

Development of a Theoretical Model for High Performance Culture

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Abstract: This research was motivated by less clarity and scarcity of literature on high-performance culture (HPC). The study was mainly conducted using grounded theory. A framework of HPC was developed by a content analysis in the first round of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews on the research question ‘what defines HPC’ which revealed HPC as a set of behaviors, expectations, and results of interactions among organizational constructs. This was followed by a thematic analysis of data gathered on the research question ‘what indicates HPC’ in the second phase leading to the identification of themes as indicators of HPC. As a way of method triangulation, all respondents were asked to rank 15 items identified as themes and sub-themes of HPC. This confirmed the qualitative research findings which were modeled into 5 relationships among organizational constructs namely the ones individual employees maintain with their jobs, working colleagues, management, expectations towards their ideal selves, and the organization along with 5 distinctive constructs including 3 behaviors and 2 psychological constructs namely focus, collaboration, accountability, subjective well-being and perceived organization support that explains the aforesaid relationships respectively. The findings of descriptive statistics, literature review and in-depth interviews with experts were used to validate and refine the model. Authors defined HPC as a socially constructed, desired pattern of behaviors and expectations of a group based on their interactions with a set of organizational constructs which aims to yield desired individual and organizational performance. The authors wish to extend this research by rigorously testing the model for reliability and validity and developing a scale of HPC based on this model.

Keywords: *Accountability, Collaboration, Focus, High-Performance Culture, High-Performance Culture Model, Perceived Organizational Support, Subjective Well-Being*

Introduction

This research aims to explore the domains related to the high-performance culture (HPC) construct in the past literature and theorize the same through a research intervention to develop a theoretical model and a definition as primary and secondary objective of this study respectively. To broadly address the research problem namely the less clarity and scarcity of literature on HPC particularly during the last decade in form of research-backed definitions, theoretical models, and standard scales, despite the works of Heerden and Roodt (2007), Pulakos et al. (2012), Wriston, (2007).

The authors wish to extend this research by testing the validity and reliability of the HPC model developed in this study in a larger sample through a rigorous statistical analysis thereby developing a scale to measure HPC.

The ability of an organization to create high-performance culture (HPC) has widely been considered an important determinant of achieving superior business results consistently. (Wriston, 2007) Coyle (2019, p. 13) noted HPC as the answer to the fundamental question, “why do certain groups add up to be greater than the sum of their parts, while others add up to be less?” Yet there is no universal way of defining, modeling, or

measuring this construct that is widely used or comprehensively explains the same. According to the past literature works on areas like high-performance organizations (HPO), Great-places-to-work (GPTW), high-performance work systems (HPWS), organizational culture, etc. have contributed to theorizing the concept of high-performance culture (HPC) whereas less research was focused purely on the concept of HPC as a standalone construct.

Heerden & Roodt (2007) have conceptualized HPC in three ways namely as an extension of organization culture, exemplary models of performance excellence, and distinctive characteristics or trends that differentiate high-performing organizations from the rest. The authors have adopted the said three approaches in exploring the past literature to achieve the primary objective of this research namely to develop a theoretical model of a high-performance culture.

Literature Review

Culture is driven by the learned assumptions, values, and beliefs that govern the daily behavior of people which is famously worded as “the way we do things around here” (Kaliprasad, 2006; Reid & Hubbell, 2005). Drucker (n.d., as cited in Shoup, 2019) so eloquently articulated “culture eats strategy for breakfast” while Shoup (2019) reexpressed the same as “culture eats strategy, organization, technology, process, and anything else I can think of for breakfast.”

Although there is no consensus over the definition of organizational culture it could widely be characterized as holistic, historically determined, related to anthropological concepts, socially constructed, soft, and difficult to change construct. (Hofstede et al., 1990, p. 286) According to McNamara a parallel could

be drawn between organizational culture and the personality of an individual where the way a person dresses, speaks, and behaves is a reflection of his or her personality influenced by his or her own set of assumptions, values, and beliefs. (1999, as cited in Heerden & Roodt, 2007) Therefore, how an organization behaves collectively could be viewed as a reflection of organizational culture influenced by its own collective set of assumptions, values, and beliefs. According to this argument, HPC could be identified by studying assumptions, values, and beliefs of high-performing organizations or collective behavior patterns by measuring perceptions which lead to identifying regularities in such cultures as frameworks or models.

The high-performance culture model developed by Heerden and Roodt (2007) has used the South African excellence model which was influenced by excellence models of the Deming Award, Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA), and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Award. They also noted the extensive use of the balanced scorecard as a self-assessment tool against business excellence benchmarks. Research work on high-performance work systems (HPWS) also provides resemblance and important insights into studying HPC. (Li et al., 2019) As highlighted in Table 01, several researchers and practitioners have identified a plethora of distinctive characteristics of HPC.

