

**HR PRACTICE SALIENCY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL
CLIMATE, JOB SATISFACTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT:
AN EMPLOYEE LEVEL STUDY – THE PILOT STUDY**

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

HR Practice Saliency and its Influence on Psychological Climate, Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment: An Employee Level Study – The Pilot Study
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This paper introduces the construct of human resource (HR) practice saliency as a key moderating variable in the relationship between HR practices and employee outcomes. I propose that HR practice saliency can help provide an explanation for the variability in the effects of HR practices on employee outcomes. Specifically, I argue that HR practice saliency assessments themselves and also in interaction with employee satisfaction with HR practices influence the nature of the relationship between HR practices and psychological climate, which, in turn, influences employee outcomes. With a student sample I conduct a pilot study to assess if HR practice saliency acts as a moderator in the relationship between HR practices (in a potential organization), and the participant's intention to pursue that organization for a job. Implications for HR literature and practice are offered.

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INTRODUCTION

Researchers in strategic human resource management (HRM) are increasingly focusing on examining the impact of HR systems on individual employees. They are interested in how employees perceive practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii & Wright, 2008; Wright & Boswell, 2002) and react to them (Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009). This increased focus on individual experience and perceptions has gained importance with the recognition that how the system is designed and implemented may influence employee attitudes and behaviors, which, in turn, impact more distal organizational outcomes (Lepak & Boswell, 2012; Nishii & Wright, 2008).

Interestingly, while scholars have argued for an increased focus on employee perceptions of HR systems, and recognized that variations in employee perceptions of HRM exist (Jensen, Patel & Messersmith, 2012; Liao et al., 2009; Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008), researchers are less clear about why variations in employee reactions to an HRM system exist. Liao & colleagues (2009) found that employees not only had different perceptions of HPWS from those of managers but also rated HPWS differently from each other. Recent research suggests that it is employees' perceptions of HR practices more so than manager-rated HR practices that have more direct effects on employee attitudes (e.g., perceived organizational support, psychological empowerment, turnover intention) and behaviors (e.g., task performance) (Aryee, Walumbwa, Seidu, & Otake, 2012; Jensen et al., 2012; Liao et al., 2009).

One stream of research has suggested that HR attributions held by employees might explain some of this variation. Indeed, Nishii et al, (2008) found that employees make different attributions for management's adoption of HR practices and these differences in attribution are associated with variations in important employee outcomes related to commitment and satisfaction.

While these attributions provide some insights into variations in reactions to HR practices, I propose that an additional factor – HR practice saliency – might provide insights into the variation in employee outcomes associated from exposure to HR practices (Lepak & Boswell, 2012). An HR practice is salient for an employee when it occupies a prominent place (in comparison to other HR practices) in the employee's mind. This notion of saliency is fundamentally tied to the individual – what is salient for one person might be different than what is salient for another person. For example, one employee may view performance incentives as salient and for someone else workforce flexibility could be salient.

This possibility for differences among individuals in what is salient might provide additional insights as to why employees differ in their reactions to HR practices. Drawing from strategic HRM and social cognition literature, I explore the potential of HR practice saliency as a critical factor in explaining variance in employee reactions to HRM. I contribute to strategic HRM by using HR practice saliency to draw linkages between perceptions of HR practices and HR practice saliency's impact on employee's assessment of the psychological climate. These employee perceptions have the potential to impact organizational outcomes by influencing employee attitudes and behaviors towards the organization. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: The first section

discusses the construct of HR practice saliency. Second, a model is developed that draws from psychological climate literature to explain how HR practice saliency and employee satisfaction with HR practices may influence an employee's psychological climate perceptions which in turn impact employee outcomes. I test the model by conducting a pilot study with a student sample using three HR practices. The chosen HR practices are not only likely to indicate different employee priorities but are also used in the ranking of companies as "great places to work" by periodicals like Fortune. The pilot study explores how HR practice saliency drives the intention of prospective employees to pursue a job in an organization. Finally the research results are presented and discussed to understand limitations and theoretical and practical implications of this study.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Strategic HRM researchers are driven by the belief that HR practices impact firm performance and they have gathered empirical support for this (Arthur, 1992; Becker & Huselid, 1998; Huselid, 1995). One theoretical perspective that has been used to understand how HRM impacts organizational outcomes is the behavioral perspective (Jackson, Schuler, & Rivero, 1989). According to this perspective, HR practices are used to encourage role behaviors in employees that help in achieving a company's goals. Thus employees play a critical role in achieving a firm's goals. However, some scholars have challenged the assumption that all employees experience the HRM system as intended by the organization (e.g., Nishii & Wright, 2008). Nishii & Wright (2008) stressed the need to understand the sources of variability that can act as moderators in the link between HRM and firm performance. One source of variability is the differences in how the

employees perceive the HR system and how this perception influences employee reaction to the HRM system.

Related, the foundation of the psychological climate research is variation in the interpretation of the “objective” environment (James, James, & Ashe, 1990; Rentsch, 1990). Psychological climate refers to how an employee describes the organizational policies, practices and procedures in psychologically meaningful terms (Schneider & Rentsch, 1988). In a meta-analysis, scholars have examined the role of psychological climate as a mediator between organizational characteristics and employee outcomes (Parker et al, 2003). James et.al, (2008) also found support for the role of psychological climate as a mediator between the work environment and an employee’s reaction to the work environment. In the context of HR-performance relationship, Bowen & Ostroff (2004) and Ostroff & Bowen (2000) have recognized the important role of psychological climate perceptions as mediators.

While researchers agree that climate is important, psychological climate might differ among employees since different employees may attend to different cues in the organizational environment to formulate their psychological climate perceptions. Kopelman, Brief, & Guzzo (1990:295), pointed out that “..climate is a perceptual medium through which the efforts of the environment on attitudes and behaviors pass”. Thus, how employees perceive the environment is an important consideration for scholars in strategic HRM.

One implication of this is that it might explain some variability in employee perceptions of HRM (Jensen, et al., 2012; Liao et al., 2009; Nishii et al., 2008). Scholars have shown an increased interest in how employee perceptions of HRM influence

employee attitude, behaviors and firm performance. Some researchers have focused on examining the line-manager's role in influencing employee perceptions of HR practices (Den Hartog, Boon, Verburg, & Croon, 2012; Gilbert et al., 2011, Liao et al., 2009).

Though this approach is useful it ignores that employees do not simply react to HR practices but work as active sensemakers of the HRM context in which they work.

HR Practice Saliency

Acknowledging the active role of employee perceptions in the sensemaking of an HRM system raises some possible insights as to why employees might have different reactions on exposure to the same HR practices. Social cognition literature recognizes that individuals are selective consumers of stimuli (Markus & Zajonc, 1985). One reason for this selective attention is the limitation of the human mind to attend to and process large amounts of information (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Miller, 1956; Simon, 1957).

In particular, individuals attend to a salient stimulus and a salient stimulus is one that stands out relative to other stimuli in the perceiver's environment (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) and attracts perceiver's attention. An HR practice may also be viewed as salient when it is viewed as possessing properties of a salient stimulus in the mind of the employee and stands out relative to other stimuli (Fiske & Taylor, 1991), draws differential attention (Taylor & Thompson, 1982), elicits disproportional amount of attention relative to its context (Pryor & Kriss, 1977), and thus enter thoughts readily and is more frequently verbalized (Krech & Crutchfield, 1948:163).

In HRM research, Bowen & Ostroff (2004) have discussed saliency from the perspective of the employer. They discuss it as a characteristic of an HR practice that is a property of the stimulus (Higgins, 1996) that makes it more visible and is a necessary

element in building a strong HR system where employees develop shared meanings about the practices. In contrast to their perspective, which is employer oriented and suggests that some practices are always salient (saliency rests in the practice itself), it is likely that employees hold individualized saliency perceptions for an HR practice. It means that the HRM perceptions of employees might vary depending on the HR practice preferences of employees. The HR practice that is most prominent or salient for one employee might not mean much to another employee and thus they might seek different HR practices in an organization.

I focus on employee driven saliency of an HR practice in this paper due to the emphasis on HR practices' influence on employee outcomes. An HR practice could be more visible relative to other practices and thus be more salient in an organization. However this saliency of an HR practice might not result in positive employee outcomes unless it corresponds to employee preferences. To elaborate, I distinguish between the employee and employer oriented concepts of salience. I refer to salience from employee perspective as "HR practice saliency", and salience from employer perspective as "saliency" and distinguish between these two in Table 1.

 Insert Table 1 about here

In employee's perception process, two constructs that are conceptually similar but distinct are vividness (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) and importance (Krech & Crutchfield, 1948; Raden, 1985) of a stimulus. They differ on various factors like context, specificity, and how their effect occurs. It is important to distinguish between the three because it helps us understand how specifically HR practice saliency operates to produce its effect.

