

THE INFLUENCE OF BENEVOLENT HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
ATTRIBUTIONS AND GRATITUDE ON PERCEIVED STRESS

ATHAR HAMEED BUTT

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DEDICATION

To my God, Allah ‘azza wa jalla’ Then to my beloved father, mother, all family members and my friends

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Thanks to Allah SWT for everything I was able to achieve and for everything I tried but I was not able to achieve.

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ABSTRACT

Stress causes serious illness and damages employee well-being, but it can be alleviated by Human Resource Management (HRM) practices. To alleviate employee' stress, this study proposes a new HRM framework from a pluralistic view of employment relations. This new framework has three components. First, employees can perceive that their organization enacts HRM practices from two benevolent intentions: a) to help employees perform better and b) to improve their well-being. Second, these benevolent HRM attributions invoke gratitude among employees. Third, gratitude reduces employees' perceived stress. Using quantitative research design and multi-stage random sampling, a survey questionnaire was collected from 367 respondents of four mobile telecom companies in Pakistan. Measurement and structural model validity were tested using AMOS 22 software, through conducting Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The measurement model was tested by using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) techniques. Structural model analyzed the relationships between the constructs and revealed that benevolent HRM attributions have a positive impact on gratitude and reduces employees' perceived stress. Moreover, gratitude mediated the relationship between both benevolent HRM attributions and employees perceived stress. This study makes important contributions towards theoretical, practitioner and policy maker. Theoretically, this study introduces a new HRM framework mediated by gratitude to reduce employee stress levels. For practitioners, this study has shown how HRM practices can engender gratitude, which leads to a reduction in employee stress levels. From a policy making perspective, this study can be referred to address employee stress management legislation at the national levels. This legislation can encourage organizations to constitute stress management policies in their HRM practices.

ABSTRAK

Tekanan boleh menyebabkan penyakit serius dan mampu merosakkan kesejahteraan pekerja namun ia boleh ditangani menggunakan praktis Pengurusan Sumber Manusia (HRM). Untuk mengurangkan tekanan pekerja, kajian ini mencadangkan kerangka kerja baru HRM berdasarkan pandangan pluralistik dalam hubungan pekerjaan. Rangka kerja baru ini mempunyai tiga komponen. Pertama, pekerja boleh menanggap bahawa organisasi mereka mengamalkan praktis HRM dari dua niat baik: a) membantu pekerja melaksanakan sesuatu dengan lebih baik dan b) berusaha meningkatkan kesejahteraan mereka. Kedua, atribut HRM yang baik ini akan membangkitkan rasa syukur di kalangan pekerja. Ketiga, rasa syukur mengurangkan tekanan yang dihadapi oleh pekerja. Menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan kuantitatif dengan pensampelan rawak pelbagai peringkat, kajian soal selidik dikumpul daripada 367 orang responden dari empat syarikat telekomunikasi mudah alih di Pakistan. Kaedah pengukuran dan model struktur yang bersesuaian telah pun diuji menggunakan perisian AMOS 22 melalui *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM). Model pengukuran pula telah diuji dengan menggunakan teknik *Exploratory Factor Analysis* (EFA) dan *Confirmatory Factor Analysis* (CFA). Model struktur menganalisis hubungan antara konstruk dan mendapati bahawa atribut HRM mempunyai kesan positif terhadap rasa syukur dan mengurangkan tekanan yang dihadapi oleh pekerja. Selain itu, rasa syukur menjadi perantara di antara hubungan atribut HRM yang baik dan tanggapan pekerja terhadap tekanan. Kajian ini memberi yang sumbangan kepada teori, pengamal sumber manusia serta pembuat dasar. Secara teorinya, kajian ini memperkenalkan rangka kerja HRM baru yang menjadikan rasa syukur sebagai perantara dalam mengurangkan tahap tekanan di kalangan pekerja. Bagi para pengamal sumber manusia, kajian ini menunjukkan bagaimana amalan HRM dapat menimbulkan rasa syukur yang akhirnya membawa kepada pengurangan tahap tekanan kepada pekerja. Dari perspektif pembuat dasar, kajian ini sesuai dirujuk dalam penggubalan undang-undang berkaitan pengurusan tekanan pekerja di peringkat kebangsaan. Perundangan ini akan menggalakkan organisasi untuk mempunyai polisi bagi menangani tekanan di dalam praktis HRM mereka.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGFI	-	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index
AM	-	Assistant Manager
AVE	-	Average Variance Extracted
CEO	-	Chief Executive Officer
CFA	-	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	-	Comparative Fit Index
CHD	-	Coronary Heart Disease
CMIN	-	Minimum Chi-square
CMV	-	Common Method Variance
DF	-	Degrees of Freedom
EFA	-	Exploratory Factor Analysis
GAC	-	Gratitude Adjective Checklist
GFI	-	Goodness of Fit Index
GWA	-	Gallup Workplace Audit
HCM	-	High Commitment Management
HIM	-	High Involvement Management
HPWP	-	High Performance Work Practices
HPWS	-	High Performance Work Systems
HR	-	Human Resources
HRM	-	Human Resource Management
HRM-P	-	HRM Performance Studies
JD-R	-	Job Demands and Resources
KMO	-	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
MCAR	-	Missing Completely at Random
NFI	-	Normed Fit Index
OCB	-	Organization Citizenship Behaviors
OP	-	Organizational Performance
PAF	-	Principal Axis Factoring

PCA	-	Principal Component Analysis
P-E	-	Person-Environment
P-P	-	Probability Plots
PS	-	Perceived Stress
PSS	-	Perceived Stress Scale
RMR	-	Root Mean Square Residual
RMSEA	-	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	-	Structure Equation Modelling
SET	-	Social Exchange Theory
SWB	-	Subjective Well-Being
TLI	-	Tucker Lewis Index
UN	-	United Nations
USA	-	United States of America
VIF	-	Variance Inflated Factor
WB	-	Well-Being
WHO	-	World Health Organization

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study and Motivation for Research

In extant literature, management practices are theorized to impact three categories of employee health and well-being; namely, psychological, physical and social well-being (Belzak *et al.*, 2017; Danna and Griffin, 1999; Edgar *et al.*, 2015a; Grant *et al.*, 2007; Ryan and Deci, 2001; Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Warr, 1990). Conceptualizing employee well-being is a multi-disciplinary area which includes psychology, sociology, anthropology and industrial economics (Kowalski and Loretto, 2017). Recently, increasing number of scholars are calling for conceptualizing stress as a fundamental element of employees' psychological well-being (Cooper and Quick, 2017; Guest, 2017; Imperatori, 2017; Kowalski and Loretto, 2017; Levi, 2017). Stress refers to pressure and demands exerted on a person, which is an unavoidable occurrence in employment situations (Selye, 1956, 1978).

