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HR Practice versus Organizational Performance: Identifying Relevant Approaches to HR Development

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Abstract:

This study seeks to illustrate the demonstrable link existing between the Human Resource (HR) practice and the organizational performance. The discussion focuses on the perspective of the hard and soft approaches towards HR development. It is a theoretical research based on a selected extant scholarly literature. Having considered the various HR practices involved in enhancing the working environment of the employees, there is a leading indication that the nature of such an environment has a corresponding implication on the overall performance of an organization. Moreover, the other factors that have a direct impact on the performance of an organization include the following areas: nature of handling the ethical concerns in the workplace, availability of structured mentoring and coaching programs, and a demonstration of a clearly incorporated process of career development and succession planning. Furthermore, it is observed that the hard and soft approaches to HR development are not absolute factors, but rather the ideal organization is one that pursues a hybrid approach of the two: the one that neither purely hard nor purely soft in its approach to its HR practice. Indeed, it is argued that the cut line between the two approaches can be quite fine to appreciate the difference at the interface.

Keywords: HR practice, ethical climate, soft and hard, HRM, HR, performance

1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to establish the nature of HR practices within organizations and thereby establish the impact of the various HR developmental activities. The critical aspect of study is to demonstrate how the HR practice influences the performance of an organization. Of essence, this theoretical research considers five main areas of study. The areas are: highlighting the relevance of HRM theoretical models to contemporary HR practice; assessment of the 'hard' and the 'soft' approaches to HR development; determining the justification of coaching and mentoring within organizational setup; establishing the role of career development and succession planning; and dealing with ethical concerns within emerging trends in HR practice.

2. HR Practice versus Organizational Performance

Vermeeren, Kuipers, and Steijn (2014) acknowledge that within the public organizations there is a growing demand 'to demonstrate efficiency and cost-effectiveness' due to the rising public management systems, that require a re-examination of the relationship between 'public organizational performance and human resource management (HRM)... [that focuses] on job satisfaction as a possible mediating variable between organizational performance and HRM, and on the influence of a supervisor's leadership style on the implementation of Human Resource (HR) practices' (p. 174). In this regard, there is need for organizations to identify the appropriate models concerning the HR practices that could propel it to a strategic competitive advantage. This, therefore, brings to the fore the relevance attributed to the human resource management (HRM) theoretical models in addressing the current human resource (HR) practice.

2.1. Relevance of HRM Theoretical Models to Contemporary HR Practice

There are several theoretical models that define what human resource management (HRM) process is and how HRM operates. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014), the most familiar ones are: The matching model of HRM; The Harvard model of HRM; Contextual model of HRM; The 5-P model of HRM; European model of HRM; and the hard and soft HRM models (pp. 9-10). However, it is important to note the observation by Budhwar (2000) that 'the developers of these models do not provide clear guidelines regarding their operationalisation in different contexts' (p. 72). Each of these six models has its unique characteristics that define them. Armstrong and Taylor elaborate that within the matching model of HRM, both the HR systems and the organization structure are managed in conformity with the strategy of the organization in such a manner as to drive the strategic objectives within the organization, and thereby initiating 'the concept of strategic HRM'. Moreover, Armstrong and Taylor reveal that 'the Harvard model of HRM' is initiated on the proposition that: 'Human resource management (HRM) involves all management decisions and actions that affect the nature of the relationship between the organization and employees – its human resources' (citing Beer et al., 1984). Indeed, they concur

with Armstrong (2009) in pointing out that the framework on which this model is established was developed by Beer et al. In this regard, they observe that Beer believed that:

'Today... many pressures are demanding a broader, more comprehensive and more strategic perspective with regard to the organization's human resources' (ibid: 4). They also stressed that it was necessary to adopt 'a longer-term perspective in managing people and consideration of people as a potential asset rather than merely a variable cost' (ibid: 6). Beer and his colleagues were the first to underline the HRM tenet that it belongs to line managers. They suggested that HRM had two characteristic features: 1) line managers accept more responsibility for ensuring the alignment of competitive strategy and HR policies; 2) HR has the mission of setting policies that govern how HR activities are developed and implemented in ways that make them more mutually reinforcing. (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014, p. 9; and Armstrong, 2009, p. 14).

