

Exploring the Mediating Role of Organizational Climate in the Relationship Between HRM Practices and HR Outcomes in Malaysia's Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the mediating role of organizational climate in the relationship between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and HR outcomes in Malaysia's public sector. It highlights the importance of HRM practices, such as recruitment, training, and performance appraisal, in shaping organizational climate and achieving desired HR outcomes, including employee satisfaction, performance, and retention. Drawing on existing literature, this study proposes a theoretical framework that positions organizational climate as a critical mediator, bridging the gap between HRM practices and employee outcomes. The paper emphasizes the significance of contextual factors unique to Malaysia's public sector and suggests avenues for future empirical research, including longitudinal studies and comparative analyses between public and private sectors. This research aims to contribute to HRM literature and provide actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners to enhance HR strategies and public sector performance in Malaysia.

KEYWORDS: *organizational climate, HRM, public sector, Malaysia*

I. INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Management (HRM) practices are pivotal in shaping employee behaviors and attitudes within the public sector. Key practices include recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and compensation management. Effective implementation of these practices is essential for enhancing employee competencies and achieving organizational goals.

The significance of HR outcomes—such as employee performance, satisfaction, and retention—cannot be overstated. High-performing employees contribute directly to organizational efficiency and service quality. Employee satisfaction is closely linked to increased commitment and reduced turnover intentions, while retention ensures the preservation of institutional knowledge and continuity in public service delivery.

Organizational climate, defined as employees' shared perceptions of their work environment, plays a crucial role as a potential mediator between HRM practices and HR outcomes. A positive organizational climate can enhance the effectiveness of HRM practices, leading to improved employee attitudes and behaviors. For instance, a supportive climate may amplify the benefits of training programs by fostering an environment conducive to learning and development.

Understanding the interplay between HRM practices, organizational climate, and HR outcomes is vital for public sector organizations aiming to optimize employee performance and satisfaction. By fostering a positive organizational climate, these organizations can enhance the impact of HRM practices, leading to better HR outcomes and, ultimately, improved public service delivery.

Achieving desired human resource (HR) outcomes in Malaysia's public sector presents several challenges. The sector faces issues such as bureaucratic rigidity, limited resources, and difficulties in implementing effective performance management systems. These challenges can hinder employee performance, satisfaction, and overall organizational effectiveness. For instance, Beh (2012) highlights that performance management reforms in Malaysia have aimed to improve efficiency in public service delivery but have encountered obstacles in implementation.

Additionally, there is a limited exploration of the mediating role of organizational climate in the relationship between HRM practices and HR outcomes within this context. Organizational climate, defined as employees' shared perceptions of their work environment, can significantly influence the effectiveness of HRM practices. However, studies focusing on this mediating effect in Malaysia's public sector are scarce. Hassan (2011) examined the impact of HR practices and organizational climate on high-performance work systems in a Malaysian context, suggesting the importance of considering organizational climate in HRM strategies.

Addressing these gaps is crucial for enhancing HR outcomes in Malaysia's public sector. Further research is needed to understand how organizational climate mediates the relationship between HRM practices and HR outcomes, which could inform more effective HR strategies and contribute to improved public sector performance.

The primary objectives of this conceptual paper are twofold: first, to explore the theoretical linkages between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices, organizational climate, and Human Resource (HR) outcomes; and second, to propose a conceptual framework that elucidates these relationships.

Understanding the interplay between HRM practices and HR outcomes is essential for enhancing organizational performance. Recent studies have highlighted the significance of organizational climate as a mediating variable in this relationship. For instance, Albrecht et al. (2015) argue that HRM practices focused on engagement influence organizational climate, which in turn affects employee engagement and performance.

Furthermore, Chatterjee et al. (2021) propose a conceptual framework linking HRM practices to organizational outcomes through employee outcomes and organizational culture, emphasizing the role of organizational climate in this process.

By integrating insights from these studies, this paper aims to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework that captures the mediating role of organizational climate in the relationship between HRM practices and HR outcomes within Malaysia's public sector. This framework will provide a theoretical foundation for future empirical research and offer practical implications for HRM strategies aimed at improving employee performance and organizational effectiveness.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute both theoretically and practically to the fields of Human Resource Management (HRM) and organizational behavior, particularly within the context of Malaysia's public sector.

A. Theoretical Contributions

This research aims to deepen the understanding of how HRM practices influence HR outcomes by introducing organizational climate as a mediating variable. While previous studies have explored direct relationships between HRM practices and employee performance, the mediating role of organizational climate remains under-examined, especially in the public sector context. By addressing this gap, the study contributes to the "black box" debate in HRM literature, which seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which HRM practices affect performance (Al Damoe, 2014). Furthermore, examining this relationship within Malaysia's public sector adds a valuable perspective to the predominantly Western-centric body of research, thereby enhancing the generalizability of HRM theories across different cultural and organizational settings.

B. Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study could inform HR policies and public sector reforms in Malaysia. Understanding the mediating role of organizational climate can help HR practitioners design and implement HRM practices that foster a positive work environment, leading to improved employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and performance. This is particularly relevant in the Malaysian public sector, where effective HRM practices are crucial for enhancing organizational performance and service delivery (Al Damoe, 2014). Additionally, insights from this research could guide policymakers in developing strategies that create supportive organizational climates, thereby attracting and retaining talent in the public sector.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. HRM Practices in the Public Sector

Human Resource Management (HRM) practices are pivotal in shaping employee outcomes within the public sector. Key HRM practices include recruitment and selection, training and development, and performance appraisal.

Recruitment and Selection: Effective recruitment and selection processes ensure that public sector organizations attract and appoint individuals with the requisite skills and competencies. A well-structured

recruitment process enhances job satisfaction and reduces turnover intentions among employees. For instance, a study by Blom et al. (2018) highlights that public organizations adopting comprehensive recruitment strategies are better positioned to meet organizational goals.

Training and Development: Continuous training and development opportunities are essential for employee growth and adaptability. In the public sector, such initiatives lead to improved job performance and higher employee commitment. Gould-Williams (2004) found that training provisions had significant positive effects on employee commitment and job satisfaction in public sector employees.

Performance Appraisal: Regular performance appraisals provide employees with feedback on their work, guiding improvements and recognizing achievements. Transparent and objective appraisal systems are linked to increased employee motivation and performance. In the Hong Kong Civil Service, for example, performance appraisals are integral to human resource planning, development, and management, contributing to enhanced corporate efficiency and effectiveness.

Implementing these HRM practices effectively can lead to positive employee outcomes, including increased job satisfaction, commitment, and performance, thereby enhancing overall organizational effectiveness in the public sector.

B. Organizational Climate

Organizational climate refers to the collective perceptions and attitudes of employees regarding their work environment, encompassing shared meanings attached to policies, practices, and procedures within an organization. It significantly influences workplace dynamics by affecting motivation, behavior, and overall job satisfaction. Key dimensions of organizational climate include role clarity, supportiveness, recognition, and fairness, each contributing to how employees perceive their organizational environment. A positive organizational climate fosters employee satisfaction and retention, enhances productivity, and promotes better team collaboration. Conversely, a negative climate can lead to increased stress, reduced morale, and higher turnover rates.

In organizational studies, organizational climate often serves as a mediator between various organizational practices and outcomes. For instance, the relationship between leadership styles and employee performance is frequently mediated by the prevailing organizational climate. A supportive and empowering climate can enhance the positive effects of transformational leadership on employee outcomes. Similarly, the effectiveness of human resource management (HRM) practices on employee engagement and productivity can be mediated by the organizational climate, where a positive climate amplifies the benefits of HRM initiatives. Understanding the mediating role of organizational climate is crucial for organizations aiming to implement practices that lead to improved employee outcomes and organizational performance.

C. HR Outcomes

Key human resource (HR) outcomes such as job performance, employee engagement, and turnover intention are influenced by various organizational and individual factors. Job performance, defined as the efficiency and effectiveness with which employees fulfill their responsibilities, is significantly impacted by perceptions of organizational justice, job satisfaction, and the availability of growth opportunities. Employees who perceive fairness within their organization are more likely to demonstrate enhanced job performance (Organizational justice, 2023). Similarly, employee engagement, which reflects an individual's commitment and involvement in their organization, is shaped by factors such as job characteristics, leadership style, and organizational support. Agrawal (2015) identified predictors of engagement in public sector organizations, emphasizing that employees who find their assignments engaging and meaningful are more likely to demonstrate high levels of commitment and productivity.

Turnover intention, or an employee's intent to leave their current organization, is another critical HR outcome in the public sector. High turnover intention can have detrimental effects, such as increased recruitment costs and loss of organizational knowledge. Factors such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceived organizational support play a pivotal role in reducing turnover intention. Hur (2024) highlights that opportunities for growth and professional development are key to minimizing turnover intentions among employees, as demonstrated in a study of U.S. federal employees. Public sector organizations must address these factors by fostering a fair and supportive work environment, providing growth opportunities, and promoting employee well-being to enhance HR outcomes and sustain organizational effectiveness.