A United Nations (UN) report considers employee stress a “20th century disease”; the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Labor organization (ILO) call it a “worldwide epidemic” (ILOReport, 2016; Tangri, 2003; WHOReport, 2006). Employee stress is linked with metabolic disorders, hypertension, behavioral problems, psychiatric disorders, anxiety, depression, coronary heart disease and many other psychological and physiological illnesses. Employee stress also costs organizations billions of dollars in sick leaves, low productivity and medical costs (Cooper and Cartwright, 2013; Cooper and Quick, 2017; Dawson *et al.*, 2016; Le Fevre *et al.*, 2003; Levi, 2017; Spector, 2017).

Researchers report that the global economic recession has forced organizations to downsize, cut wages and increase employee workload; thus, causing an increase in worker anxiety, depression and suicide on a global scale (Chang *et al.*, 2013; Mucci *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, management of employees' stress related mental and physical issues has become a big challenge in the recession (Kowalski and Loretto, 2017). Since anxiety and stress has been increasing globally among workers, Pakistan is no exception. The Pakistani mobile telecommunication companies (hereafter known as PKTelcos) have the 10th largest customer base in the world (i.e. 160 million) and operate in an extremely high stress inducing industry. Industry volatility due to economic recession, rapid technological changes, mergers and downsizing have a negative impact on employees' psychological well-being (Chmiel *et al.*, 2017; Johannes, 2017; Mucci *et al.*, 2016; Schnall *et al.*, 2018). In the same vein, industry volatility due to economic recession, rapid technological advancements, mergers and downsizing have also made the PKTelcos prone to extremely high instances of employee stress (Baloch, 2017; Ibrahim, 2017; Mansoor *et al.*, 2011; Ramay *et al.*, 2017).

Industry price-wars have a negative impact on employee well-being, as employers demand increased productivity from workers while removing job security (Cooper and Quick, 2017; Michie, 2002; USCongress, 1987). PKTelcos have fallen prey to a cut-throat price competition (call rates as low as one Pakistani rupee per minute or US\$0.0063) (PTAAnnualReport, 2017; Ramay *et al.*, 2017). This intense competition has brought the PKTelco industry to a breaking point and created a work environment where employees suffer increased work demands and stress (Hafeez and Hasnu, 2010; Ramay *et al.*, 2017). Researchers suggest that the health harm caused to employees due to stress has not been considered a priority thus far; however, the time has come to direct academic investigation towards the alleviation and management of stress in occupational settings (Guest, 2017; Imperatori, 2017; Quick and Henderson, 2016; Schnall *et al.*, 2017; Stankevičiūtė and Savanevičienė, 2019). Operating in a high stress environment, PKTelcos present an ideal context to explore how management practices can reduce employee stress (Khan and Imtiaz, 2015; Ramay *et al.*, 2017).

Majority of management and organizational psychology research has risen primarily from north America or western Europe (Budhwar and Debrah, 2013). Scholars are calling for research from the south Asian nations (i.e. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) because it shall add new perspectives and rigor to the theoretical context (Khilji, 2012; Rowley *et al.*, 2017). This study is driven by a motivation to discover how stress can be alleviated and managed in occupational settings in a developing country like Pakistan. While stress is extremely detrimental to employee health and performance, a question arises; who is responsible to manage employee stress in occupational settings (Ivancevich *et al.*, 1985)?

Ivancevich *et al.* (1985) suggested that stress can be as debilitating as physical injury and employers should constitute policies for management of stress. A year ago, Beer *et al.* (1984) introduced a pioneering, multi-stakeholder framework of Human Resource Management (HRM). The multi-stakeholder model is the most influential framework for formulating HRM practices (Gooderham *et al.*, 2019; Paauwe and Boon, 2018a). This framework outlined that HRM practices should be enacted by management with two different objectives a) increase employee commitment and productivity so that firm performance can be improved b) to improve employee well-being and societal well-being (Beer *et al.*, 1984). The multi-stakeholder model formed the basis of the mutual gains HRM model (Peccei *et al.*, 2013). Remaining true to its theoretical foundations, the mutual gains model suggests that HRM practices should be enacted to improve employee performance and also to simultaneously enhance their well-being (Guest, 2017; Kochan and Osterman, 1994; Paauwe, 2009; Van De Voorde *et al.*, 2012; Wood and Ogbonnaya, 2016). The mutual gains framework bestowed HRM practices with the custodianship of employee well-being in an organization. However, extant literature on the relationship between HRM and wellbeing presents a different picture altogether.

This study is motivated by literature reviews spanning 30 years which conclude that HRM research and practice has ignored the pursuit of employees' psychological well-being, and merely focused on improving employee productivity and performance (Beer, 2017; Beer *et al.*, 2015). Researchers suggest that little scholarly work has examined how HRM can improve employees' psychological

well-being (Guest, 2017; Stankevičiūtė and Savanevičienė, 2019). Scholars are increasingly criticizing this solitary fixation with firm performance and calling for studies which explore the relationship between HRM and employees' stress levels (Boxall *et al.*, 2016; Guest, 2017; Kowalski and Loretto, 2017; Mariappanadar, 2016; Stankevičiūtė and Savanevičienė, 2018).

Another justification for the study is based on literature which shows that HRM practices damage employee well-being by increasing their stress, and this is known as “conflicting outcomes perspective” (as opposed to mutual gains) (Peccei *et al.*, 2013; Ramsay *et al.*, 2000). Although there are some studies which link HRM practices with lower incidence of employee stress (Boxall and Macky, 2014; Macky and Boxall, 2008), but there is also evidence which suggests that HRM practices are associated with higher instances of employee stress and strain (Kroon *et al.*, 2009; Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2018; Van De Voorde *et al.*, 2012; Wood and Ogbonnaya, 2016). The conflicting outcome perspective is based on the notion that HRM practices cause employee stress and strain by increasing their job-demands (Kroon *et al.*, 2009; Ogbonnaya, 2019; Ogbonnaya *et al.*, 2017; Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2018; Ramsay *et al.*, 2000). In short, HRM has two contradictory theoretical perspectives vis-à-vis employees' psychological well-being. Such contradictory and inconclusive findings require continuing investigation into the underlying mechanisms which connect HRM practices and employee stress (Boxall *et al.*, 2016; Guest, 2017; Kowalski and Loretto, 2017; Marescaux *et al.*, 2019).