For example, an employer might identify a new HR practice like performance-based pay and believe that this practice can be influential in aligning employee's efforts towards achieving organizational goals. The employer can make the practice *vivid* to employees by channeling information about it through different communication mediums in the organization, hoping this would be a practice that would be *important* to all individuals. However, it is still possible that this practice will not result in the desired effect as expected by the employer. Salience and how it is different from vividness and importance can explain the mechanism of possibly why the employer's expectations are not met in this case.

Salience and vividness. A vivid stimulus is able “to attract and hold our attention and to excite the imagination because it is (a) emotionally interesting, (b) concrete and imagery provoking, and (c) proximate in a sensory, temporal, or spatial way” (Nisbett & Ross, 1980:45). For example, an organization might introduce and popularize a new performance appraisal system like 360-degree appraisal. Organizations can offer training sessions, which emphasize its benefits. The memory of these sessions can make the practice vivid for the employee yet the practice need not be salient in the employee's mind because the performance feedback might not be high in his or her priorities.

Further, in comparison to vividness, salience needs a context (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) where an employee is likely to pay more attention to one practice in comparison to other practices irrespective of the fact whether that specific practice is vivid or not. Differential attention is an essential part of salience but not of vividness (McArthur, 1981). Think of the lighted signs in Times Square, New York City. These are stimuli with “striking properties” that “attract attention” (Taylor & Thompson, 1982:176) and here

vividness is inherent in the stimulus itself (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). They are vivid stimuli that exist together but a salient sign will draw more attention of the perceiver in comparison to other signs because salience depends on the interaction between the context and the stimulus. Similarly the opposite can also happen. There is also a possibility that differential attention to a salient stimulus can make a stimulus vivid. If an employee's thoughts are focused on an HR practice, the thoughts might evoke emotions, and excite imagery related to a practice that might make the practice vivid in the mind of the employee. Thus salience can make a practice vivid, but a vivid practice is not necessarily salient to an employee but can become one. For example, if an employer makes efforts to educate employees about the benefits of performance-based pay, in some cases this practice will become salient for an employee. But then this saliency is employer-driven because it aims to create a shared meaning among employees about the importance of performance-based pay and not employee directed as I conceptualize it in this study.

Taylor & Thompson (1982) discussed that the vividness effect (when a vivid stimulus has an impact on perceiver's judgment) is weak, if at all present, which means that vividness in itself does not impact judgment (in this case employee outcomes) but salience can lead to vividness effects. Though intuitively it seems reasonable that a vivid stimulus can impact judgment because it is easier to recall because of it being imageable and having more impact emotionally (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) it does not actually do so. Vivid information can actually capture the attention of individuals if they are uninvolved, for example, in educating the employees about a new HR practice. But salience through differential attention mediates any impact on outcomes (Taylor & Thompson, 1982).

Salience can lead to vividness effect (Taylor & Thompson, 1982). It implies that if an HR practice is salient for an employee, while thinking of the HR practice, this practice becomes an internal stimulus. The employee is bound to attend to the internal stimulus from memory and imagination which makes the practice more vivid because it involves imagery and emotion. Since salience of an HR practice already implies that the employee is convinced about its relevance to him/her and thus is an involved perceiver, here, vividness can impact employee judgment. But, there could be salient practices that do not turn into vivid internal stimuli if the perceiver does not spend time to attend to them (by consciously focusing on something else), to cognize about them, and thus they evoke no emotions and do not hold the interest of the perceiver.

Thus in the example that I discussed about adoption of performance-based pay not resulting in desired effects, I can argue that the efforts to capture attention of the employees through vivid information can be, but not necessarily, successful in making the information meaningful for the employees. HR practice saliency is driven by meaningfulness to the employee and acts as a filter to determine where the employee is likely to spend conscious attention and thought. In the example discussed about an organization's failure in achieving desired results in introducing performance-based pay, it could be that for the majority of employees at this workplace some practice other than performance-based pay was salient, unless the vivid performance-based pay practice was salient to them, it could not impact employee outcomes as the employer intended.

Salience and importance. There are also similarities and differences in salience and importance that I clarify below. Some HR practices can be important for an employer to achieve their goals which could be the same as what the employee holds as

important in the long-term. It is important to distinguish between the two perspectives considering the temporal characteristic of salience that can influence employee outcomes because the employer might believe that a practice like performance-based pay is meaningful for employees, and there is a high possibility that it could be, but *not at that time* because at that time the employee might be focusing on something else such as skill development to make oneself more marketable. Or the employee might be more concerned about extensive performance feedback for self improvement and these practices are salient and strongly influence employee outcomes.

Krech & Crutchfield (1948) highlight an important difference between importance and salience in the attitude and belief research when they discuss that many important beliefs could be less salient. In the context of HR practices, an employee might give importance to HR practice flexibility but this belief about the importance of the practice would be less salient if his or her current organization gives an option to work from home. Since what the employee wants in terms of flexibility is what is being offered by the organization, there is no conflict to draw the attention of the employee. But what if this employee joins a new organization where the new employer does not offer flexibility? In the new organization, the beliefs became more salient because there is a discrepancy in what the employee expected and what the employer offered. There is a possibility that the new organization might impose pressures to conform to a strict schedule and reward such behavior which can at times, make the flexibility practice less salient for the employee while it still retains its importance in employee's mind.

Further, Amit, MacCrimmon, Zietsma, & Oesch (2000) stress that in contrast to importance, salience is particular to a specific decision situation. A practice that is

important for an individual might not necessarily be salient at a particular time. For example, salary might be very important for a person in general but while considering a new job, a person might look for a job that offers her flexibility at work. Thus flexibility is salient while making the decision specific to returning to the work but this practice might not be salient forever. The importance that this person actually places on pay might surface with time as the desire for flexibility decreases. Similarly in consumer research salience is related to order of elicitation of features that are considered “important” by consumers (Myers & Alpert, 1977:107). If employees are viewed as consumers of HR practices, it implies that out of many features (practices) of an HR system, salience is related to the HR practice that draws immediate attention of the employee out of all the other practices, some of which could also be important for the employee. Also Donnellon (1986) discussed that in context of communication in organizations that we do not process information linearly but organize it in a hierarchy based on some structure related to self interest. Thus one attends to HR practices based on some sort of importance hierarchy in which the salient HR practice is positioned high. Importance and salience might be correlated but are not necessarily the same.

Thus reflecting on the properties of a salient stimulus and the inter-relationships between the three constructs of salience, vividness, and importance I arrive at a definition of HR practice saliency.

In an organization, when an employee is exposed to multiple HR practices, an HR practice is salient (internally) for the employee at that time in comparison to other HR practices when it draws immediate and more attention of the employee.

This definition highlights three important factors of salience: relationship to the context, differential and more attention, and ease of accessibility. I also place focus on the temporality of the salient HR practice as a specific practice that is salient can change with time depending on various factors like the life stages of the employee, environmental factors, etc. For example, someone in early stages of career might focus more on skill enhancement rather than performance-based pay. Or due to a slack labor market, an employee might be driven by a desire to get a high salary.

HR Practice Saliency and Employee Reaction to HRM

HR practice saliency and psychological climate. Wright & Boswell (2002) urged scholars to study the impact of multiple HR practices (an HRM system) on employees. An understanding of what HR practice saliency is can partially help explain how employee reactions to multiple HR practices develop. HR practice saliency has the properties of a salient stimulus, thus by being in the memory it can impact a perceiver's judgments and influence attributions (Pryor & Kris, 1977; Taylor, Crocker, Fiske, Sprinzen, & Winkler, 1979; Taylor & Thompson, 1982). This means that salient stimulus engulfs attention, is readily available in the perceiver's mind, influences judgments and mediates attributions. Extending this logic to the strategic HRM literature, if an HR practice is salient, an employee will devote resources like time, energy, and thought to it and because of all resources directed towards it, thoughts about this practice are likely to be most readily available in memory and influence employee judgments.

HR practice saliency can give insights into the perceptual processes that employees undergo when they are exposed to HR practices. Specifically, as discussed by Taylor & Fiske, (1978:249), salience can produce the "top of the head phenomenon"

which in the current context implies that an individual responds to HR practices with little thought and assesses it by something that occupies his consciousness at that particular time, something that comes first to his or her mind, which I argue is the salient HR practice. This can be understood in terms of heuristics as well. When exposed to a lot of information, an individual might use heuristics or shortcuts to cope with the uncertainty and complexity of decision making (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973). One such heuristic is the availability heuristic, which relates to the ease of retrieval of instances related to a particular stimulus and associations that come to mind (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Relating this heuristic to properties of a salient stimulus (easily available in the mind) explains how HR practice saliency can influence an employee's perception of the HR practices. The salient HR practice will employ all the cognitive resources of the employee, will be on the top of his or her mind and thus influence attention and corresponding judgments.