III. METHODOLOGY

The proposed conceptual framework explores the mediating role of organizational climate in the relationship between HRM practices and HR outcomes within Malaysia's public sector. HRM practices, including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation, and employee participation, are theorized to significantly influence the organizational climate. Organizational climate, defined as employees' collective perceptions of their work environment—such as support, recognition, and fairness—is believed to play a pivotal role in translating HRM practices into desirable HR outcomes, such as job satisfaction, commitment, performance, and reduced turnover intentions. The model posits that effective HRM practices create a positive organizational climate, which in turn enhances HR outcomes.

Supporting literature underscores these relationships. Marescaux, De Winne, and Sels (2013) found that HR practices focusing on development and empowerment positively shape organizational climates that satisfy employees' psychological needs. Additionally, Rose and Waterhouse (2004) highlighted the impact of a supportive climate on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Furthermore, Albrecht et al. (2015) proposed that organizational climate mediates the relationship between HRM practices and outcomes such as employee engagement and performance. By integrating insights from these studies, the proposed framework provides a

robust theoretical basis for understanding how HRM practices influence outcomes through organizational climate, offering practical and theoretical implications for Malaysia's public sector.

This study adopts a conceptual research approach, focusing on theoretical exploration rather than empirical testing. Conceptual research emphasizes abstract ideas and theories, aiming to develop new theoretical insights or reinterpret existing ones without direct observation or experimentation. This approach is particularly valuable for constructing frameworks that can guide future empirical investigations. By synthesizing existing literature and theoretical perspectives, conceptual research contributes to a deeper understanding of complex phenomena, laying the groundwork for subsequent empirical validation. As noted by Lee and Kim (2023), conceptual articles can disrupt and advance academic fields by providing foundational insights that inform and shape empirical research.

To empirically validate the proposed conceptual framework examining the mediating role of organizational climate in the relationship between HRM practices and HR outcomes in Malaysia's public sector, future research should adopt several strategies. First, developing robust measurement tools tailored to the Malaysian public sector context is essential to ensure reliability and validity when assessing HRM practices, organizational climate, and HR outcomes (de Oliveira & da Silva, 2023). Longitudinal study designs can provide insights into causal relationships and how HRM practices influence organizational climate and outcomes over time. Additionally, employing multilevel analysis allows researchers to account for individual, team, and organizational-level factors, capturing the hierarchical nature of public sector organizations. Cross-sectional surveys with a broad sample of public sector employees could reveal patterns and correlations between the key variables.

Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, can complement quantitative findings by providing in-depth perspectives on employees' experiences with HRM practices and organizational climate. Comparative studies between different public sector departments or agencies could further illuminate contextual factors influencing the studied relationships. Furthermore, exploring the role of an innovative climate as a mediator or moderator in HRM practices and organizational performance could uncover new dynamics, fostering innovation within public sector organizations (Kožo, 2023). Lastly, examining the impact of sustainable HRM practices on employee well-being and its subsequent influence on organizational outcomes can emphasize the importance of holistic HR strategies in achieving public sector objectives (Qamar, Afshan, & Rana, 2023). By implementing these research approaches, future studies can empirically test the proposed framework and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of HRM practices and organizational climate in Malaysia's public sector.

IV. FINDINGS

The exploration of organizational climate as a mediating factor between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and HR outcomes offers significant theoretical contributions to both HRM and organizational

behavior literature. This perspective enhances our understanding of how internal environmental factors influence the effectiveness of HRM strategies.

Recent studies have underscored the importance of organizational climate in this mediating role. For instance, Al Damoe, Hamid, and Sharif (2017) examined the Libyan public sector and found that organizational climate mediates the relationship between HRM practices—such as performance appraisal, compensation, and HR planning—and HR outcomes. Their research suggests that a positive organizational climate can enhance the effectiveness of HRM practices, leading to improved employee satisfaction and performance.

Similarly, Macena (2020) explored the impact of HR practices on organizational climate and employee well-being. The study revealed that effective HR practices positively influence organizational climate, which in turn enhances employee well-being. This finding highlights the critical role of organizational climate in translating HRM practices into favorable HR outcomes.

These insights suggest that organizational climate serves as a conduit through which HRM practices affect HR outcomes. By fostering a supportive and positive organizational climate, public sector organizations can amplify the benefits of HRM practices, leading to enhanced employee performance and satisfaction. This understanding encourages a holistic approach to HRM, where the interplay between practices and organizational climate is considered crucial for achieving desired HR outcomes.

Enhancing Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and fostering a positive organizational climate are critical for improving employee performance and satisfaction in Malaysia's public sector. Recent studies offer several practical recommendations to achieve these goals. Ibrahim and Rahman (2017) emphasize the adoption of sustainable HRM practices, such as work-life balance initiatives, continuous training, and active employee engagement, as essential strategies for promoting long-term employee retention and organizational success. Similarly, Beh (2012) highlights the importance of refining performance management systems (PMS) by incorporating clear performance indicators, regular feedback mechanisms, and tailored development plans to align individual performance with organizational objectives effectively.