There have been scholarly attempts to explain the conditions under which HRM practices can lead to either mutual gains or conflicting outcomes.; these attempts are based on the “content approach”. The content approach suggests the content of HRM practices which positively enhance employees' psychological well-being is not the same as the content of HRM practices which improve their performance (Boxall and Purcell, 2011; Peccei, 2004). In literature, HRM practices are mostly called high performance work systems (HPWS) (Boon *et al.*, 2019; Boselie *et al.*, 2005; Posthuma *et al.*, 2013; Saridakis *et al.*, 2017; Sheehan, 2014). Scholars suggest that the content of HPWS can be categorized in two distinct theoretical variants; High Commitment HRM practices (or HCM) and High

Involvement HRM practices (or HIM) (Boxall and Macky, 2009, 2014; Guest, 2017; Guthrie, 2001; Wood and De Menezes, 1998). Some researchers suggest that while both HCM and HIM practices are linked with superior employee performance, it is the HIM practices which are theorized to have a positive impact on employees' psychological well-being (Boxall and Macky, 2014; Guest, 2017).

Building on this rationale, although some studies have linked HIM practices with lower perceived stress and depression (Mackie *et al.*, 2001), less anxiety, fatigue and stress (Boxall and Macky, 2014; Macky and Boxall, 2008; Wood and de Menezes, 2011; Wood *et al.*, 2012). However, HIM practices have also been linked with increased employee stress and strain (Ogbonnaya, 2019; Ogbonnaya *et al.*, 2016; Ramsay *et al.*, 2000) and emotional exhaustion (Oppenauer and Van De Voorde, 2018). The evidence of a relationship between HRM (both HIM and HCM) practices and employees' psychological well-being is contradictory and necessitates further research on how HRM practices are connected with employee stress (Guest, 2017; Kowalski and Loretto, 2017; Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2018).

1.1.1 Addressing Theoretical Basis for Conflicting Outcomes

This study suggests a new framework to investigate how HRM practices can result in lower employee stress levels; thus, it is necessary to examine the problems with the current mutual gains model. In the current framework, scholars consider employee commitment or involvement as desirable and positive psychological states, thus a main focus of HCM and HIM variants of HRM practices respectively. Scholars have argued that HRM practices (both HIM and HCM) encourage employee participation and voice, which is the opposite of oppressive, controlling and non-participative practices (Lawler, 1986; Wall and Wood, 2005; Walton, 1985). In theory, oppressive and controlling employment practices deteriorate employee well-being; whereas through encouraging participation and empowerment, HRM practices improve worker's psychological well-being (Beer *et al.*, 1984; Boxall and Macky, 2014; Edgar *et al.*, 2015b; Guest, 2017; Valizade *et al.*, 2016; Yang, 2012). Two

primary theoretical basis have been adopted to explain how participative and empowering HRM practices lead to mutual gains, (i.e., improved employee performance and well-being); these include social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) and unitary view of employment relations (Boselie *et al.*, 2009; Guest, 1987; Peccei *et al.*, 2013; Van De Voorde *et al.*, 2012).

SET claims that in an interpersonal exchange, people (i.e. the beneficiaries) feel obliged to return the favors they receive from other people (i.e. their benefactors) (Blau, 1964). Employment relations become a social exchange when employees see their employers as benefactors, because the latter enact participative and empowering HRM practices (Gould-Williams, 2007; Latorre *et al.*, 2016; Tsui *et al.*, 1997; Vanhala and Ritala, 2016). SET suggests when employees perceive their employers act as benefactors, it invokes positive emotions in them resulting in improved psychological well-being; in turn, such happy employees repay their benefactor (i.e., the employer) with commitment, involvement and increased effort (Edgar *et al.*, 2015b; Guest, 2017; Peccei, 2013 ; Van De Voorde *et al.*, 2012; Whitener, 2001). However, scholars have also argued that social exchanges can be exploitative, and can thus have a deteriorating effect on people's psychological well-being (Fiori and Consedine, 2013; Fung *et al.*, 2009). Since HRM practices are linked with increased job demands and elevated stress levels, this is reflective of a negative and exploitative social exchange (Guest, 2017; Lopes, 2017).

The reason why this social exchange is exploitative and harms employees' psychological well-being may be explained by the unitary view of employment relations (Boselie *et al.*, 2009; Gill, 2017; Guest, 1987; Janssens and Steyaert, 2009). The unitary view states that employer and employee are on the same team, and have the same goal of working tirelessly to improve organization's performance (Nickson, 2007). Having the same goals and objectives means that what is good for the firm is good for the employee (Guest, 2002; Janssens and Steyaert, 2009). Thus, HRM practices which improve employee commitment/involvement to boost organizational performance, are also theorized to automatically improve employees' psychological well-being (Brewster and Mayrhofer, 2009; Goldsmith, 1997; Heery, 2016; Legge, 2005). However, researchers have suggested that worker's psychological well-being

is not ensured by merely improving employee commitment/involvement or organizational performance, as suggested by the unitary view (Guest, 2002; Heery, 2016; Paauwe, 2009). Instead, the unitary view allows management to enact HRM practices that encourage greater commitment/involvement without caring for the simultaneous increase in job demands and employee stress (De Prins *et al.*, 2018; Imperatori, 2017; Kroon *et al.*, 2009; Stankevičiūtė and Savanevičienė, 2018). Scholars are increasingly calling for HRM literature to examine how HRM practices can improve worker's psychological well-being by abandoning the unitary view (Beer *et al.*, 2015; De Prins *et al.*, 2018; Guest, 2017; Stankevičiūtė and Savanevičienė, 2019).

1.2 Presenting a New Framework to Address Employee Stress

Researchers posit that the concerns regarding employee stress can be addressed in a better manner through adopting a pluralistic view of employment relations, which is largely missing from HRM-well-being research (De Prins *et al.*, 2018; Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010; Greenwood and Van Buren, 2017; Guest, 2017; Heery, 2016). The pluralistic view differs from the unitary view in two key aspects. First, a pluralistic view acknowledges that there is a difference between management and employee perceptions of the same HRM practices; thus instead of the content of HRM practices, this view recommends that employee interpretations of such practices need to be examined (Avgar and Owens, 2014a; Boselie *et al.*, 2009; Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010; Geare *et al.*, 2014; Greenwood and Van Buren, 2017).