In regard to the contextual model of HRM, they explain that it particularly lays an emphasis on the essence of integrating the influence of variables like social, institutional and political forces on the contextual environmental factors which had hitherto been underrated or ignored altogether. In this model, context is regarded as 'a contingency variable [and that] the contextual approach is broader, integrating the human resource management system in the environment in which it is developed' (p. 9). On the other hand, the 5-P model of HRM describes the operation of HRM in regard to the following five heading: HR philosophy; HR policies; HR programmes; HR practices; and HR processes (Armstrong and Taylor; and Armstrong). In regard to the European model of HRM, Armstrong and Taylor observe that this model is characterised by the following: 'dialogue between social partners; emphasis on social responsibility; multicultural organizations; participation in decision-making; continuous learning' (p. 10). And finally, of the six models enlisted earlier on, the one that is of interest to this part of the discussion is the hard and soft model. This approach to human resource development is the main subject in the following discussion.

2.2. The Hard and Soft Approaches to HR Development

It is observed that there is a distinction between the 'hard' and the 'soft' versions of human resource management. In citing Storey (1989) there is established a clarification that the hard one 'emphasises the quantitative, calculative and business-strategic aspects of managing human resources in as 'rational' a way as for any other economic factor. By contrast, the soft version traces its roots to the human-relations school; it emphasizes communication, motivation and leadership' (Armstrong, 2009, p. 8; Armstrong and Taylor, 2014, p. 10). Furthermore, they point out that the two versions of HRM should be regarded as complementary to each other instead of perceiving the two practices as mutually exclusive. Indeed, Armstrong and Taylor cite the perspective provided by Truss et al (1997) who elaborate that the cut line between these two versions may not be so precise or definitive contrary to the way their definitions seek to portray. In this regard, Armstrong and Taylor (2014) cite the following conclusions arrived at by Truss et al. regarding the hard and soft models of HRM:

Even if the rhetoric of HRM is 'soft', the reality is almost always 'hard', with the interests of the organization prevailing over those of the individual. In all the organizations, we found a mixture of both hard and soft approaches. The precise ingredients of this mixture were unique to each organization, which implies that factors such as the external and internal environment of the organization, its strategy, culture and structure all have a vital role to play in the way in which HRM operates. (p. 10)

In order to develop a detailed assessment of the soft version, Armstrong (2009) highlight that it is founded on the basis of humanism with an approach that has a definite link to human interests and which regards people as responsible beings who are also progressive. Although in a remote dimension, he acknowledges its limited link to 'the human relations school ... which believed that productivity was directly related to job satisfaction and that the output of people will be high if they like their co-workers and are given pleasant supervision' (p. 8). In citing Storey (1989) and Guest (1999b), Armstrong concurs that:

The soft version of HRM as described by Storey (1989) involves 'treating employees as valued assets, a source of competitive advantage through their commitment, adaptability and high quality (of skills, performance and so on)'. It therefore views employees, in the words of Guest (1999b), as means rather than objects, but it does not go as far as following Kant's (1781) advice: 'Treat people as ends unto themselves rather than as means to an end.' The soft approach to HRM stresses the need to gain the commitment (the 'hearts and minds') of employees through involvement, communication, leadership and other methods of developing a high-commitment, high-trust organization. Attention is also drawn to the key role of organizational culture. (p. 8)

Furthermore, the 'soft' model is different from the 'hard' model that emphasizes an integration of HR policies with the business strategy by regarding 'employees as a resource to be managed in the same rational way as any other resource being exploited for maximum return' (p.9). Instead, it views 'employees as 'valued assets and as a source of competitive advantage through their commitment, adaptability and high level of skills and performance' (p. 9). According to Lenka, Suar, and Mohapatra (2010), there has been an adoption of the practices of quality management within the post-liberalized economy, especially in the manufacturing and the service sectors. They divulge the critical variables that influence the service quality and the customer satisfaction. In this regard, they concur that these variables are categorized as "soft' and 'hard' aspects of quality management' (p. 79). In addition, they elaborate that 'the soft aspects include transformational leadership, workplace spirituality, service climate, human resource management practices, employees' affective commitment and job satisfaction' (p. 79). On the other hand, they reveal that 'the hard aspects incorporate the management information system and physical evidence. It is rationalized that the adoption of soft and hard aspects of quality management is essential to achieve service quality and customer satisfaction' (p. 79).