Furthermore, fostering employee participation in decision-making processes can significantly improve job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Hassan (2011) underscores the positive influence of participative HRM practices on organizational climate, leading to enhanced performance outcomes. Shahibudin et al. (2015) also advocate for HRM practices that boost intrinsic motivation and public service motivation (PSM), demonstrating that fostering a sense of public duty enhances job satisfaction and performance. Additionally, cultivating an ethical organizational climate is essential. Al Damoe (2014) identifies ethical climates as potential mediators that enhance the effectiveness of HRM practices in achieving desired organizational outcomes.

By implementing these strategies, Malaysia's public sector can strengthen HRM practices, create a positive organizational climate, and improve overall employee performance and service delivery. These practical recommendations provide a foundation for addressing existing challenges and aligning HR policies with broader organizational goals.

Addressing human resource (HR) challenges in Malaysia's public sector requires strategic policy interventions to enhance organizational climate and improve HR outcomes. One critical area is the implementation of effective performance management systems. Beh (2012) emphasizes that performance-management reforms have improved efficiency in Malaysia's public service delivery. However, challenges remain in fully realizing these systems' potential. Policymakers should focus on refining performance appraisal mechanisms, ensuring they are transparent, fair, and aligned with organizational goals. Additionally, fostering employee empowerment and self-leadership can lead to better performance outcomes. Beh (2014) suggests that empowering employees and promoting self-leadership contribute to enhanced performance in the public sector. Therefore, policies that encourage autonomy, provide opportunities for professional development, and recognize employee contributions are essential. Furthermore, the Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR) has outlined key areas of focus for HR in Malaysia, including the development of the National Human Resource Policy Framework and the Progressive Wage Policy, aiming to strengthen cooperation between the government, employers, and employees to produce more inclusive and participatory policies (Human Resources Online, 2024). By implementing these strategies, policymakers can create a conducive organizational climate that mediates the relationship between HRM practices and HR outcomes, leading to a more effective and responsive public sector.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper underscores the pivotal role of organizational climate as a mediator between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and Human Resource (HR) outcomes within Malaysia's public sector. The proposed framework suggests that effective HRM practices—such as recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and compensation—can enhance HR outcomes, including employee satisfaction, performance, and retention, through the cultivation of a positive organizational climate. This mediating effect implies that the organizational climate serves as a conduit through which HRM practices influence HR outcomes, highlighting its significance in achieving desired organizational objectives.

Empirical studies support this proposition. For instance, Al Damoe, Hamid, and Sharif (2017) found that organizational climate significantly mediated the relationship between HRM practices and HR outcomes in the Libyan public sector, suggesting that a favorable climate enhances the effectiveness of HRM initiatives.

Similarly, Yamin and Mahmood (2019) reported that an ethical organizational climate mediated the impact of HRM practices on HR outcomes in Saudi Arabia's public sector, emphasizing the importance of fostering an ethical work environment to achieve positive HR results.

These findings underscore the necessity for public sector organizations in Malaysia to not only implement robust HRM practices but also to actively cultivate a supportive and positive organizational climate. Such an environment can amplify the benefits of HRM practices, leading to improved employee outcomes and, ultimately, enhanced organizational performance.

To empirically validate the proposed conceptual framework, future research could explore several critical areas. Longitudinal studies would be valuable in observing changes over time, allowing for an understanding of how HRM practices and organizational climate influence HR outcomes in Malaysia's public sector. Such studies could identify causal relationships and reveal the long-term effects of specific interventions (Kassim & Mokhber, 2015). Comparative analyses between public and private sectors could further uncover sector-specific dynamics, highlighting best practices and tailoring HR strategies to the unique needs of each sector (Hassan, 2011). Additionally, cross-cultural studies could examine how Malaysia's diverse cultural landscape impacts the relationship between HRM practices, organizational climate, and HR outcomes, providing nuanced insights (Yee & Mahadevan, 2013).

Research could also focus on identifying other potential mediating or moderating variables, such as employee engagement or leadership styles, to deepen understanding of the mechanisms through which HRM practices affect HR outcomes (Mohamed & Nor, 2013). Furthermore, examining the impact of specific HRM practices, such as training, development, and performance appraisal, on organizational climate and employee outcomes could identify the most effective approaches for the public sector context (Lashari, 2019). By addressing these areas, future research would provide empirical support for the proposed conceptual framework and practical guidance for enhancing HR outcomes in Malaysia's public sector.

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