HRM-well-being research which is based on the content approach has produced contradictory results (Guest, 2017; Kowalski and Loretto, 2017). This shows that contrary to the unitary assumption, HRM practices are not inherently participative and empowering, nor automatically beneficial for employee well-being (De Prins *et al.*, 2018; Heery, 2016). The same so called “empowering HRM practices” may be perceived by employees as exploitative systems designed to increase their job demands (Bélanger and Canada., 2000; Imhof and Andresen, 2018;

Imperatori, 2017; Jensen and van de Voorde, 2016). This employee interpretation of HRM practices as exploitative, ultimately increases levels of stress and strain among them (Kroon *et al.*, 2009; Ogbonnaya, 2019; Ogbonnaya *et al.*, 2017; Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2018; Ramsay *et al.*, 2000). This is why examining employee interpretations of HRM practices (instead of content) reveals a robust relationship between HRM and employees' psychological well-being (Nishii's *et al.*, 2008; Shantz *et al.*, 2016).

Secondly, the pluralistic perspective recognizes that management and employees belong to a diverse group of stakeholders, each with their own interests and objectives (Boselie *et al.*, 2009; Godard, 2004; Greenwood and Van Buren, 2017). Moreover, the unitary HRM literature is focused on achieving management's objectives (i.e., improving employee commitment, involvement or performance) at the expense of employee goals (i.e., improved well-being) (De Prins *et al.*, 2018; Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010; Greenwood and Van Buren, 2017; Guest, 2017; Heery, 2016).

In short, the discussion so far shows that a) employee stress is a major cause for concern and b) HRM practices have either ignored or deteriorated employee well-being. The afore-mentioned discussion has also presented the theoretical basis for the why HRM mutual gains model has not ensured employee well-being. The background thus presents the motivation and provides an opportunity for research that could further the understanding of how HRM practices can be enacted to alleviate employee stress. To this end, this study examines the impact of HRM on employee stress in PKTelcos, because they operate in an extremely high stress work environment. In line with scholarly recommendations, this study presents a new framework to examine how HRM practices can reduce employee stress based on the adoption of both components of the pluralistic view.

1.2.1 Benevolent HRM Attributions

HRM attributions construct allows researchers to examine the relationship between HRM practices and employees' psychological well-being through a pluralistic view (Shantz *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, this study gathers employee interpretations of HRM practices by deploying the HRM attributions construct. Attribution theory postulates that a social interaction can be divided among initiators of behavior (i.e., actors) and interpreters of behavior (i.e., observers) (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967). Similarly, Nishii *et al.* (2008) postulated that the organization (i.e., the actor) initiates a behavior (through enacting HRM practices); whereas employees (i.e., the observers) develop interpretations of management's intent, i.e., "why management has enacted these HRM practices"; these interpretations are known as HRM attributions (Nishii *et al.*, 2008).

The construct of benevolent HRM attributions was developed by Nishii *et al.* (2008), based on the idea of internal or dispositional attributions posited by Heider (1958). Heider (1958) suggested that there are two main types of attributions (or causal explanations) which are formed by observers regarding an actor's behavior; a) External/Situational attributions: While interpreting why the actor has behaved a certain way, observers can interpret that the behavior is due to situational factors which are outside the actor's control. b) Internal/dispositional attributions: Or, an observer can interpret that the behavior has been caused by an actor's internal factors e.g., an actor's internal intent or motivation (Kelley and Michela, 1980). Attribution theory further postulates that only internal attributions have an impact on observer's psychological well-being and behavior whereas external attributions do not (Jones and Nisbett, 1972; Kelley, 1967; Kelley and Michela, 1980).

Similarly, while interpreting why management has enacted certain HRM practices, Nishii *et al.* (2008) demonstrated that employees can make two categories of internal benevolent attributions; i.e., employees perceive HRM practices as benevolent when they interpret that management's motive in carrying out HRM practices is, a) to help them perform at high levels (i.e. performance HRM

attributions) b) to care for them and enhance their well-being (i.e. well-being HRM attributions) (Fehr *et al.*, 2017; Nishii *et al.*, 2008; Shantz *et al.*, 2016). This study uses the model developed by Nishii *et al.* (2008) and examines the impact of two internal and benevolent HRM attributions (performance and well-being) on employee stress. This is done for two reasons; First, in line with attribution theory, scholars suggest that internal HRM attributions have an impact on employees' psychological well-being, while external attributions do not (Koys, 1988, 1991; Nishii *et al.*, 2008). Secondly, only benevolent internal attributions of HRM practices are theorized to result in positive employee well-being outcomes, e.g. reducing employee stress, emotional exhaustion and increasing satisfaction (Fehr's *et al.*, 2017; Nishii *et al.*, 2008; Shantz *et al.*, 2016).

1.2.2 Gratitude

The second component of the pluralistic perspective negates the unitary view that improving employee commitment or involvement is inherently beneficial for employee well-being (Boselie *et al.*, 2009; Godard, 2004; Greenwood and Van Buren, 2017). Therefore, instead of focusing on employee commitment or involvement, this study presents a new framework which examines the impact of HRM practices on employee gratitude. Gratitude is chosen because it can be positively invoked by benevolent HRM attributions (Fehr's *et al.*, 2017), and such gratitude can reduce perceived stress levels of employees (Killen and Macaskill, 2015; Lee *et al.*, 2018).

Gratitude is referred to as an emotion which arises in an interpersonal exchange when a receiving party (i.e. the beneficiary) recognizes receiving a valuable benefit from the other party (i.e. the benefactor) (Emmons and McCullough, 2004; Emmons and Stern, 2013; Fournier and Sheehan, 2015; McCullough *et al.*, 2002). When beneficiaries perceive that their benefactor has acted from a benevolent intention and motivation, this internal benevolent attribution gives rise to gratitude in them (Heider, 1958; Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Smith, 1959, 1976; Smith *et al.*,

1759, 1976; Stewart, 2014; Weiner, 1985, 2014). Similarly, when employees perceive that an organization enacts HRM practices from a benevolent intent, it can also foster an emotion of gratitude among them (Fehr *et al.*, 2017). Researchers have called for examining how benevolent HRM attributions can give rise to gratitude in occupational settings as such studies are non-existent (Di Fabio *et al.*, 2017b; Fehr *et al.*, 2017).