On the overall perspective, Armstrong cautions that a research has shown that in several organizations, there is found a mixture depicting the usage of both the hard and the soft approaches to HRM, and at times it is difficult to notice where the limits of application for each lie. In this regard, he acknowledges the importance of mutuality whereby there is an emphasis on the 'belief that management and employees share the same concerns and it is therefore in both their interests to work together ... composed of policies that promote mutuality – mutual goals, mutual influence, mutual respect, mutual rewards, mutual responsibility' (p. 9). On the other hand, Armstrong asserts that the concept of hard HRM is based on a 'management- and business-oriented philosophy [which] is concerned with the total interests of the organization – the interests of the members of the organization are recognized but subordinated to those of the enterprise' (p. 10). This perspective highlights the looming confrontation involving the 'organization- versus employee-centred outcomes' whereby the organization seeks to capitalize on the humanity as opposed to pursuing to invest in the human capital as they align themselves with the labour process theory (p. 10). Consequently, in order to enhance the performance of organizations, the aspect of investing in human capital calls for deliberate adoption of processes aimed at implementing appropriate human development strategies. These strategies include: introducing the coaching and mentoring programs; establishing career development and succession planning strategies; and also dealing with the ethical concerns that may arise within the emerging trends in HR practice. Each of these three strategies is discussed below in detail so as to arrive at a unifying conclusion.

2.3. Justification of Coaching and Mentoring Within Organizational Setup

The process of HR development could call for a structured and intentional approach aimed at utilising the existing talents within the organization. One of the ways of enhancing the career development is through coaching and mentoring. Indeed, Dessler (2014) cautions against underestimating the impact supervisors could have on the career development of their employees. He argues that this impact could go either way, positive or negative: the positive impact is within a situation whereby the competent supervisor supports by the use of performance reviews that are realistic; or negative impact in the circumstances that unsupportive supervisor inhibits the career development of the employees.

2.3.1. Mentoring

According to Dessler, in this process the manager could act as a mentor whereby the experienced manager advises, counsels, and guides the employees in a long-term structured career development through either a formal or an informal mentoring program. Dessler points out that the informal process calls for a voluntary exercise initiated both the mid-level and the senior-level management such as through career advices and by assisting them to handle the diverse aspects of office politics. On the other hand, he elaborates that in the formal mentorship programs are carried out by the employer through a structured system of pairing protégés with their potential mentors together with a training facilitation of defining the respective responsibilities for each party. Ultimately, it is established that 'having a mentor either formally or informally give career-related guidance and act as a sounding board can significantly enhance one's career satisfaction and success' (p. 313). However it is cautioned that 'because the supervisor is usually not a psychologist or trained career advisor, he or she must be extra cautious in the mentoring advice he or she gives [and that] research on what supervisors can do to be better mentors reveals few surprises' (Dessler, 2014, p. 314). On the other hand, this perspective is affirmed by Armstrong and Taylor (2014) and Armstrong (2009) who provide the following detailed elaboration regarding the impact of mentoring within an organization:

Mentoring is the process of using specially selected and trained individuals to provide guidance, pragmatic advice and continuing support that will help the person or persons allocated to them to learn and develop. Mentors prepare people to perform better in the future and groom them for higher and greater things, i.e. career advancement. Mentoring can play an important part in a leadership and management development programme. Mentoring is a method of helping people to learn and develop, as distinct from coaching, which is a relatively directive means of increasing people's competence. Mentoring promotes learning on-the-job, which is always the best way of acquiring the particular skills and knowledge the job holder needs. Mentoring also complements formal training by providing those who benefit from it with individual guidance from experienced managers who are 'wise in the ways of the organization'. (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014, p. 307; Armstrong, 2009, pp. 1027-1028)

Furthermore, Armstrong observes that even though there may not be standard mentoring procedures, 'it is essential to select mentors who are likely to adopt the right non-directive but supportive approach to the person or persons they are dealing with [and that] they must then be carefully briefed and trained in their role' (p. 1028). In addition, Dessler observes that the characteristics of effective mentorship include: high standards, commitment on time, transparency, 'trust, and the level of trust reflects the mentor's professional competence, consistency, ability to communicate, and readiness to share control' (p. 314).