Ajzen & Fishbein (1975) discuss the importance of salience in terms of a salient belief being most influential in determining an individual's attitude. I use the same logic to understand how HR practice saliency can impact an individual's psychological climate perceptions. HR practice saliency will direct an employee's attention to such an extent that there is less time and cognitive resources left for other environmental cues. By acting as a filter that magnifies what the employee focuses on, a salient HR practice will moderate the relationship between the HRM system and psychological climate of an employee. I propose that

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between HR practices and psychological climate will be moderated by HR practice saliency such that the relationship will be stronger when HR saliency is high compared to when it is low.

Employee satisfaction with HR practice and psychological climate. McArthur (1981) highlighted that a perceiver's attention is determined by his or her expectations and arousal level (increase in drive that causes a restriction in range of cues that one attends to). Beyond looking at an employee's arousal, which is influenced by HR practice saliency, I also examine employee satisfaction with an HR practice. I examine employee satisfaction with an HR practice as a moderator of the HR practices-psychological climate relationship. By satisfaction with an HR practice I mean that the HR practice that is desired by an employee is offered by the organization with the quality (practice features and the degree to which it is offered) that fulfills the expectations of the employee.

An additional theoretical perspective that supports the impact of saliency on employee perceptions is psychological contracts. Psychological contract corresponds to need fulfillment in an employee's relationship with his or her organization (Masterson & Stamper, 2003) and refers to "individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization" (Rousseau, 1995:9). Beyond the design of the HRM system, how it is experienced by an employee in terms of it meeting his or her needs is an important consideration in an employee's thoughts related to psychological contract fulfillment. Morrison & Robinson (1997) discuss that salience of the discrepancy between what the employee believed what was promised to him or her and what he or she received is an important factor in determining

perceptions of unmet promise and consequently feelings of psychological contract violations. While they use salience to understand the gap between what was promised and delivered in relation to psychological contract violation, I argue similarly but focus on salience determining expectations. In the context of HR practices, HR practice saliency may determine what is expected by the employee. Mutuality (which is shared beliefs regarding terms of exchange) and reciprocity (reciprocal commitments) that constitute shared understanding and agreement around reciprocal obligations between employee and employer are considered as essential parts of functional psychological contracts (Dabos & Rousseau, 2004) but mutuality is not an essential element of a salient HR practice. A practice (flexibility) might become salient for an employee due to a life event (like having a baby), it does not imply that the organization has promised to provide the practice but nonetheless it does impact employee expectations.

In the context of psychological contract breach and fulfillment, deficient and excess of inducements is discussed by Lambert, Edwards, & Cable (2003). They argue that having an excess or less of a promised inducement can have negative outcomes depending upon the nature of the inducement. Applying this in the context of HR practices if an organization has an extensive training program for employees it can be viewed as great for an employee for whom training is salient. But what if it overwhelms the employee? The salient practice is being offered in excess of what the employee expected and it could possibly hinder with employee's daily commitments at work. Another example could be that an employee wants to be empowered and looks for avenues for employee participation and decision making. However, having too many opportunities to participate can be equally confusing and time consuming for the

employee or employees empowerment could be limited to activities not valued by the employee. Similarly, garnering performance feedback from multiple sources might not appeal to many employees, who might see it as information overload even when getting extensive feedback is salient to them. Thus the HR practice needs to be met at a level and with features that satisfy the employee. Organizations can fall short of employee expectations or exceed them which can influence psychological climate perceptions.

Thus I argue that:

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between HR practices and psychological climate will be moderated by employee satisfaction with the salient HR practice such that the relationship will be stronger when employee satisfaction with the salient HR practice is high compared to when it is low.

HR practice saliency, satisfaction and psychological climate. Employees actively engage in seeking the HR practice that is salient to them that can meet their needs. Different HR practices are likely to be salient for different employees. Employee satisfaction with an HR practice is also idiosyncratic; someone could be satisfied with an HR practice with certain features which might not satisfy someone else. At a group level, research by Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayton, & Swart (2005) confirmed that there is variation in HR practices that satisfy different groups of employees. The interaction between these two idiosyncratic variables - HR practice saliency and satisfaction with HR practices can drive psychological climate perceptions.

Psychological climate is a multi-dimensional construct, James & James (1989) came up with hierarchical view of the dimensions of psychological climate with a single higher order factor that represents a global interpretation of the psychological climate. It

is this single latent component – a general factor (g-factor) that acts as a schema (framework used to organize knowledge) and furnishes all cognitions with a facility to assess if the environment is beneficial or detrimental to one's well being. I argue that if an HR practice satisfies an employee in terms of meeting his/her expectations and this HR practice is salient, this HR practice will correspond to a specific dimension of psychological climate that will dominate the higher order factor of psychological climate through which all information about the work environment will be filtered and influence the general feeling of the organizational environment being beneficial or in some cases detrimental to the employee if the salient HR practice is not met to the satisfaction of the employee. Salient HR practice will result in magnifying the impact that employee satisfaction/dissatisfaction with an HR practice would have had on psychological climate. If an employee is satisfied with an HR practice but that practice is not salient for an employee, it could still elicit positive psychological climate perceptions from the employee possibly because the employee values the HR practice though not enough for it to be salient. Similarly if an employee is dissatisfied with an HR practice, it will elicit negative psychological climate perceptions from the employee, even in the case of it not being salient because of possible value to the employee. However, if an employee is satisfied with a salient HR practice and dissatisfied with a less salient HR practice, it is still likely to result in a positive psychological climate perceptions of the employee because of the properties of a salient stimulus that govern a salient HR practice (drawing attention, availability in mind, influencing judgments and mediating attributions) and influence psychological climate perceptions.

There is empirical support for the link between psychological climate and employee outcomes (e.g. Carr, Schmidt, Ford, & DeShon, 2003) like job satisfaction (Schneider & Snyder, 1975; Schulte, Ostroff, & Kinicki, 2006), citizenship behavior (Moorman, 1991), and job performance (Pritchard & Karasick, 1973). The meta-analysis by Carr et al., (2003) on climate confirmed that it affects individual level outcomes through its impact on underlying cognitive and affective states. HRM outcomes mediate the relationship between an HRM system and operational outcomes and influence financial outcomes of a firm (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012). Thus it makes HR practice saliency an important factor to consider in understanding the link between HR practices and psychological climate.

Since the relationship between these affective responses and psychological climate are well established in the literature (Carr et al., 2003), I don't elaborate on the mechanisms. Our focus on the role of HR practice saliency adds an insight into that mechanism by showing how employee expectations and arousal due to a salient HR practice can influence employee reactions to an HRM system.

 Insert Figure 1 about here

HR practices play an important role in communicating organizational values not only to the current employees but also to the potential employees of the organization. Some studies have looked at the relationship between HR practices and the significant role they can play in influencing applicant decision-making process (e.g., Bretz and Judge, 1994; Casper and Buffardi, 2004; Rau and Hyland, 2002).

At the recruitment stage, potential employees might be concerned with knowing about the organization and the job to assess if there is a good fit with the abilities, needs and desires of the individuals and the demands of the job and what it furnishes to the employee defined as person-job fit (Edwards, 1991) and also the values of the individual and the norms and values of the organization defined as person organization fit (Chatman, 1989). Researchers have argued that HR practices play an important role in managing employee person-organization and person-job fit, which in turn impacts employee attitudes and behavior (Boon, Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2011). This is possible because HR practices act as signals of the organizational values and what it expects from and gives as rewards to its employees. If the organization offers something that is of no value to the employee, there is going to be a perceived lack of fit.

An important feature of a salient stimulus is that individuals can easily recall information related it and consciously think about it. Thus, if an HR practice is salient to an employee, there is a high possibility that an employee will spend a lot of time and energy thinking about it. Thus integrating this with the availability heuristic, when expressing intention to work for an organization, the salient HR practice will be prominent in the potential employee's mind and impact his or her decision making process. I examine the role of a HR practice saliency as a moderator in the relationship between HR practices in an organization and organizational attractiveness and job pursuit intentions of the potential employee, I argue that presence of a salient practice will make an organization attractive to employees and also bolster their willingness to actively pursue job in an organization.

Researchers have pointed out the difference between finding an organization attractive in terms of desirability which is affect based, and pursuing it for a job which is behavioral response and a weak relation between affect and behavior (Aiman-Smith, Bauer, and Cable, 2001; Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar, 2003). I hoped to get same but possibly different responses to the questions related organizational attractiveness and job-pursuit intentions because a prospective employer might find an organization attractive but possibly not apply there and thus developed the following two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3a: The positive (negative) relationship between a met (an unmet) HR practice and organizational attractiveness will be moderated by the HR practice saliency such that the relationship will be stronger for a highly salient HR practice.

Hypothesis 3b: The positive (negative) relationship between a met (an unmet) HR practice and job pursuit intentions will be moderated by the HR practice saliency such that the relationship will be stronger for a highly salient HR practice.