1.2.3 Perceived Stress

Benevolent HRM attributions are theorized to positively impact employees' various psychological well-being outcomes, e.g., invoking gratitude, reducing emotional exhaustion, job strain and improve satisfaction (Fehr's *et al.*, 2017; Nishii *et al.*, 2008; Shantz *et al.*, 2016). This study attempts to examine how benevolent HRM attributions can lead to gratitude, and how such gratitude can ultimately lower employees' perceived stress (PS) levels. PS construct postulates that stress becomes harmful when people subjectively perceive that an event is stressful and that they do not have enough resources to cope with the situation (Hamama-Raz *et al.*, 2007; Lazarus, 1966, 1974; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Zarbova and Karabeliova, 2018).

The construct of perceived stress is deployed in the study because of two reasons a) PS is evaluated by an individual subjectively b) it is a global assessment of stress (Lazarus, 2006). Global well-being constructs represent people's subjective evaluations and overall assessment of stress in their life, instead of work-based (or domain-specific) well-being constructs e.g., job-stress (Diener, 1984; Diener *et al.*, 2016; Warr, 1990; Wright and Cropanzano, 2000). Scholars recommend that global measures of stress should be deployed in employment situations because they are more comprehensive assessments of overall psychological well-being of employees (Bliese *et al.*, 2017; Imhof and Andresen, 2018; Imperatori, 2017; Kröll *et al.*, 2017). In line with these scholarly recommendations, this study employs perceived stress to determine employees' overall stress levels, instead of isolated job-based stress assessments.

1.3 Problem Statement

Stress causes employees to experience fear, anxiety, grief and dread, which ultimately deteriorate their well-being (Dollard *et al.*, 2003; Motowidlo *et al.*, 1986; Peter, 2001; Selye, 2014). The stress-related health harm caused to employees also costs organizations billions of dollars in absenteeism, medical expenses and lost productivity (Cooper and Quick, 2017; Dawson *et al.*, 2016; Le Fevre *et al.*, 2003; Levi, 2017; Spector, 2017). In short, stress is known to cause various psychological and physical health problems among employees and thus requires urgent scholarly attention (Cooper and Cartwright, 1994; Cooper and Marshall, 1976; Guest, 2017; Quick and Henderson, 2016).

The Pakistani telecom industry is a high stress environment where PKTelcos focus on offering the lowest price services to its customers, thus the industry has been brought to the brink of a breaking point (Hafeez and Hasnu, 2010; Ramay *et al.*, 2017). Naseem (2018) suggests that PKTelco employees are under high levels of stress because of the turbulent and consistent changes in the industry, high customer expectations and rapid technological advancements. A study aimed at exploring the stress levels in various sectors of Pakistan showed that the mean stress levels among the PKTelco employees were higher than banking sector, health sector, insurance companies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and software companies (Khan and Imtiaz, 2015).

Mansoor *et al.* (2011) observed that intense competition in the telecommunication sector was making PKTelcos exert increased pressures on their employees to perform, which caused increased job-demands and elevated levels of stress among their employees. Other studies have also demonstrated that employees in PKTelcos experience uncertain job prospects and excessive work demands, which lead to much higher incidence of employee stress in PKTelcos (Ahmad *et al.*, 2012; Dar *et al.*, 2016; Malik *et al.*, 2017). Considering the negative fall-out of stress on health and well-being, research is required to examine how HRM practices can

alleviate and manage PKTelco employee stress levels (Mansoor *et al.*, 2011; Naseem, 2018; Ramay *et al.*, 2017).

HRM practices are charged with the responsibility to improve employee well-being and reduce their stress levels as per the mutual gains model (Beer *et al.*, 2015; Beer *et al.*, 1984; Peccei *et al.*, 2013). Contrary to the assertions of HRM mutual gains model, HRM research has historically demonstrated a singular focus on improving employee commitment and performance (Beer, 2017; Beer *et al.*, 2015; Guest, 2017). Scholars have reported that the same international research trend is repeated in Pakistan (Ali and Brandl, 2017). More specifically, the overwhelming majority of HRM research conducted in PKTelcos also examines the link between HRM and performance, while ignoring employee stress issues (Gulzar *et al.*, 2014; Naseem, 2018).

Moreover, when it comes to employees' psychological well-being, literature also demonstrates that HRM practices result in conflicting outcomes as well as mutual gains (Peccei *et al.*, 2013; Ramsay *et al.*, 2000). Although some studies connect HRM practices with lower employee stress (Boxall and Macky, 2014; Macky and Boxall, 2008); other researchers have supported the conflicting outcomes view and shown that HRM practices improve firm performance at the expense of increasing employee stress (Kroon *et al.*, 2009; Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2018; Van De Voorde *et al.*, 2012; Wood and Ogbonnaya, 2016). Although very little HRM-well-being research has been conducted in Pakistani context, they also demonstrate contradictory findings. For instance, HRM practices have been shown to increase employee anxiety and burnout (Gulzar *et al.*, 2014) or contradictorily improve employee satisfaction (Jawaad *et al.*, 2019).

The scholarly attempts to resolve the difference between the mutual gains and conflicting outcomes perspective has so far been inconclusive (Guest, 2017; Kowalski and Loretto, 2017; Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2018). Most scholarly effort has been focused into the content approach, as some evidence demonstrates that high involvement HRM (HIM) outperforms high commitment HRM (HCM) in

lowering employee stress, anxiety, fatigue and improving work-life balance (Boxall and Macky, 2014; Mackie *et al.*, 2001; Macky and Boxall, 2008; Wood and de Menezes, 2011; Wood *et al.*, 2012). This theoretical stance is not entirely accurate as other studies have shown that HIM practices are linked with increased work demands, enhanced stress, fatigue and work-life imbalance (Ogbonnaya, 2019; Ogbonnaya *et al.*, 2017; Ogbonnaya *et al.*, 2016; Oppenauer and Van De Voorde, 2018; Ramsay *et al.*, 2000). Researchers suggest that the content of HRM practices (HCM or HIM) is unclear, contradictory and the content itself is insufficient in explaining the link between HRM, performance or well-being (Boon *et al.*, 2019; Bowen and Ostroff, 2004).

Scholars suggest that the unitary view of employment relations is the reason why HRM has neglected or deteriorated workers' psychological well-being (Francis and Keegan, 2006; Godard, 2004, 2010; Greenwood and Van Buren, 2017). Unitary HRM literature has primarily shown a preference to improve organizational performance while increasing job demands and employee stress in the process (Kroon *et al.*, 2009; Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2018; Van De Voorde *et al.*, 2012; Wood and Ogbonnaya, 2016). This exchange is unequal and exploitative, working in the favor of the more powerful stake-holders (i.e. management/employer) at the expense of employee well-being (De Prins *et al.*, 2018; Greenwood and Van Buren, 2017; Guest, 2017; Jensen and van de Voorde, 2016; Lopes, 2017). Research in Pakistan is also primarily preoccupied with HRM's impact on employee performance while ignoring the increase in employee stress caused by this preoccupation (Ali and Brandl, 2017; Gulzar *et al.*, 2014).