2.3.2. Coaching

In regard to coaching, Dessler reveals that it focuses on a daily teaching task that could be easily re-learned, as opposed to mentoring which focus on 'relatively hard-to-reverse longer-term career issues, and often touches on the person's psychology (motives, and how one gets along with others, for instance)' (p. 314). In this respect, coaching is seen to have a very limited downside. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014), 'the need for coaching may arise from formal or informal performance reviews, but opportunities for coaching will emerge during everyday activities' (p. 307). He observes that, as part of the normal process of management coaching consists of the following aspects:

- Using whatever situations may arise as opportunities to promote learning;

- Controlled delegation – ensuring that individuals not only know what is expected of them but also understand what they need to know and be able to do to complete the task satisfactorily; this gives managers an opportunity to provide guidance at the outset: guidance at a later stage may be seen as interference;
- Making people aware of how well they are performing by, for example, asking them questions to establish the extent to which they have thought through what they are doing;
- Encouraging people to look at higher-level problems and how they would tackle them. Coaching has an important role in workplace learning. Executive coaching is used frequently as part of a blended learning approach (i.e. one that includes a number of complementary learning activities) to leadership and management development. (p. 307)

Furthermore, Armstrong (2009) asserts that at the heart of coaching is dialogue that well-structured and purposeful. In this regard, 'the coach uses feedback and brings an objective perspective [and that] the need for coaching may arise from formal or informal performance reviews, but opportunities for coaching will emerge during normal day-to-day activities' (p. 1023). He asserts that impact and effect of coaching will be felt most when coaches realize that their role is to 'help people to learn and individuals are motivated to learn [and that] they should be aware that their present level of knowledge or skill or their behaviour needs to be improved if they are going to perform their work satisfactorily' (p. 1024).

2.4. Role of Career Development and Succession Planning

Boxall and Purcell (2011) describe HRM as that process through which management builds the workforce and tries to create the human performances that the organization needs' (p. 7). They reinforce the fact that organisations depend on human resources which belong to people and that 'without ongoing access to people with the kind of talents they need, organisations are simply not viable' (p. 3). In the intense struggle to acquire and retain talented workers within an organization, Boxall and Purcell observe that there will always be winners as well as losers within the labour market at 'firm, industry and societal levels [and that] at the firm level, the labour market tends to be dominated by large, well-recognised and well-resourced organisations, which can pay higher salaries and offer individuals greater avenues for career development' (p. 18). On the other hand, Weir (1982) acknowledge that 'organisations in both the public and private sectors must also contend with change and uncertainty; technological innovations, mergers and reorganisations, changes in international economies and internal protection policies have all affected organisational staffing and development requirements' (p. 19). Furthermore, according to Armstrong and Taylor (2014) a career development strategy would include activities such as a:

A policy of promoting from within wherever possible; career routes enabling talented people to move upwards or laterally in the organization as their development and job opportunities take them; personal development planning as a major part of the performance management process, to develop each individual's knowledge and skills; systems and processes to achieve sharing and development of knowledge (especially tacit) across the firm; multidisciplinary project teams, with a shifting membership, to offer developmental opportunities for as wide a range of employees as possible. (p. 271)

They describe management succession planning as the process that ensures that able managers are readily available to fill up any emerging vacant posts within the managerial ranks. They argue that this process would require a good supply of key potential personnel that would step in to fill any vacancies that may ultimately arise. Furthermore, it is required that such personnel must be appropriately competent enough to enable a smooth transition. It is also argued that at different stages within their careers, 'managers may be categorized as being ready to do the next job now, or being ready for a specified higher-grade position in, say, two years' time, or as a high-flyer on the 'A list' who has senior management potential' (p. 276).

There is also the aspect of an aging workforce. In this regard, Kim (2003) observes that due to the inevitable process of an extensive downsizing coupled with this element of an aging workforce, 'succession planning is rapidly becoming a key strategic planning tool for human resource management and for improving government performance and accountability' (p. 533). He concurs that succession planning would always be an ongoing process that systematically identifies, assesses, and develops an organizational leadership that enhances the overall performance of an organization. He points out that this is not for an exclusive usage by the public sector alone, but equally useful for the purpose of enhancing the private organizations as well, and that the process improves both the performance and the accountability of the workforce. In so observing, he reiterates that succession planning is useful in 'developing leadership talent in a world of continuous organizational change and that it is clearly an important goal for businesses and non-profits' (p. 533). Jarrell and Pewitt (2007), on the other hand, affirm that succession planning 'is the plan an organization develops to meet its most critical employment needs [and that] although frequently used in the private arena, succession planning is rarely employed in the public sector' (p. 297). They also question if public organizations, with the elaborate inherent bureaucracy as well as meritocracy, could sustain a talented workforce given the impending changes in the workforce' (p. 297). Arguing for an American context, Fusarelli, Fusarelli, and Riddick (2018) reveal that superintendents that leading specific school districts, especially those within the hard-to-staff zones, face many challenges in terms of recruiting as well as retaining a 'high-quality, well-trained teachers, principals, and district leaders.' They point out that 'many large urban areas as well as their rural counterparts have high concentrations of intergenerational poverty and unemployment [and that] rural areas are further disadvantaged by the lack of social and cultural attractions as well as fewer health care resources' (p. 286).