Insert Figure 2 about here

METHOD

Sample

For Study 1 which is a pilot study, two-wave surveys were administered to 212 Masters students enrolled in a professional degree program in management at a university in the northeastern United States. 54 of the participants were working while the rest expected to be in the job-market soon. Parts of survey were administered at different times to reduce response bias (Ostroff, Kinicki, and Clark, 2002). Participants were solicited to participate in the surveys voluntarily. Their responses were collected via

paper pencil questionnaires. A script of instructions was read before the survey was administered to ensure consistency in the communication of instructions.

At time 1, the participants were asked to respond to measures of saliency for three HR practices - career management opportunities, performance based pay, and workplace flexibility while imagining themselves as potential applicants to organizations.

Participants were also asked to provide certain demographic information: age, gender, race, and marital status. One month after Time 1, participants were invited to respond to the second survey. Student identification numbers were used to match their responses during two time periods. Before taking the survey at each time, student participants were instructed to read and sign a consent form and their confidentiality was ensured.

At time 2 participants were asked to read eight vignettes ($2 \times 2 \times 2$) in which HR practice scenarios (the HR practices that the hypothetical organization will have) were manipulated based on the descriptions of three HR practices—pay for performance, workplace flexibility, and career management opportunities. To ensure orthogonality of cues, I chose three practices for this study that are likely to represent different priorities for employees: compensation, work-life balance and development. Since it has been shown that studies with more than five cues per scenario may be unrealistic in terms of number of scenarios that a participant will be exposed to (Brehmer and Brehmer, 1988), I concentrate on three HR practices with each having two values (high or low).

Each vignette contained the HR practice manipulation. An example of the scenarios is presented as below: “Imagine yourself as a potential applicant to an organization. Please read the following description about that organization’s HR practices and answer the questions that follow. Please consider only the HR practices described

below while responding to the questions. In this organization high performers get higher pay raises than low performers, but you have no freedom to vary your work schedule and you are given no training to help develop your career.”

To increase the representativeness of the study so that it captures important elements of real life situations (Aiman-Smith, Scullen, and Barr, 2002) I ensured that the cue value in each scenario is realistic. The design yielded eight vignettes describing different fictional organizations. Each participant read all eight scenarios. The scenarios were presented randomly to minimize order effects. Following each scenario, participants were asked to respond to measures of organizational attractiveness and job pursuit intentions.

In Study 2, we will collect data from employees of a large organization with multiple work units. Similarly to Study 1, there will be two stages in Study 2. In the first stage, the participants will be asked to respond to an online questionnaire about saliency for three HR practices and their perceptions of the three HR practices according to their experience and situation in their units. We will ask employee participants to provide their email addresses that will be used to send the second online questionnaire to them at time 2. Study 2 will further adopt a multilevel analysis by considering managerial perspective of HR practices (e.g., Aryee, Walumbwa, Seidu, and Otaye, 2012; Liao et al., 2009; Takeuchi, Chen, and Lepak, 2009). Specifically, we will ask unit heads to evaluate the three HR practices in their units. With this design, we can examine the moderating effect of HR practice saliency on the relationship between unit-level HR practices rated by managers and individual-level employee outcomes. At time 2 (one months after Time 1), for those who participate in the survey at Time 1 and provide their email addresses, we

will email them the link of the second questionnaire about their work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, turnover intention, etc.). In order to protect employee participants' confidentiality, we will delete their email information from the dataset after matching their answer at the two time points. The time-lagged design in both studies can help to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff, 2003).

Measures for study 1

In study 1, participants rated their saliency for three HR practices at Time 1 and reported their perceived organizational attractiveness and job pursuit intentions for each scenario.

HR practice saliency. To develop the items for HR practice saliency, I followed the process of developing and validating measures of constructs described by scholars (e.g., Schwab, 1980). First, I researched the literature for scales and items measuring saliency. I measure HR practice saliency from the employee point of view i.e. the extent to which an HR practice draws immediate and more attention than other HR practices for an employee. Although I did not locate existing scales with items that directly measure saliency for HR practices, I found some references to saliency for other subjects, such as identity saliency (Lobel and Clair, 1992), career saliency (Greenhaus, 1971), and stakeholder saliency (Agle, Mitchell, and Sonnenfeld, 1999). Accordingly, I referred to existing literature to develop a new scale to measure HR practice saliency. For developing a reliable and valid scale I referred to the steps mentioned by Hinkin (1995) and DeVellis (2003). I used the social cognition literature, marketing literature and HR

literature and for an extensive review to generate items that can be used to test the importance, salience and vividness of an HR practice.

Next, I created an instrument to measure salience, importance and vividness of an HR practice. I sought and got informal feedback about the items from a random sample of twelve individuals (a mix of PhD students, recent graduates with PhD and professionals with diverse backgrounds). I mixed and combined the items before sending them out to the group via email and, asked them to sort the items based upon their perception whether it measured salience, importance or vividness of an HR practice. Based on the results, the respondents were clearer about the vividness and importance than about saliency. Thus I revised and reduced the items in the instruments to ensure that the items clearly reflect the domain of interest.

After revising the items I finally had 15 items to reflect the saliency for each of the three HR practices—career management opportunities, performance based pay, and workplace flexibility.

 Insert Table 2 about here

HR practices. In Study 1, I created eight scenarios of the three HR practices used in a hypothetical organization. For each scenario, I used three dummy variables to indicate whether the three HR practices existed in the organization (0 = no, 1 = yes). The three practices were performance based pay, career management and workplace flexibility. Though the model can be tested with any HR practice, I chose the three practices that are likely to show maximum variance as they indicate different priorities for individuals, for example, career (career management), compensation (performance

based pay) or work-life balance(workplace flexibility) and represent a broad range of practices. Periodicals like Fortune rank companies as “best to work for” consistently on the basis of practices like for example: pay and benefit programs, training, and work-family related policies.

Further, as discussed by Aiman et al, (2001) pay and promotional opportunities have been important factors in many recruitment related studies which indicate that these practices might hold great value for employees (Feldman and Arnold, 1978; Rynes, Schwab and Heneman, 1983; Strand, Levine, and Montgomery, 1981). In their meta-analyses, Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, and Jones explained that their finding that pay as relatively weak predictors of job pursuit intentions could be because of some other factors being important in an individual’s job choice decision. Thus I considered other factors like workplace flexibility which point to the importance of work-family related practices for employees (e.g. Bretz and Judge, 1994; Casper and Buffardi, 2004; Honeycutt and Rosen, 1997; Lockwood, 2009; Rau and Hyland, 2002). I also explored career management in an organization. Sturges, Guest, Conway, and Davey (2002) are of the view that organizational career management and career self-management are related as the former promotes the latter. Career management has become a joint responsibility of the employee and the employer. The employer expects the employee to enhance skills in order to meet the business demands and the employee expects the employer to contribute in the employee’s growth and career development.

Organizational attractiveness. I measured perceived organizational attractiveness of each hypothetical organization by using four items from Turban and Keon (1993). The sample items included “I would exert a great deal of effort to work for

this company” and “I would like to work for this company”. All items had a 5-point response scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Job Pursuit intentions. I measured job pursuit intentions by using five items used by Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003). Sample items were “I would accept a job offer from this company” and “I would make this company one of my first choices as an employer” (Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .82) All items had a 5-point response scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Measures for Study 2

In Study 2, we will ask employees to indicate their perceptions of the three HR practices as well as the saliency for the three HR practices at Time 1. We will also ask unit managers to report the three HR practices used in their units at Time 1. At Time 2, employees will be requested to evaluate their work attitudes and behaviors at work.

HR practice saliency. The same measure of HR practice saliency developed in Study 1 will be used in Study 2.

HR practices. We will use the measures of HPWS adopted by previous research (e.g., Chuang and Liao, 2010; Delery and Doty, 1996; Lepak and Snell, 2002) to measure the three proposed practices. For career management opportunities, the sample questions are “internal candidates have the priority for job openings” and “qualified employees have good opportunities for promotion”. For pay for performance, the sample questions include “employees receive monetary and nonmonetary rewards for great effort and good performance” and “employee salaries are determined by their performance”. For workplace flexibility, the sample questions are “the company cares about the work-life

balance of employees” and “the company has its ways or methods to help employees reduce work stress”.

Psychological climate. Psychological climate will be measured using Brown and Leigh (1996) 22-item scale. Some representative items include: “Management makes it perfectly clear how my job is to be done”, “I can trust my boss to back me up on decisions I make in the field”, “My superiors generally appreciate the way I do my job”. A seven-point Likert-type scale will be used with strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7) as the anchors.

Satisfaction with HR practices. Satisfaction with HR practices will be measured using items from Kinnie, et al (2005) scale. The scale has exhibited internal reliability (Kinnie, et al, 2005) and some of the items are as follows: “How effective do you think this system (individual performance-related pay) is in encouraging you to improve your performance?”, “How well do you feel that your company does in helping employees achieve a balance between home life and work?”