Wriston defined HPC as “a mindset with accompanying and reinforcing habits, practices and routines about how to optimally engage one’s human resources to optimize long-term team/organization performance” (2007,p.9) while Pulakos et al. (2012) defined it as a culture that values excellence, strives for success, seeks feedback, and embraces continuous learning and development where employees engage in effective

performance management behaviors, i.e. set clear expectations, help employee accomplish work, provide regular

feedback, find new opportunities for them to succeed and develop.

Table 1: Compilation of Characteristics of HPC Based on The Past Literature

Characteristics of HPC	Source
Knowledge, capacity, motivation, instruments, and incentives (Behavior engineering model)	(Gilbert, 1978)
Vision, “true believer” & “can-do” mentality, values, pride & dissatisfaction over performance, peer respect, long-term relationships, fun, precise expectations/measurement & feedback, no excuses, performance-driven credible processes	(Osborne & Cowen, 2002)
Openness & trust, managed differences, simplicity & focus, playing to people’s strengths	(Reid & Hubbell, 2005)
Empowerment, meaningful core values, transparency, openness, trust, being performance-driven	(de Waal, 2007)
Collaborative environment, focus, accountability, robust processes	(Wriston, 2007)
Leadership, vision & strategy (direction), core capabilities, systems & processes, stakeholder satisfaction	(Heerden & Roodt, 2007)
Leadership, design, people, change management, engagement	(Bhalla, et al., 2011)
Trust (credibility, respect, fairness), pride, camaraderie (collaboration)	(Burchell & Robin, 2011; The Definition of a Great Place, 2022)
Focus, collaboration, coaching	(Pulakos, Mueller-Hanson, O’Leary, & Meyrowitz, 2012)
Mission, consistency, adaptability, involvement (Denison model)	(Adkins & Kaur, 2022; Ahmady, Nikooravesh, & Mehrpour, 2016)
Achievement-orientation, self-actualization humanistic-encouragement, affiliation	(Camberis, 2016)
Build safety (belongingness & collaboration), share vulnerability (trust), and establish purpose (focus)	(Coyle, 2019)
Trust & collaboration autonomy & accountability Practices of continuous improvement	(Shoup, 2019)

Individual work performance is predominantly considered as a form of behavior (Gunathilake, 2021) while organization performance is a form of results or outcomes identified using performance indicators. (Bhalla et al.,

2011; de Waal, 2007; Fusch & Gillespie, 2012) Works of Burchell and Robin, (2011), Coyle (2019), Fusch and Gillespie (2012), etc. identified culture as a product of collective interactions or relationships among different organizational constructs.

According to the above arguments, high performance could be conceptualized as the desired level of collective behavior against a set of expectations or standards which leads to the following definition of HPC.

Collective behaviors and interactions that result in desired business results.

By applying systems theory as illustrated in Figure 01, HPC could be measured using three ways namely;

- measuring antecedents or factors influencing HPC (inputs)
- measuring constituents/dimensions or characteristics of HPC based on a

standard definition or a theoretical model of HPC (process)

- measuring business results & compare them against a benchmark. (outputs)

Authors are convinced the conceptualization of HPC without a reference to its very purpose, i.e., the sustained long-term performance of the organization is incomplete. However, since HPC is not the sole influencer or antecedent of achieving the desired business outcomes, the authors argue HPC could best be modeled using either inputs or the elements of the process.

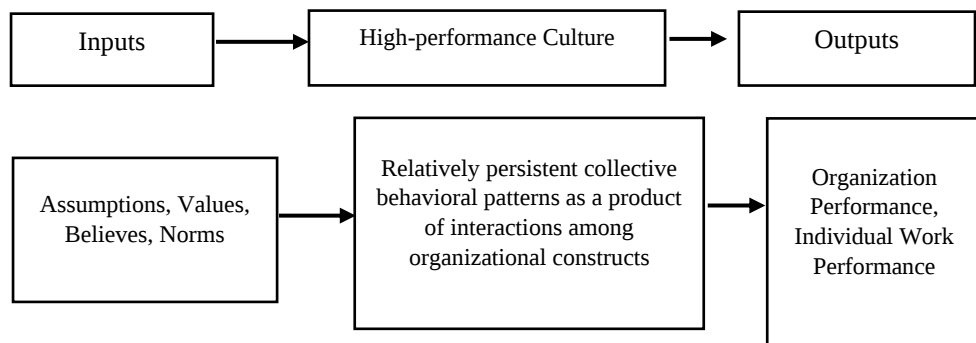


Figure 1: Application of Systems Approach Towards Conceptualizing HPC

This argument was supported by the works of Burchell and Robin (2011) who asserted that the business outcomes were not considered a key determinant in identifying any business organization as a great place to work back in the 1980s. Alternatively, they had uncovered employee experience as a yardstick in differentiating organizations as great places to work. Levering (1988, as cited in Burchell & Robin, 2011) has identified three relationships as given below.