2.5. Dealing with Ethical Concerns within Emerging Trends in HR Practice

The contemporary organizations are evolving with the various emerging trends that are evident across the globe. In this regard, the HR practice is also affected by these trends. According to Dessler (2014) there are several such trends that are shaping the human resource management. He observes that although traditionally, the HR managers have been engaged in the activities of hiring and firing employees, administering benefits, and conducting appraisals, in the contemporary times, employers have adopted new trends that govern how the human resource managers carry out their tasks: 'these trends include workforce trends, trends in how people work, technological trends, and globalization and economic trends' (p. 7). Furthermore, Dessler affirms that 'the composition of the workforce will continue to change over the next few years; specifically, it will continue to become more diverse with more women, minority group members, and older workers in the workforce' (p. 7). The focus of this section of study is a highlight of the trends in HR practice that raise ethical concerns within the organizations.

Ruona, Lynham, and Chermack (2003) assert that, because the future holds an infinite number of challenges due to its prevailing nature of uncertainty and unpredictability it ought not to be ignored whatsoever. It is notable that 'understanding trends and indicators emerging today helps us to proactively think about potential future developments and positions us to constructively shape them' (p. 272). Ruona et al. establish that the advancement in technology would continue to have a substantial impact in defining the progression of organizations, especially in terms of providing e-services. They point out that this has a potential of drastically transforming the environment and appearance of the traditional workplace. In their research, Ruona et al. established from five respondent that there is a disturbing concern that the elements of e-learning and that of developing virtual offices would make human resource development 'harness and explode the potential of technology, while also effectively integrating it with the premises of well-verified learning theories [and that] a few others reflected on the impact of technology on the workplace questioning the effect of 'virtuality' on basic human needs' (p. 276). On the other hand, Burke (1999) projects that the trends on human resource roles extends beyond the traditional mandates to include a complex combination involving strategy and operational parameters such as: 'a) human resource planning, b) tracking legal and ethical issues, c) incorporating global innovations, d) assessing trends in the workforce, and e) assisting in restructuring and rightsizing of public service personnel' (p. 529). He points out that the ethical concerns form a basis on how organizations ought to develop their human resource practice. Furthermore, there is an assertion that many organizations are required to develop their operations in ways that: 'provide a safe and healthy workplace; use fair employment practices; be responsible for environmental protection; comply with federal, state and local laws; and maintain a corporate culture ... where ethical conduct is recognized, valued, and exemplified by all employees' (p. 530). This argument is concurrent to the several other propositions that seek to enhance the ethical climate in organizational workplace for the sake of improving performance of the workforce. According to Jha, Varkkey, Agrawal, and Singh (2017), the ethical concerns are categorized into two: explicit and implicit initiatives. They observe that the 'explicit ways of promoting ethics include ethics trainings, seminars on ethics, rewards and punishment policy, and mechanism of reporting ethical concerns/issues (ethics portal, whistle blower policy...)' (p. 106). On the other hand, the implicit ways of creating ethical climate include 'HR practices, namely selective selection, training for developing interpersonal and technical skills, fair performance appraisal system and various engagement initiatives [and that] the support and guidance of the senior management and line managers ensured successful execution of both initiatives' (p. 106). Jha et al. establish that within a legacy organization, there is a link existing between human resource systems and the development of an ethical climate, and that ethical climate could be considered as a 'strategic tool to gain competitive advantage in the current dynamic business environment where replication of best practices has become simpler' (p. 125).