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

164 participants returned the questionnaires for Time 1 and 143 participants returned the questionnaires for Time 2. After matching participants’ responses during the two time periods, I arrived at a final sample of 114 participants (response rate of 54%). 78.9% of the respondents were females, 58% of respondents were Asian, 34.2% of them had less than one year of work experience, 66.7% were currently not working and 92.1% did not have children living at home, 85% of the respondents were single.

Insert Table 3 about here

I conducted this study to test and verify if the constructs of HR practice saliency, vividness, and importance are independent. To check if they are sufficiently distinct I used the data from time 1 of Study 1 where I had a response from 164 individuals, and conducted an exploratory factor analysis using principal component factoring with a varimax rotation in SPSS. I conducted an EFA using SPSS on the 45 scale items and seven factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than 1.00. After removing items that cross loaded on two factors I retained five factors. The five factors were factors measuring (1) saliency, importance and vividness of career management practice (2) saliency, importance and vividness of workplace flexibility practice (3) importance of performance based pay 4) saliency of performance based pay, and (5) vividness of performance based pay. Since three factors pertained to saliency, vividness, and importance of performance based pay, I looked at them closely to find that items related to vividness of performance based pay were cross loading on the factor measuring importance of performance based pay. It indicated that respondents were not able to distinguish between the vividness and importance of performance based pay. Data further revealed significant correlations between items that measured saliency, importance, and vividness of performance based pay, which made clear it does not justify treating them as three sufficiently distinct factors. Thus I combined them into a single factor measuring saliency, importance, and vividness of performance based pay and called it HR practice saliency.

 Insert Table 4 about here

 Insert Table 5 about here

The three factors retained corresponded to the salience, importance, and vividness of performance based pay, salience, importance, and vividness of career management and salience, importance, and vividness of workplace flexibility. For career management with 15 items, Cronbach's Alpha was .95, for workplace flexibility with 11 items, Cronbach's Alpha was .95 and for performance based pay with 11 items Cronbach's Alpha was .86.

I examined the factor structure across practices and three factors emerged for each of the practice corresponding to importance, vividness, and salience components of each practice. This confirmed that there was variability due to HR practice and for different individuals, different HR practices are salient. For example, for respondents, saliency of performance based pay was different from saliency of career management or from saliency of workplace flexibility.

Further the factor analysis results showed that there were no differences in how individuals responded to the measures of organizational attractiveness and job pursuit intentions. I expected two independent factors indicating that there is a difference between the two constructs. However, the results showed emergence of one factor. This implies that the responses to the two did not differ. Thus the respondents could not differentiate between the items related to the two measures. Thus for clarity in interpretation, I combined the two measures into one factor and in this study and called it the intention to pursue the organization for a job.

Due to the nested nature of the data in both Study 1 (scenarios nested in individual employees) and Study 2 (employees nested in work units), I used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002) to test the hypotheses. All eight

scenarios were nested in one individual and I wanted to see if a higher individual level variable of HR practice saliency acted as a moderator between HR practice and individual intention to pursue an organization. This was to understand if HR practice saliency accounted for significant variance in an individual's intention to pursue an organization given different HR scenarios and if there was significant variance between individuals in terms of intention. To test the cross-level interactions, I applied group-mean centering for lower-level independent variables and included their group means at the higher-level intercept model. This approach ensures that the results for the cross-level interactions are not spurious (Hofmann and Gavin, 1998). In addition, full maximum likelihood estimation was used to test model improvement. In this case, similar to examining R^2 change in ordinary least squares regression or chi-square differences in structural equation modeling, deviance tests were performed to assess relative improvements in model fit between various hypothesized models (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002).

To test the relationship between HR practice saliency, HR practice and intentions to pursue the organization I tested different models. In step 1 I tested the null model in which no predictors were added to see if the data justifies the uses of hierarchical liner modeling. The results of this model 1 revealed that there were significant between group (individual in this case) differences. Residual variance of the intercept and ICC1 revealed that 4% of the variance resided between different individuals ($\tau = 0.043$, $p < .001$, $ICC1 = .0396$). The ICC 1 value justifies the use of HLM as on conducting an ANOVA, F-test also yielded significant effect of person ($F=1.37$, $p < .01$) (Bliese, 2000).

In step 2, I added the controls to assess if there was any influence on intention due to the demographic variables gender, age, race and work experience, marital status, whether respondents have children or not, whether they are currently working. A deviance test indicated that on adding control variables there was no significant improvement in fit in comparison to the null model ($X^2 [7] = 7.99, p > .05$) Thus as a whole the control variables have no significant impact on intention.

In step 3, group level predictors of HR practice were added after the controls (gender, age, race, work experience, marital status, have children or not, current work status). The results of testing the model showed that the relationship between an HR practice and the intention to pursue an organization was significant for all three HR practices. Pay for performance ($\gamma 80 = 1.06, p < .001$), Career Management ($\gamma 90 = .68, p < .001$), and Workplace flexibility ($\gamma 100 = .60, p < .001$). This means that presence of an HR practice can impact an individual's the intention to pursue an organization. The deviance statistics of the model shows that there is a significant improvement in the third model. This means that adding HR practices to the model adds in significantly explaining the individual's intention to pursue an organization. ($X^2 [12] = 803.24, p < .01$). Thus the model fit improvement is attributed to the addition of the HR practices.

Next in step 4, I added the higher-level predictor of HR practice saliency to assess if it directly accounted for any variance in intention to pursue an organization. The results indicated that the relationship between an HR practice saliency and the intention to pursue an organization was not significant for all three HR practices. This implies that HR practice saliency in itself does not relate significantly to an individual's intention to

pursue an organization. There was no improvement in model fit as indicated by the deviance test ($X^2 [3] = 5.47, p > .05$)

In Step 5 I included all the lower level predictors, higher-level control variables, group level predictor of HR practice saliency, and the cross level interaction terms (interaction between saliency of a practice and the practice itself). I used this model to test the hypothesis as it accounts for the cross level interaction between a met (an unmet) HR practice, HR practice saliency, on the intention to pursue the organization. I use this step to check if HR practice saliency plays the role of a moderator. The interaction terms were positive and significant for two of the three HR practices pay for performance ($\gamma_{21} = 0.45, p < .001$), and workplace flexibility ($\gamma_{31} = 0.19, p < .001$) but not for career management. The deviance statistics of the fifth model shows that there is a significant improvement in step 5 (when I add the interaction terms) $X^2 [3] = 31.33, p < .01$. It implies that with the addition of the interaction term there was a significant improvement in the model and the interaction was significant for two of the three practices. It means that by HR practices by themselves, and HR practices and HR practice saliency interact to significantly explain the variability in respondent's intention to pursue an organization based on different scenarios.

This implies that for pay for performance and workplace flexibility, HR practice saliency interacts with the HR practice in an organization to impact an individual's intentions to pursue an organization. For example, if pay for performance is salient for an individual and it is not present in the organization, it is likely to adversely impact the individual's intention to pursue the organization. Similar logic holds true for workplace flexibility but not for career management.

 Insert Table 6 about here

To further examine the use of HR practice saliency as moderator, I plotted simple slopes which show that intentions to pursue and organization was higher for scenarios with the presence of a salient practice than for a scenario in which a salient practice was not present (for two practices, workplace flexibility and performance-based pay).

 Insert Figure 3 about here

 Insert Figure 4 about here

Thus the third hypotheses (a) and (b) were supported by the results. I further analyzed the correlation between different HR practice saliencies and intention to pursue the organization for a job (based on different scenarios that manipulated the HR practices) and found partial support for the fourth hypothesis in all eight scenarios.

The results supported the hypothesis for the pilot study that the positive (negative) relationship between a met (an unmet) HR practice and the intention to pursue an organization will be moderated by the HR practice saliency such that the relationship will be stronger for a highly salient HR practice for two of the three practices (i.e. for performance based pay and workplace flexibility but not for career management). It implies that there was significant variance in the responses of individuals to different scenarios. All individuals did not weigh the scenarios in the same way (depending on the HR practices manipulation) that impacted their decision to pursue the organization. Thus the presence or absence of an HR practice impacts the intention of an individual to pursue an organization.

For pay for performance and workplace flexibility, the presence or absence of a practice impacted the intention to pursue an organization. But it was not so for career management. This means that if an organization does not have pay for performance but it is salient for a potential recruit of that organization, that particular individual is not likely to pursue that organization for a job, similar trend can be seen for workplace flexibility. However, the presence or absence of career management does not impact the intention of a potential recruit to pursue an organization.

Understanding responses to the scenarios generate more insights as shown in table 6.