Recently, there is a renewed interest in the relationship between HRM and employee well-being. There is a good business case for organizations to invest in employees' psychological well-being because a happy worker is a productive worker (Nielsen *et al.*, 2017; Zelenski *et al.*, 2008). Scholars are also increasingly calling for HRM practices to alleviate employee stress because it is one of the core ethical and social responsibilities of firms to do so (Abdelmotaleb and Saha, 2019; Bartram *et al.*, 2019; Celma *et al.*, 2018; De Stefano *et al.*, 2018; Diaz-Carrion *et al.*, 2018; Glavas, 2018; Lange, 2016; Mariappanadar, 2016; Paauwe and Boon, 2018b;

Stankevičiūtė and Savanevičienė, 2019). Going into the future, researchers cannot ignore the harm HRM practices continue to inflict by intensifying employee stress (Guest, 2017). In the Pakistani context, scholars suggest that studies are required which examine the relationship between HRM practices and employees' psychological well-being, especially with regards to HRM's impact on employee stress (Gulzar *et al.*, 2014; Noor-ul-Ain and Akhtar, 2018).

To answer this call, this study presents a new theoretical model based on the pluralistic view of employment relations, which can better serve employees' psychological well-being needs (De Prins *et al.*, 2018; Greenwood and Van Buren, 2017; Guest, 2002, 2017; Van Buren *et al.*, 2011). A pluralistic view of employment relations has two components. First component states that HRM needs to gather employee insights and interpretations of HRM practices (Avgar and Owens, 2014b; Boselie *et al.*, 2009; Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010; Geare *et al.*, 2014; Guest, 1999). This is important as the content of HRM itself cannot benefit or harm employees; instead, their subjective interpretation at the employees' end improves their psychological well-being or performance (Latorre *et al.*, 2016; Sanders and Yang, 2015; Shantz's *et al.*, 2016).

To deploy the first component of pluralistic view, this study examines two categories of benevolent internal HRM attributions which have a strong positive influence on employee emotions and well-being; these two attributions include a) performance HRM attributions b) well-being HRM attributions (Nishii *et al.*, 2008; Shantz *et al.*, 2016). Performance and well-being HRM attributions have been shown to reduce job strain and emotional exhaustion experienced by employees (Shantz *et al.*, 2016; Van De Voorde and Beijer, 2015). Hewett *et al.* (2018) has identified the need to further explore the association between benevolent HRM attributions and employees' psychological well-being as only seven empirical studies have employed this construct. To fill this gap, this study examines the impact of benevolent HRM attributions on employee gratitude and perceived stress, as no prior study has done so.

The second component of a pluralistic perspective recognizes that management and employees may have different interests and objectives (De Prins *et al.*, 2018; Geare *et al.*, 2009; Shantz *et al.*, 2016). Thus, this view opposes the unitary assumption that HRM's focus on achieving management's objectives (i.e., improving employee commitment, involvement or performance) automatically serves employee objectives (i.e., improving their psychological well-being) (Francis and Keegan, 2006; Godard, 2010, 2014; Greenwood and Van Buren, 2017; Guest, 2017; Heery, 2016). Therefore, instead of commitment/involvement, this study presents "gratitude" as a variable that arises in employees when they perceive that their management has enacted benevolent HRM practices.

Many studies have shown that gratitude is an internal-benevolent-attribution dependent emotion; which means that gratitude arises in the beneficiary from attributing benevolence to the intentions and motivations of a benefactor (Algoe *et al.*, 2008; Algoe *et al.*, 2016; McCullough *et al.*, 2001; Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Tsang, 2006; Weiner, 2014). Employees have been shown to make two internal-benevolent-attributions while judging the intentions of their management for enacting HRM practices; these include a) performance HRM attributions b) well-being HRM attributions (Nishii *et al.*, 2008; Shantz *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, researchers suggest that both internal benevolent attributions of HRM practices may also invoke gratitude among employees, but this relationship has not been empirically examined (Di Fabio *et al.*, 2017b; Fehr *et al.*, 2017).

In line with the theory of benevolence and gratitude, this study examines the impact of internal benevolent HRM attributions (performance and well-being) on invoking gratitude among employees. Only a handful of studies have examined gratitude in organizational contexts (Grant and Gino, 2010; Grant and Wrzesniewski, 2010; Jackowska *et al.*, 2016; Kaplan *et al.*, 2014; Waters, 2012). Scholars are urged to examine how employee gratitude arises in organizations as it can have a positive impact on employee performance and well-being (Cortini *et al.*, 2019).

In order to examine the impact of benevolent HRM attributions and gratitude on employees' psychological well-being, this study deploys the construct of perceived stress. This is because many researchers increasingly recommend perceived and global construct of stress in work settings, instead of job-specific constructs of employees' psychological well-being (Bliese *et al.*, 2017; Diener *et al.*, 2016; Kröll *et al.*, 2017; Kuykendall and Tay, 2015). This is because overall perceived stress can be extremely damaging to employee health as it is linked with fast aging, compromised immune functions, greater susceptibility to diseases, elevated cortisol, poorer health practices, sleep problems, coronary heart disease, addiction behaviors and increased mortality (Bonow *et al.*, 2011; Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Cohen and Janicki-Deverts, 2012; Redmond *et al.*, 2013). Research examining employee stress in PKTelcos have also primarily employed job-specific measures of employees' psychological well-being e.g., job stress or occupational stress (Ahmad *et al.*, 2012; Dar *et al.*, 2016; Khan and Imtiaz, 2015; Malik *et al.*, 2017; Mansoor *et al.*, 2011). Naseem (2018) recommended that global and perceived measures of employees' psychological well-being should also be deployed in HRM research in the Pakistani context.

This study posits that employee gratitude can reduce their perceived stress levels. McCullough *et al.* (2001) suggest that people who are grateful because of the benevolence of a benefactor experience less stress and improved well-being. Empirical research supports this assertion as grateful people have been shown to report lower stress, enhanced optimism, better sleep, healthier biological markers, better cardiac function, personal development and social progress (Bruton, 2003; Emmons and McCullough, 2003; Emmons and Stern, 2013; Fredrickson, 2004; Jackowska *et al.*, 2016; McConnell, 2013; Wood *et al.*, 2010). In particular, gratitude has been shown to reduce perceived stress levels among people (Chen, 2013; Killen and Macaskill, 2015; Lee *et al.*, 2018; O'Connell and Killeen-Byrt, 2018). Therefore, this study examines the effect of benevolent HRM attributions on gratitude and the influence of such gratitude on lowering employees' perceived stress.