There is also an argument raised that in order to understand the process of ethical decision-making within the human resource management, it is essential to explore the particular dynamics that involve the 'ethical inaction, not just the dynamics of ethical action' (Lowry, 2006, p. 171). In this regard, Lowry objects to the practice of merely viewing the HRM practice as either ethical or not and therefore terms this as out-rightly inappropriate due to its heterogeneous nature. He argues that a more useful approach would be to analyze the ethical dimensions in the specific aspects within the HRM and thereby establish their impact in terms of their principles and practices. In addition, other scholarly observations argue that HR managers are seen as the providers of ethical stewardship. For instance, Lowry views the HR manager as 'a guardian of ethics', responsible for a variety of activities such as the provision of training in ethics; communicating codes of ethical conduct; managing compliance and monitoring arrangements; and establishing and maintaining principles of corporate social responsibility' (p. 173). Nevertheless, Lowry cautions that such expectations regarding the HR managers tend to face several difficulties and tensions related to the general lack of goodwill in support for this manager becoming ethically assertive. Indeed, he observes that the HR managers are mostly tasked with the responsibility of achieving several 'competing organizational objectives (for example, high performance with low costs) alongside their personally held moral convictions, and are constrained by the nature of the bureaucratic context of organizations and associated notions of control' (p. 182). In regard to the impact that ethics have on performance of the organization, Armstrong and Taylor cite Winstanley and Stuart-Smith (1996)'s definition of the four performance management ethical principles, namely:

Respect for the individual – people should be treated as 'ends in themselves' and not merely as 'means to other ends'.

- Mutual respect – the parties involved in performance management should respect each other's needs and preoccupations.
- Procedural fairness – the procedures incorporated in performance management should be operated fairly in accordance with the principles of procedural justice.

- Transparency – people affected by decisions emerging from performance management processes should have the opportunity to scrutinize the basis upon which decisions were made. (pp. 99-100)

In addition, they argue that one of the essential roles that HR professionals are required to undertake is that of doing 'whatever they can to embed the consistent application of ethical values in the organizations that they can become values in use rather than simply professed values in a code of practice or values statement' (p. 103). Certainly, they point out that these HR professionals are tasked with a unique responsibility aimed at 'guarding and promoting core values in the organization on how people should be managed and treated generally. They are particularly concerned with values relating to just and fair treatment. They can act as role models and challenge unethical practices' (p. 103). Furthermore, Armstrong and Taylor acknowledge that professional ethos ought to be displayed by the HR professionals as they carry on with their duties, and that this should be characterized by: possession of specialized knowledge and skills; power and status based on expertise; self-discipline and adherence to some as pirational performance standards; opportunity to display high levels of autonomy; ability to apply some independence of judgment; operating, and being guided by a code of ethics (Armstrong and Taylor, p. 47 citing Fletcher (2004)). On the part of the personal characteristics, there is also cited the professional requirements laid out by the HR professional bodies as well as the personal ethical values exhibited. In addition, these professionals are 'are bound by organizational codes of conduct expressed formally or accepted and understood as core values (the basic values adopted by an organization that set out what is believed to be important about how people and organizations should behave)' (p. 47). On the other hand, Jha, Varkkey, Agrawal, and Singh (2017) acknowledge that an appropriate ethical climate within the organization is able to shape the behaviour and attitude of employees that ultimately influences the various outcomes related to work. They recommend that organizations ought to focus on the ethical climate development because this leads to attainment and retention of skilled workforce that provides a work culture that is 'trustworthy, fair and transparent.' In addition, they observe that a treatment by line managers would enhance the values and expectations of the 'in the mind of employees. Employees tend to reciprocate the organization for providing healthy work culture through a variety of ways such as high level of commitment, performance and exhibition of extra-role behaviour at workplace' (p. 126).

Moreover, Guest (2002) concurs with this as he reiterates that in the contemporary times, business organizations have been operating within a very competitive environment, and therefore they ought to build a competitive advantage in order to score above their competitors. He establishes that regarding 'the hypothesized relationship between the HR practices and organizational performance, it is found that the two are positively related... [and that] it has been empirically established that HR practices are predictors of performance of an organization' (pp. 335, 352).

3 Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that there is a demonstrable link existing between HR practice and the organizational performance. An in-depth assessment of the two approaches to HR practice (hard and soft) show that it is fairly hard to establish a clear-cut line between the two. Nevertheless, the extreme practice of the two is a fairly hypothetical affair because it is rare for an organization to practise either of them exclusively. From this study it is also noted that the other factors that effectively enhance the organizational performance include: dealing with the ethical concerns arising within the work environment; incorporating the aspect of mentorship and coaching within the organization; and fairly, transparently, procedurally and adequately addressing the processes of career development and succession planning. It is observed that when the ethical climate within the workplace of an organization is enhanced, then there is a corresponding improvement on performance by the workforce.

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