 Insert Table 7 about here

The scenario analysis indicates that HR practice saliency influences the intention of respondents mainly for performance based pay and workplace flexibility. Further, it is the absence of a practice that has a significant impact on intention than the presence of a salient HR practice. The scenario analysis directs to the conclusion that there are alternate moderators that significantly impact the relationship between career management and intention. Also, absence of a practice has the most significant impact on the relationship between workplace flexibility, performance based pay and intention to pursue an organization. This might imply that workplace flexibility and performance based pay are perceived as of high value in the minds of the respondents.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the scenarios highlights that the absence and not presence of a salient practice is likely to generate significant (undesired) results for the organization. Further, the findings indicate the relevance of the interaction between HR practice

saliency and HR practice supporting the hypotheses for two of the three practices. The model with the interaction terms (HR practice and HR practice saliency) was significantly different from the baseline model (which had only the control variables) which shows significant contribution of HR practice saliency and HR practices in explaining how it might impact the individual intentions. It is possible that the reason that the hypothesis was not supported for career management could be due to the sample (possibly influenced by gender, age, and race). Another reason that could explain the lack of support for career management could be that increasingly individuals are relying on themselves for career management, for instance they are focusing on developing marketable skills in contrast to acquiring just firm specific skills and are opting for continuous education in fields they want to enter or excel in (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Lips-Wiersma and Hall 2007). Thus absence of career management might not dissuade them from working in an organization.

Moreover, in this study, I did not define the HR practices to the respondents and thus there is a possibility that subjectivity in interpretation of what one means by a particular practice could influence respondents. Thus, I emphasize a need to clearly define the practices for the second study.

Implications

This study contributes to the literature by bringing employee perceptions to the center stage of strategic HRM research. Guest & Conway (2011) discussed the one needs to adopt a stakeholder perspective when determining the effectiveness of an HRM system. I focus on employees as stakeholders. A number of studies have focused on the role of line managers in impacting employee perception of HR practices (Den et al., 2012;

Gilbert et al., 2011) I drive the focus to employee reactions by focusing on how employees themselves influence their perception process irrespective of the action or attributes of their line-managers.

By means of HR practice saliency I attempt to explain why there is variance in employee reactions to an HR system. Taking a multi-level perspective I argue that the effectiveness of an organizational level HRM system can be influenced by individual employee level perceptions of the system. The HRM system cannot achieve its goals unless it is perceived as meaningful by individual employees. Valuation of the HRM system by employees in terms of HR practice saliency, gives insights into how idiosyncratic interpretation of the HRM system takes place.

Further, going beyond an employer driven effort to create a strong HRM system as discussed by Bowen & Ostroff (2004), I argue that the system needs to have features relevant to the employee in order for it to motivate employees to reciprocate as expected by the organization. Our focus is driven by the belief that it is not mere presence of HR practices but the employee perceptions of them (in the context of HR practices meeting their specific needs) that are more proximal to employee outcomes that ultimately determine an HRM system's effectiveness.

These findings are likely to have practical implications for managers, HR practitioners, and employees in the following ways. First, I would suggest managers to understand employees' values and needs before investing time, energy, and finances to initiatives directed towards increasing employee motivation. These findings might help HR practitioners examine their HR systems closely to assess if there is a good fit between the current system and the current and potential employee needs. For example, if the

organization has a large number of retired employees, are the health benefits comprehensive enough as per employee expectations? Also, if the current workforce is young, are there ways to enhance organizational commitment through promotion opportunity and competitive pay? This will help HR practitioners make better HR investment of their time and financial resources and thus help organizations become more effective through the use of HR practices.

Having an HR system that caters to the needs of the employees will minimize costs to the organization if an employee quits due to the absence of a salient HR practice in the organization. The costs in terms of money and time in filling an open position can be considerable. Thus it emphasizes the need for good communication between the managers and the employees to develop a better understanding of individual needs and what the organization can offer in terms of satisfying those individual level needs.

This study may also provide implications for employees. Although meeting personal goals is emphasized when designing and implementing HR practices, different employees may hold different HR practices as salient which makes it difficult for employers to meet the needs of all employees simultaneously. In this case, individuals may negotiate personalized, non-standard arrangements with their employers called idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) (Rousseau, 2005). These i-deals may counterweigh the negative impact of absence of a salient HR practice in an organization. However, not every employee could have the privilege or inclination for negotiating an i-deal as our paper looks at employees in general. The absence of a salient HR practice could be a basis for an employee to negotiate an i-deal in the organization and explain how this can help to enhance their positive work attitudes and desired behaviors.

Limitations

Beyond the implications, the limitations of our paper also deserve a mention. I did not focus on when and why an HR practice is salient but on the role of a salient HR practice in the explaining employee reactions to an HRM system. Understanding the reasons for saliency of different HR practices for different types of employees (full time/part-time/contract worker), under different conditions (state of economy, life cycle of the employee) can enrich the understanding of HR practice saliency.

Further, I did not conceptualize a salient practice in negative and positive terms. It could be that presence of a salient HR practice that has negative associations for the employee can result in undesirable employee outcomes. For example, someone might not favorably look at team based rewards and might pay a lot of attention to that practice (which makes it salient). Presence of a salient practice can result in negative employee outcomes. Thus looking at saliency with two dimensions (positive and negative) will help one develop meaningful explanations for the HR practices, employee outcomes link.

Another point that deserves mention is that individuals might differ in exchange ideology in their relationship to the organization. Exchange ideology is defined as “the strength of an employee’s belief that work effort should depend on treatment by the organization.” (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986:503) It is possible that some individuals might be high performers even when the HR practice that is salient to them is not met because they are low on exchange ideology and will reciprocate to the organization with the expected attitudes and behavior irrespective of what the organization offers them.

Also, I have not explored the idea that an employee's feelings of excessive entitlement (Fisk, 2010) might be related to HR practice saliency. Individuals with the entitlement mentality believe that "they should get exactly what they want, when they want it – oftentimes without regard for the well-being of others" (Fisk, 2010:102)). If a salient HR practice is satisfied via an idiosyncratic deal, it is possible that in someone with an entitlement mentality, another HR practice might immediately become salient and that could drive this particular employee to negotiate further with the employer and if nothing works out it can adversely impact employee outcomes. Future research can venture in that domain and explore the interaction between HR practice saliency and entitlement mentality of an employee.

Another area that deserves mention is the quality of relationship between the line-manager and the employee (LMX) (Graen & Scandura, 1987). It is possible that if the quality of this relationship is high, in the absence of a salient HR practice, HR practice saliency might not result in negative employee outcomes because the leader might offer the employee socio-emotional support that compensates for any benefits that a salient HR practice could bring to the employee. Thus LMX could be influential as well.

CONCLUSION

My primary contribution through this study is elaborating on the concept of HR practice saliency and drawing its linkages with the HR system and employee outcomes. I extend the strategic HRM literature by looking into the connection between HR system and employee outcomes by embracing concepts from social cognition literature. By means of using saliency I focus the attention to the employee and what he or she "sees", rather than what the organization "shows" in the HR system. Understanding the "how" of

this disconnect between the two is my contribution. This pilot study resulted in supporting the hypotheses that HR practice saliency plays an important role in influencing potential employees' intention to pursue an organization. With a student sample, I developed an understanding of the psychological process that might take place in the mind of a potential employee when that person perceives an organization in terms of its HR system. The results of this study are encouraging indicators to embark on the study in an organizational setting and delve deeper into employee perceptions.

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TABLE 1
Comparison of salience from employer and employee perspectives

	HR practice saliency from employee perspective	Saliency from employer perspective
1.	It is based on employee preferences. For example: training is salient for an employee.	It is based on employer objectives. For example: an employer might want to have an effective performance management system.
2.	Internal to the employee. For example: due to employee's needs and desires for growth he/she focuses on training.	External to the employee. For example: depends on the employer's objective i.e. having an effective performance management system.
3.	It influences an employee's perception process. For example: training draws the employee's attention and	It is targeted to influence all employees' perceptions. For

	HR practice saliency from employee perspective	Saliency from employer perspective
	focus.	example: Employer holds companywide meeting to discuss new performance management system to influence reactions of all employees.
4.	Results in variations in employee perceptions and reactions. For example: training is salient for an employee. Appraisal could be salient for another. Different salient HR practices influence their perceptions and reactions.	Aimed to result in consistency in employee perceptions. For example: to develop a shared meaning among employees about a particular practice.
5.	The employee does not plan to determine a salient HR practice. For example: the employee might not be conscious of which HR practice might become salient with time.	It is a planned effort to make HR practices salient. For example: Employer devotes time and effort before determining a salient HR

	HR practice saliency from employee perspective	Saliency from employer perspective
		practice.
6.	Can influence the HR practice made salient by employer For example: a huge part of the workforce consisting of old workers values extensive benefits which makes the employer go back to review and possible revise the benefit policy.	Can influence HR practice saliency of employee. For example: An employee might focus on an HR practice made salient by employer that drives his/her progress and rewards.