- Relationships between employees and their leaders (management)
- Relationships between employees and their work (Job)

- Relationships between employees and each other (working colleagues)

Since culture is a product of a multitude of relationships among different parties in an organization (Burchell & Robin, 2011; Coyle, 2019; Fusch & Gillespie, 2012) the nature of these three relationships could be impacting desired business results such as the achievement of organizational goals and priorities through mediators such as increased loyalty, commitment and willingness to contribute to desired results as highlighted by Burchell and Robin (2011). Therefore, HPC as a latent variable could best be interpreted by explaining the nature of the aforesaid

relationships using an appropriate mix of observable variables that explain the said relationships.

Methodology

The research was conducted mainly using grounded theory based on pragmatic research philosophy. A mixed-method was used with a high degree of qualitative data, supplemented by a data triangulation technique using a simple quantitative data collection to enhance the validity of the findings. (Saunders et al., 2014) Both content and thematic analysis techniques were employed in analyzing qualitative data while simple descriptive analysis was conducted on quantitative data.

Four rounds of focus group discussions were conducted with 2 groups of 11 participants at 2 different points of time along with 6 in-depth interviews under primary data collection. The participants of the focus group discussions represented professionals reading for Master of Business Administration degrees from construction, hospitality, banking, and manufacturing industries in Sri Lanka. Interviews were conducted with two CEOs, HR professionals, and academics.

Three in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions were conducted initially, and the data were analyzed using inductive coding and content analysis techniques to identify certain categories and themes (Saunders et al., 2014) related to the research question “what defines an HPC?” This was intended to identify an initial HPC framework for the study. The latent approach was adopted in examining the content by trying to extract deeper meanings by focusing on implicit data. (Croseley & Rautenbach, 2021)

Subsequently, the identification of an initial framework and a definition of HPC was followed by two focus group discussions and 3 in-depth interviews to find answers to the research question “what indicates HPC”. This was intended to build a model based on the framework identified using the initial data. As highlighted by Croseley and Rautenbach (2021), the thematic analysis technique was employed using deductive coding during initial coding, and categorization and theme identification under line-by-line coding.

As a means of method triangulation, an online questionnaire was circulated among all 28 participants in the qualitative study requesting to rank 15 variables that were identified as possible constituents of HPC based on themes and sub-themes of HPC identified in qualitative data analysis that explains multiple relationships a single employee maintains within an organizational setting. This was done to cross-validate the themes derived from the qualitative study and refine the proposed model. Finally, two in-depth interviews with one HR professional and one academic with expert knowledge in the concerned field were conducted as a means of expert validation.

Findings and Discussion

Results of the content analysis of qualitative data gathered for the research question, i.e., “what defines high-performance culture” were summarized in Table 02. Accordingly, HPC was mainly identified as a culture with a set of desired behaviors, high expectations, and interactions among organizational constructs such as relationships individual employees maintain with their job, management, and colleagues at work.

Table 2: Findings of content analysis for the research question “What defines an HPC”

#	Themes	Frequency	Percentages
1	Business Results (desired)	8	32%
2	Values (desired)	9	36%
3	Behaviors (desired)	22	88%
4	Practices (high performance work systems)	7	28%
5	Interactions among Organizational Constructs (Quality)	20	80%
6	Leadership (effective)	12	48%
7	Expectations (higher)	19	76%

Frequency: number of times the themes appeared in the data

Percentages: number of times a theme was coded in the data divided by the number of respondents (N=25)

Findings of the thematic analysis done for the qualitative data gathered on the research question “what indicates/constitutes a high-performance culture” were given in table 03 which has identified 72 codes categorized into 24 sub-themes and 5 main themes in interpreting the main construct HPC.

High focus comprises four sub-themes where high engagement comprises three codes namely vigor, absorption, and dedication. The sub-theme of high alignment includes four codes namely alignment with the mission (organization’s overall mission/goals), individual skills, individual goals, and time while clarity comprises 3 codes namely expressed (written) policy & procedures, role & goal clarity, and finally, the high awareness includes 2 codes namely promotion awareness and

prevention awareness. The author extracted vigor, absorption, and dedication codes and the derivation of the sub-theme work engagement from the works of Schaufeli and Bakker (2010). In the same way, the other 4 themes namely high accountability, collaboration, subjective well-being, and perceived organization support were derived through a different set of codes and sub-themes as illustrated in table 03.