Researchers recommend developing an understanding of the theoretical reasons and mediating variables underlying the relationship between HRM practices

and employees' psychological well-being (Beer, 2017; Beer *et al.*, 2015; Boxall *et al.*, 2016; Guest, 2002, 2017). Mediator variables act as theoretical bridges to explain why HRM practices are connected with specific employee performance and well-being outcomes (Boxall *et al.*, 2016). The previous evidence of the relationship between HRM perceptions and employees' stress and anxiety has been inconsistent (Boxall and Macky, 2014; Mackie *et al.*, 2001; Macky and Boxall, 2008; Ogbonnaya, 2019; Oppenauer and Van De Voorde, 2018; Ramsay *et al.*, 2000; Valizade *et al.*, 2016; Wood and de Menezes, 2011). On this basis, researchers have suggested that the influence of perceived HRM practices on employee stress is not direct, but indirect through attitudinal and affective constructs (Guest, 2002; Kroon *et al.*, 2009; Ogbonnaya, 2019; Ogbonnaya and Messersmith, 2018; Ramsay *et al.*, 2000).

Hewett *et al.* (2018) noted that there were only three studies which empirically tested the role of mediators between benevolent HRM attributions and employees' psychological well-being. For instance Shantz *et al.* (2016) showed that job involvement mediates the relationship between HRM performance attributions and employees' emotional exhaustion, while work overload mediated the relationship between HRM cost attributions and emotional exhaustion. HR performance attributions and well-being attributions were shown to mediate relationships between HRM practices, employee performance and job strain (Van De Voorde and Beijer, 2015). Chen and Wang (2014) tested the role of perceived organizational support (POS) between HRM attributions, turnover intentions and task performance. This dearth of literature necessitates studies which examine mediating relationships between HRM attributions and employees' psychological well-being outcomes (Hewett *et al.*, 2018).

To fill this gap, this study examines the mediating impact of gratitude between benevolent HRM attributions and the perceived stress of employees. This is so because benevolent HRM attributions can reduce perceived stress (Shantz *et al.*, 2016; Van De Voorde and Beijer, 2015) and invoke employee gratitude (Di Fabio *et al.*, 2017b; Fehr's *et al.*, 2017); in turn, gratitude has also been shown to lower perceived stress levels among people (Chen, 2013; Killen and Macaskill, 2015; Lee

et al., 2018; O'Connell and Killeen-Byrt, 2018). This is representative of a probable mediating influence of gratitude between benevolent HRM attributions and employees' lowered perceived stress levels. Empirical examination of gratitude in occupational settings is very scarce (Fehr *et al.*, 2017), even fewer studies examine the mediating influence of gratitude in organizations. One study by Farh *et al.* (2006) showed that employee gratitude mediated the relationship between benevolent leadership practices and employee satisfaction as well as employee commitment.

Gratitude's mediating effect can be explained by SET because a social exchange can be initiated and enacted out of gratitude (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). In conclusion, gratitude has also been shown to engender a social exchange which a) improves the beneficiary's psychological well-being in response to the benevolence of a benefactor (Algoe and Haidt, 2009; Bartlett *et al.*, 2012; Emmons and McCullough, 2004; Fredrickson, 2004; Schaumberg and Flynn, 2009); b) gratitude also makes grateful people reciprocate with behaviors to benefit their benefactor, hence completing the social exchange (Algoe and Haidt, 2009; Bruton, 2003; Ma *et al.*, 2017; McCullough *et al.*, 2001; Rusk *et al.*, 2016). Gratitude builds and reinforces social relationships between the benefactor and beneficiary (Algoe *et al.*, 2008; Gouldner, 1960), and therefore can play a mediating role between perceived benevolence of a management practices and psychological well-being outcomes (Farh *et al.*, 2006).

Based on the previous discussion, this study aims to examine a theoretical model to explore the direct and indirect relationships between benevolent HRM attributions, gratitude and perceived stress. In particular, the study focuses on (1) the influence of benevolent HRM attributions on perceived stress levels and gratitude of PKTelco employees (2) the effect of gratitude as a mediator between benevolent HRM attributions and perceived stress.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What is the relationship between benevolent HRM attributions (performance and well-being attributions) and perceived stress?
- ii. What is the relationship between benevolent HRM attributions and gratitude?
- iii. What is the relationship between gratitude and perceived stress?
- iv. Does gratitude mediate the relationship between benevolent HRM attributions and perceived stress?

1.5 Research Objectives

- i. Examine the relationship between benevolent HRM attributions (performance and well-being attributions) and perceived stress.
- ii. Examine the relationship between benevolent HRM attributions and gratitude.
- iii. Examine the relationship between gratitude and perceived stress.
- iv. Investigate the mediating effect of gratitude on the relationship between benevolent HRM attributions and perceived stress.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study adds to the current body of knowledge and attempts to bridge numerous contextual, theoretical and practical gaps which were identified in HRM and organizational psychology literature. Scholars are increasingly calling to examine how HRM practices help alleviate employee stress and enhance their well-being (Guest, 2017; Stankevičiūtė and Savanevičienė, 2018). In terms of theoretical contribution to knowledge this study introduces a new HRM framework to address employee stress. This model fills a theoretical gap by examining the impact of benevolent HRM attributions on lowering employees' perceived stress. The model

also introduces “gratitude” as the enabler of a mutually rewarding social exchange between the employer and employee. Scholarly research on gratitude in work settings is almost non-existent but organizations can greatly benefit from studies on employee gratitude (Di Fabio *et al.*, 2017b; Fehr *et al.*, 2017). Thus, this study examines the impact of benevolent attributions of HRM practices on invoking employee gratitude, and also examines the mediating influence of gratitude between benevolent HRM attributions and employees’ perceived stress levels.