TABLE 2**Items to measure saliency, importance and vividness of three HR practices**

1. ____ I think more about performance-based pay than any other HR practice.
2. ____ Right now I am very sensitive to performance-based pay.
3. ____ I pay a lot of attention to performance-based pay.
4. ____ I want to know more about performance-based pay than any other HR practice in this organization.
5. ____ Performance-based pay is at the top of my mind.
6. ____ I think more about career management opportunities than any other HR practice.
7. ____ Right now I am very sensitive to career management opportunities.
8. ____ I pay a lot of attention to career management opportunities.
9. ____ I want to know more about the career management opportunities than any other HR practice in this organization.
10. ____ Career management opportunities are at the top of my mind.
11. ____ I think more about workplace flexibility than any other HR practice.
12. ____ Right now I am very sensitive to workplace flexibility.
13. ____ I pay a lot of attention to workplace flexibility.
14. ____ I want to know more about workplace flexibility than any other HR practice in this organization.
15. ____ Workplace flexibility is at the top of my mind.
16. ____ Performance-based pay is likely to be crucial to me for a long time.
17. ____ Performance-based pay is a critical factor in every decision I make.

18. ____ Performance-based pay is essential for the fulfillment of my long-term goal.
19. ____ Performance-based pay is a decisive factor while considering a job in this organization.
20. ____ I feel most strongly about performance-based pay.
21. ____ Career management opportunities are likely to be crucial to me for a long time.
22. ____ Career management opportunities are a critical factor in every decision I make.
23. ____ Career management opportunities are essential for the fulfillment of my long-term goal.
24. ____ Career management opportunities are a decisive factor while considering a job in this organization.
25. ____ I feel most strongly about career management opportunities.
26. ____ Workplace flexibility is likely to be crucial to me for a long time.
27. ____ Workplace flexibility is a critical factor in every decision I make.
28. ____ Workplace flexibility is essential for the fulfillment of my long-term goal.
29. ____ Workplace flexibility is a decisive factor while considering a job in this organization.
30. ____ I feel most strongly about workplace flexibility.
31. ____ I can easily picture a performance-based pay practice.
32. ____ It is exciting to think about a performance-based pay practice.
33. ____ Performance-based pay can make working for an employer memorable.
34. ____ Performance-based pay evokes strong emotions in me.
35. ____ I feel happy thinking about a performance-based pay practice.
36. ____ I can easily picture career management opportunities.
37. ____ It is exciting to think about career management opportunities.
38. ____ Career management opportunities can make working for an employer memorable.
39. ____ Career management opportunities evoke strong emotions in me.

- 40. ____ I feel happy thinking about career management opportunities.
- 41. ____ I can easily picture a workplace flexibility practice.
- 42. ____ It is exciting to think about a workplace flexibility practice.
- 43. ____ Workplace flexibility can make working for an employer memorable.
- 44. ____ Workplace flexibility evokes strong emotions in me.
- 45. ____ I feel happy thinking about a workplace flexibility practice.

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Gender	0.78	0.40													
2. Age	24.3	7.66	-.247**												
3. Work experience	3.28	1.84	-.190**	.369**											
4. Marital Status	1.15	0.35	.039	.247**	.339**										
5. Children	0.08	0.27	-.086*	.419**	.417**	.607**									
6. Currently working	0.33	0.47	-.085*	-.001	.462**	.117**	.274**								
7. Career management (CM)	0.50	0.50	0	0	0	0	0	0							
8. Performance based pay (PBP)	0.50	0.50	0	0	0	0	0	0	0						
9. Workplace flexibility (WF)	0.50	0.50	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0					
10. CM saliency	3.65	0.72	.195**	-.032	.090**	.062	-.015	.020	0	0	0				
11. PBP saliency	3.24	0.57	.097**	-.056	-.082*	-.016	.061	-.020	0	0	0	.195**			
12. WF saliency	3.14	0.84	.091**	.053	.079*	-.012	.070*	.195**	0	0	0	-.037	.069*		
13. Intention	3.07	1.01	-.017	-.029	-.031	-.016	-.075*	.024	.338**	.527**	.299**	.061	-.049	-.019	

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 4

Exploratory Factor Analysis of Salience, Importance and Vividness of HR Practices- Results 1

	Salience, Importance, and Vividness of career Management .780	Salience, Importance, and Vividness of workplace Flexibility .027	Importance of performance based pay .120	Salience of performance based pay -.125	Vividness of performance based pay -.014
21. Career management opportunities are likely to be crucial to me for a long time.					
23. Career management opportunities are essential for the fulfillment of my long-term goal.	.803	-.144	.060	-.084	.076
24. Career management opportunities are a decisive factor while considering a job in this organization.	.785	-.027	.114	-.097	-.078
8. I pay a lot of attention to career management opportunities.	.768	.004	-.032	.095	-.103
25. I feel most strongly about career management opportunities.	.819	-.012	-.119	.180	.116
22. Career management opportunities are a critical factor in every decision I make.	.820	.079	.167	-.061	.001
37. It is exciting to think about career management opportunities.	.715	-.018	-.050	-.058	.183

10. Career management opportunities are at the top of my mind.	.876	.078	.139	.292	-.329
7. Right now I am very sensitive to career management opportunities.	.734	.090	.054	.171	-.104
39. Career management opportunities evoke strong emotions in me.	.741	.022	.039	.031	.320
38. Career management opportunities can make working for an employer memorable.	.652	-.020	.000	-.145	.115
9. I want to know more about the career management opportunities than any other HR practice in this organization.	.759	-.013	.003	.286	-.312
6. I think more about career management opportunities than any other HR practice.	.770	-.085	-.164	.347	-.161
40. I feel happy thinking about career management opportunities.	.665	.030	-.105	-.004	.285
36. I can easily picture career management opportunities.	.512	.072	-.001	-.186	.196
13. I pay a lot of attention to workplace flexibility.	-.045	.989	-.063	.009	.013
30. I feel most strongly about workplace flexibility.	-.076	.966	.049	.020	-.119
29. Workplace flexibility is a decisive factor while considering a job in this organization.	-.024	.940	.103	-.106	-.212

26. Workplace flexibility is likely to be crucial to me for a long time.	.060	.947	.118	-.144	-.020
12. Right now I am very sensitive to workplace flexibility.	-.062	.889	-.076	.009	.061
27. Workplace flexibility is a critical factor in every decision I make.	-.022	.920	.160	-.032	.050
28. Workplace flexibility is essential for the fulfillment of my long-term goal.	.060	.871	.084	-.142	-.098
14. I want to know more about workplace flexibility than any other HR practice in this organization.	-.037	.882	-.176	.251	-.103
11. I think more about workplace flexibility than any other HR practice.	-.039	.855	-.128	.236	-.061
45. I feel happy thinking about a workplace flexibility practice.	.180	.626	-.095	-.001	.339
43. Workplace flexibility can make working for an employer memorable.	.119	.503	.097	-.257	.121
16. Performance-based pay is likely to be crucial to me for a long time.	-.013	.064	.771	-.041	.017
19. Performance-based pay is a decisive factor while considering a job in this organization.	-.023	.032	.749	.043	.069

18. Performance-based pay is essential for the fulfillment of my long-term goal.	.052	-.027	.743	.120	.154
17. Performance-based pay is a critical factor in every decision I make.	-.061	.078	.718	.337	.004
32. It is exciting to think about performance-based pay practice	.095	-.084	.444	.012	.390
33. Performance-based pay can make working for an employer memorable.	.118	-.014	.366	.049	.359
4. I want to know more about performance-based pay than any other HR practice in this organization.	.021	-.082	.149	.732	.155
5. Performance-based pay is at the top of my mind.	.033	.094	.403	.528	.344
1. I think more about performance-based pay than any other HR practice.	.091	-.036	.370	.494	.050
35. I feel happy thinking about a performance-based pay practice.	-.026	-.067	.271	.186	.588
34. Performance-based pay evokes strong emotions in me.	.051	-.043	.449	.320	.514

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

TABLE 5
Exploratory Factor Analysis of Salience, Importance and Vividness of HR Practices- Results 2

	Salience, Importance, and Vividness of career Management	Salience, Importance, and Vividness of workplace Flexibility	Salience, Importance, and Vividness of performance based pay
21. Career management opportunities are likely to be crucial to me for a long time.	.769	.037	.058
23. Career management opportunities are essential for the fulfillment of my long-term goal.	.796	-.139	.059
25. I feel most strongly about career management opportunities.	.830	-.016	.016
8. I pay a lot of attention to career management opportunities.	.774	.010	-.025
24. Career management opportunities are a decisive factor while considering a job in this organization.	.776	-.015	.039
10. Career management opportunities are at the top of my mind.	.887	.096	.103
37. It is exciting to think about career management opportunities.	.711	-.021	.013
22. Career management opportunities are a critical factor in every decision I make.	.810	.090	.127
7. Right now I am very sensitive to career management opportunities.	.740	.098	.073
39. Career management opportunities evoke strong emotions in me.	.738	.017	.174
6. I think more about career management opportunities than any other HR practice.	.793	-.083	-.067
9. I want to know more about the career management opportunities than any other HR practice in this organization.	.774	-.001	-.007