Sub-themes such as answerability, evaluability, and consequentiality could be identified as dimensions of accountability in the standard scale developed by Han and Perry (2020) while the sub-theme autonomy along with norms and mutuality closely corresponds with respect and trust dimensions of the collaboration scale of Thomson et al. (2009)

Table 03: Results of Thematic Analysis For The Research Question “What Indicates An HPC”

Number of Codes	Sub-themes	Themes	Main Construct (Theory)
3	High engagement	High Focus	High-Performance Culture (HPC)
4	High alignment		
3	High clarity		
2	High awareness		

2	High Answerability to management	High Accountability
4	Effective Performance Measurements	
3	Constant Feedback	
3	Consequentiality	
3	High trust	High Collaboration
3	High sense of belongingness	
2	High respect for each other	
2	High autonomy	
3	High Empowerment	
2	High Job satisfaction	High Subjective Well-being
4	High motivation	
2	Self-actualized individuals	
3	Happiness at Work	
3	Conducive working environment	High Perceived organization support
4	Leadership support	
3	Fair policies & procedures	
5	High-performance work systems	
2	High recognition	
3	Continuous Employee development	
4	Attractive Rewards	

Past literature supports the theme of subjective well-being measured using satisfaction with life and subjective happiness scales (Wickramasinghe & Ahmad, 2014) which most closely corresponds with job satisfaction and happiness at work. According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) supervisor support, working conditions, fairness, and

organizational rewards are considered antecedents of perceived organizational support and most of the sub-themes correspond to the said conception. For example, high recognition, attractive rewards, and continuous employee development could be summed up as organizational rewards.

Table 04: Ranking of themes and sub-themes of HPC identified by thematic analysis.

Themes	Ranking
Focus	1
Leadership	2
Trust	3
Collaboration	4
Accountability	5
Engagement	6
Perceived organizational support	7
Subjective Well-being	8

High Performance Work Systems	9
Autonomy	10
Empowerment	11
Effective Performance Measurements	12
Working environment	13
Fair policies and procedures	14
Organizational rewards	15

Fifteen behavioral and perceptual characteristics identified as themes and sub-themes of HPC were ranked by all 28 participants of the qualitative study and the resulted rankings were given in Table 04. Accordingly, all five themes were found within the first 8 ranks having work focus as the most preferred. Leadership, trust, and engagement were among the first 8 which were not included in the model whereas they were better captured under perceived organizational support, collaboration, and focus constructs respectively.

When developing the model, 5 interactions among organizational constructs namely, the ones individual employees maintain with other employees, management, and their jobs along with the expectations of their own (ideal) selves and the (ideal) organization were considered as the themes derived by the qualitative analysis and the past literature closely correspondence to the aforesaid.

The following marks some of the important findings in defining & identifying indicators of HPC.

HPC is a social construct, which means different things to different people based on their prejudices.

HPC is a desired behavioral construct of a group.

Desired individual behaviors, being the building blocks of HPC, create the desired collective behaviors in the long run which become hardwired as a group attribute in an organization.

HPC could be interpreted based on the perceptions of the individuals associated with it.

HPC is an extension of organizational culture as an ideal or desired state of it which could best be understood by its inputs or a set of indicators rather than outputs. HCP could be theorized using a set of indicators each at a desired/ ideal level and therefore the validity of the claim that any culture identified as high-performance culture is strictly subject to the criteria used with a particular set of indicators and the perception of the observer.

The purpose of HPC is to achieve superior individual and organizational performance in a competitive setting.

Performance management was identified as the major process or practice that promotes and regulates HPC which in turn was found to influence individual and organizational performance to a certain extent.

Leadership, focus, trust, and accountability are the most expressed attributes of HPC during the qualitative inquiry.