In terms of the contribution to management practitioners, the study of gratitude can open new vistas of managing employees for higher performance while simultaneously reducing the negative impact of employee stress. Extant empirical literature shows that gratitude can be invoked, cultivated and nurtured among people through simple exercises and activities (Algoe and Haidt, 2009; Algoe *et al.*, 2008; Algoe *et al.*, 2016; Ames *et al.*, 2004; Bartlett *et al.*, 2012; Ma *et al.*, 2017; MacKenzie *et al.*, 2014; Tsang, 2006; Wood *et al.*, 2010). Through constituting policies and internal communication strategies, PKTelcos can create a perception of care and benevolence in their HRM practices. Gratitude can be embedded in organizational policies and practices and can also be invoked and cultivated in employees through training interventions (Di Fabio *et al.*, 2017a). On one hand, employee gratitude can result in lower stress and improved well-being and on the other hand grateful employees can repay their employer with improved performance (Cortini *et al.*, 2019; Di Fabio *et al.*, 2017a; Fehr *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, invoking employee gratitude through a perception of benevolent HRM practices can result in an equitable and mutually rewarding social exchange between employer and employee.

In terms of the contextual contribution to knowledge, this study fills the gap by focusing on PKTelco employee stress and well-being, which requires urgent attention from academics and practitioners. Intense competitive pressures, tough regulations, changing competitive landscape and their negative impact on employee well-being have been a focal point for many studies on Pakistani telecom sector (Ahmad *et al.*, 2012; Dar *et al.*, 2016; Khan and Imtiaz, 2015; Malik *et al.*, 2017; Mansoor *et al.*, 2011; Naseem, 2018; Ramay *et al.*, 2017). Pakistan has a legislative

and regulatory framework on employee rights and well-being but the implementation and enforcement of these rights is very weak (Ahmad, 2019; ITUC, 2018). This study highlights the negative psychological fallout of employee stress in the Pakistani telecom sector for the policy formulators. Also, this study suggests remedial measures that can be taken into account while formulating policies for how stress can be managed in Pakistan.

Another important contextual contribution arises from the fact that this study was conducted in the Pakistani telecom sector, but the findings can be generalized to other countries. HRM research and knowledge from developing countries will contribute to the understanding and enhancement of human resource management application in developed countries (Khilji, 2013; Rowley *et al.*, 2017; Schuler, 2013). Generally, this study highlights the impact of HRM practices on employee stress. Scholars have been increasingly recommending to conduct studies which examine how employee stress can be alleviated (Abdelmotaleb and Saha, 2019; Bartram *et al.*, 2019; Celma *et al.*, 2018; De Stefano *et al.*, 2018; Guest, 2017; Paauwe and Boon, 2018b). This study opens new research avenues in HRM literature for the developed countries, with an HRM-well-being framework built and tested in a developing country.

1.7 Scope of the Study

Currently, there are four companies operating in Pakistan, which for this study are called PKTelco 1, PKTelco 2, PKTelco 3 and PKTelco 4. The reasons for not sharing their real names is that the organizations were assured confidentiality and promised that their data or information will not be shared in a public report. With a cellular phone tele-density of 72.4% and a combined revenue of 467.6 billion Pakistani rupees (3.85 billion USA dollars approximately), telecom remains one of the largest service industries in Pakistan (PTAAnnualReport, 2017).

Table 1.1 Mobile Phone Service Providers in Pakistan

Sr. No	Name of Company	No of Subscribers	No of Employees
1.	Telco 1	51,876,119	4000
2.	Telco 2	39,752,541	2631
3.	Telco 3	27,706,481	1180
4.	Telco 4	18,456,580	1400
Total number of Employees			9211

Source: PTA statistics and PKTelco HRM departments

1.8 Definitions of the Constructs

This study uses 4 main constructs which include benevolent HRM attributions (performance HRM attributions and well-being HRM attributions), gratitude, and perceived stress. The operational definition of these constructs is as follows;

- i. **Benevolent HRM attributions:** Benevolent HRM attributions are divided into a) performance HRM attributions b) well-being HRM attributions. Performance HRM attributions are employee perceptions that management enacts HRM practices to help them perform better (Shantz *et al.*, 2016). Performance HRM attributions are operationalized through a construct developed by Shantz *et al.* (2016); this construct measures if employees' perceive that their organization enacts HRM practices (i.e., training and development, reward systems, selection process, performance appraisal process and employee participation process) to help them maximize their performance. Well-being HRM attributions are employee perceptions that management enacts HRM practices to promote their well-being (Nishii *et al.*, 2008). Well-being HRM attributions are operationalized through a construct developed by Nishii *et al.* (2008); this construct measures if employees' perceive that their organization enacts HRM practices (i.e., training and development, reward systems, selection process, performance appraisal process and employee participation process) to help promote their well-being.

- ii. **Gratitude:** This is defined as an emotion of thankfulness arising in the beneficiary in response to the benevolent actions of a benefactor (McCullough *et al.*, 2001). Gratitude was measured with the adoption of a 3 item checklist called Gratitude Adjective Checklist or GAC, developed by McCullough *et al.* (2002). The instrument operationalizes gratitude as the sum of three emotions; being grateful, thankful and appreciative
- iii. **Perceived Stress (PS):** PS is a measure of the extent to which events in one's life are subjectively perceived as stressful, in relation to the degree of resources one possesses to cope with such events (Cohen *et al.*, 1983; Lazarus, 2006). PS is operationalized through the deployment of Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen *et al.*, 1983; Cohen and Williamson, 1988).

1.9 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 has discussed the background of the study, problem statement, research questions and research objectives, significance of the study, scope of the study and operational definitions of the constructs used in the research. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of the study. This includes a detailed review of employee stress, perceived stress (PS), the mutual gains HRM model, HRM-performance literature, benevolent HRM attributions, gratitude, and perceived stress. The chapter also includes the theories which underpin the mutual gains HRM model and hypotheses based on the underpinning theories.

Chapter 3 includes the details regarding the research methodology including the research philosophy, ontology and epistemology. The chapter also contains information on data-collection methodology and the statistical techniques and tools deployed in conducting analysis and the testing of study hypothesis. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study and analyses of the data. The study employed statistical package for social sciences (SPSS 20) for data processing and AMOS 22 for (SEM) Structural Equation Modelling. First, data filtration was presented followed by assumptions of univariate and multi-variate normality, which includes

linearity, homoscedasticity and detection of outliers. Then, findings regarding demographics and common method bias were presented. Following this, the study presents SEM for the measurement model accompanied by the validation tests. Finally, structural model for this study was tested and the findings were summarized.

Chapter 5 includes a discussion, conclusions and recommendations of the study. First, the chapter presents a research overview and a summary of the research methods. Following this, the chapter presents the findings of the study based on every research question to accomplish the study objectives. Then, the chapter elaborates the theoretical, practitioner and policy implications of the study. Next, the limitations of the study are discussed followed by the future directions and recommendations. In the end, conclusion of the study is provided.

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