38. Career management opportunities can make working for a employer memorable.	.642	-.019	-.002
40. I feel happy thinking about career management opportunities.	.665	.021	.024
36. I can easily picture career management opportunities.	.500	.070	.011
13. I pay a lot of attention to workplace flexibility.	-.047	.985	-.059
30. I feel most strongly about workplace flexibility.	-.080	.970	-.011
29. Workplace flexibility is a decisive factor while considering a job in this organization.	-.035	.950	-.046
26. Workplace flexibility is likely to be crucial to me for a long time.	.044	.952	.027
27. Workplace flexibility is a critical factor in every decision I make.	-.033	.923	.130
12. Right now I am very sensitive to workplace flexibility.	-.063	.883	-.051
28. Workplace flexibility is essential for the fulfillment of my long-term goal.	.047	.877	-.030
14. I want to know more about workplace flexibility than any other HR practice in this organization.	-.022	.876	-.111
11. I think more about workplace flexibility than any other HR practice.	-.026	.849	-.059
45. I feel happy thinking about a workplace flexibility practice.	.178	.613	.042
43. Workplace flexibility can make working for an employer memorable.	.099	.505	.030
18. Performance-based pay is essential for the fulfillment of my long-term goal.	.035	-.007	.735
17. Performance-based pay is a critical factor in every decision I make.	-.065	.099	.731
34. Performance-based pay evokes strong emotions in me.	.051	-.046	.696
19. Performance-based pay is a decisive factor while considering a job in this organization.	-.043	.054	.677
5. Performance-based pay is at the top of my mind.	.046	.093	.664

16. Performance-based pay is likely to be crucial to me for a long time.	-.038	.089	.645
32. It is exciting to think about performance-based pay practice	.080	-.081	.533
35. I feel happy thinking about a performance-based pay practice.	-.027	-.078	.524
33. Performance-based pay can make working for an employer memorable.	.108	-.012	.468
1. I think more about performance-based pay than any other HR practice.	.106	-.028	.514
4. I want to know more about performance-based pay than any other HR practice in this organization.	.055	-.088	.452
Cronbach's alpha (α)	.95	.95	.86

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

TABLE 6
HLM RESULTS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Level 1					
Constant (γ 00)			1.65**	1.68**	1.68 **
Pay for performance (γ 80)			1.06**	1.06**	1.06**
Career management (γ 90)			.68**	.68**	.68**
Flexibility (γ 100)			.60**	.60**	.60**
Level 2					
Gender (γ 01)		-0.08	-0.13	-0.16*	
Age(γ 02)		-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	
Race(γ 03)		0.00	-0.04	0.04	
Work experience(γ 04)		-0.00	0.00	-0.01	
Marital status (γ 05)		0.18	-0.19	0.19	
Children (γ 06)		-0.40**	0.31**	0.29**	
		0.12	0.12	0.13	
Currently working (γ 07)					
Saliency of pay for performance (γ 10)				.05	-.26*
Saliency of career management(γ 08)				.08	.07
Saliency of workplace flexibility (γ 09)				-.04	-.16*
					0.45**
Saliency of pay for performance * Pay for performance (γ 21)					
Saliency of career management* Career management (γ 11)					0.02
Saliency of flexibility* Flexibility (γ 31)					0.19**
Deviation	2601.54	2593.55	1790.31	1784.84	1753.51
Δ Dev(df)		7.99 (7)	803.24** (12)	5.47 (3)	31.33 (3) **

**Deviation is significant

TABLE 7
Scenario Analysis

Scenario	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Intention								
CM saliency	-.049	.027	.065	.182	.159	-.014	.141	.165
WF saliency	.152	-.229*	.153	-.256**	-.051	-.022	-.071	-.243**
PBP saliency	.294**	-.150	-.270**	.139	.144	-.203*	-.105	.116

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Scenario	HR practice present
1	All present
2	None present
3	Only career management (CM) and workplace flexibility (WF) present
4	Only career management and performance based pay(PBP) present
5	Only workplace flexibility and performance based pay present
6	Only workplace flexibility present
7	Only career management present
8	Only performance based pay present

FIGURE 1
A Moderated – Mediated hypothesized model of HR practice saliency

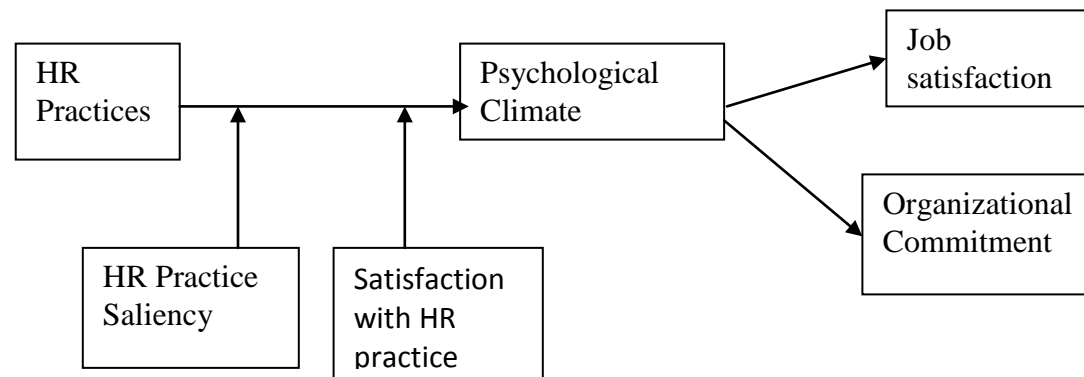


FIGURE 2

A Moderated model of HR practice saliency for the pilot study

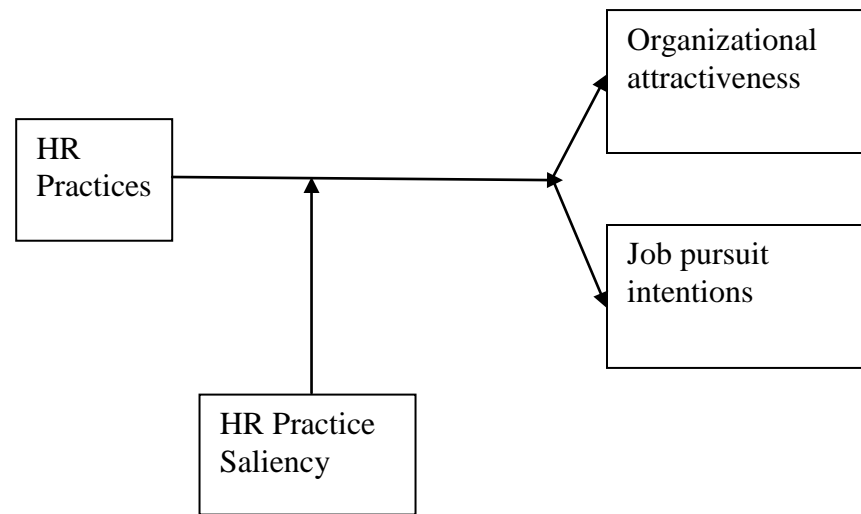


FIGURE 3

**Interaction between HR practice and HR practice saliency
(For performance based pay)**

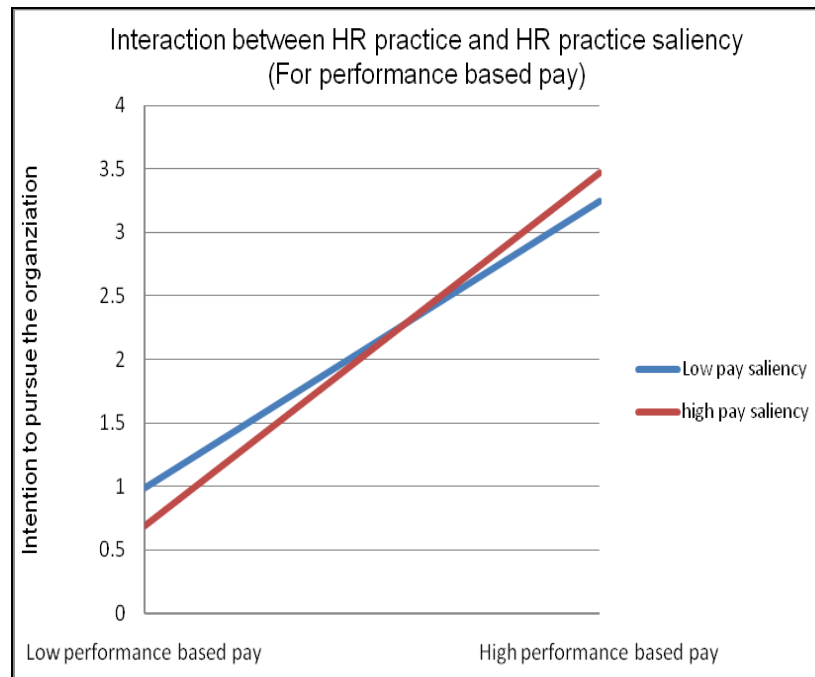


FIGURE 4
Interaction between HR practice and HR practice saliency
(For workplace flexibility)