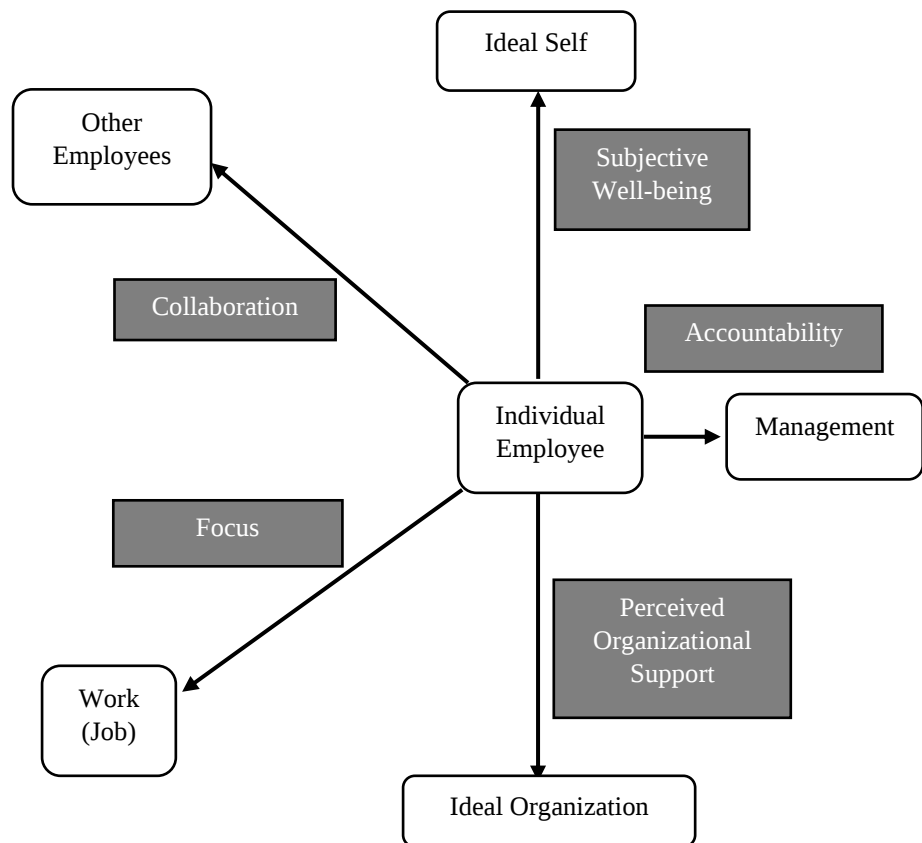


Figure 2: Proposed Model of High-Performance Culture

Further, a framework illustrated in Figure 02 could be presented as the HPC model which characterizes 5 interactions of individual employees with 5 organizational constructs namely job, other colleagues at work, management, ideal organization, and ideal self.

Directions for Future Research

As the next step of this research, the authors intend to test this model for validity and reliability using a bigger sample and rigorous data analysis. Further, this model could be validated in different contexts which could potentially help refine the model. Authors also intend to develop a scale for measuring HPC

based on this model as no such scale has been developed since Heerden & Roodt back in 2007. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the extreme socio-economic crisis in Sri Lanka on respondents' perception could be identified as a possible bias potentially undermining the validity of the findings. This could be eliminated by testing the model in different times and socio-economic contexts.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this research was achieved by developing a model of high-performance culture as illustrated in Figure 02. The model encompasses 5 relationships that an individual employee

maintains with 5 different perceptual domains that influence their overall behavior in their existence as a citizen of the organization, which influence the social construct, i.e., organizational culture or the ideal/ desired state of it, termed high-performance culture. The relationship of individual employees with the management is interpreted by their accountability while their relationships with their work tasks (job) and other working colleagues by work focus and collaboration respectively. Previous literature (Burchell & Robin, 2011; Fusch & Gillespie, 2012; How the Great Place to Work Trust Index Works, 2022), has already identified those three relationships to a certain extent. Individuals' affinity with expectations towards their ideal self and ideal organization was explained by subjective well-being and perceived organizational support constructs respectively which were identified purely by the qualitative inquiry.

This model of HPC holds some resemblance to the model of Wriston, (2007) which encompasses focus, collaborative environment, and accountability as three characteristics of HPC whereas Wriston's model was not developed through a proper research intervention and was not based on any

theoretical or empirical framework. The HPC model of Heerden & Roodt (2007) is fundamentally different from this model and the former was initially developed based on literature and then tested for validity and reliability as a precursor for scale development of HPC. The authors too intend to develop a scale to measure HPC based on the proposed model. This model corresponds to the Trust model of Burchell and Robin (2011) which has subsequently been used by the great place to work institute (The Definition of a Great Place, 2022), to a certain extent, yet it is significantly different in terms of variables used to measure different relationships, e.g., when trust model conceptualize employee – job relationship with pride the proposed model uses focus.

Based on the findings author defines HPC as: a socially constructed, desired pattern of behaviors and expectations of a group such as focus, collaboration, accountability, subjective well-being, and perceived organizational support based on their interactions with organizational constructs such as work (jobs), work colleagues, management, expectations of their ideal selves and ideal organization, which is intended to yield desired individual and organizational performance.

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