

Humanistic HRM and Perceived HR Outcomes: Evidence from South Korea

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of the humanistic human resources management (HHRM) on the perceived human resources outcome. Despite of debate on humanistic management, the concept of humanistic HRM still remain open. The HHRM can be defined as a subsystem of the humanistic management orienting to the human virtue, in all its forms, to its fullest extent. As I emphasize 'self-fulfillment' among numerous human virtues, the research focus is put on the HR practices supporting self-fulfillment such as competency-building and participation. The humanistic HRM has unique nature distinguished from the prevailing strategic HRM(SHRM). Although both of them take commonly a people-first approach, the humanistic HRM oriented human itself differs from the strategic HRM focusing on competent talent with business goal orientation. And thus the HHRM put more emphasis on employee involvement and participation developing HR tools, while the SHRM do on building vocational competency.

In the view of the HHRM, I empirically examine the linkage between the humanistic HR practices and the perceived HR outcomes. The HR outcomes, measured by employers' perception, involve the increase in vocational competency, labor productivity, work morale and employee retention. The empirical evidence shows that the humanistic HRM is positively associated with the HR outcomes. In particular, the participatory arrangement- e.g. MBO, TQM, EI(employee involvement) programs, suggestion box, etc.-has stronger impact on increase in the HR outcomes than the competency building support such as training and development program. It infers that the modern management is called for combining the humanistic approach in the view of business

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ethics to the strategic one both for employee satisfaction and for the success of business.

Key Words : Humanistic Management, Humanistic HRM, Strategic HRM, Self-fulfillment, Human Virtue, Participation

I . Introduction

As international attention has been paid to business ethics especially since the insolvency of Enron in the United States, research agenda in the field of human resource management have been shifted from the strategic HRM (SHRM) to the humanistic one. For a long time there has been growing body of literature on the SHRM and business organizations developed a goal-oriented management. In the view of the SHRM employees are considered as human resources to achieve the success of business and the management has continued to invest lots of resource to building the employees' competency. Recently, as a humanistic management becomes a real challenge for achieving a high ethical quality in management (Melé 2003), many scholars have pay more attention to the humanistic HRM (HHRM). The HHRM is distinguished from the SHRM which put an emphasis on goal-oriented management of human resources. Instead, the humanistic HRM takes a human-oriented approach which put a top priority on human itself rather than business goals. It is on the premise that the human growth of employee ensures a higher quality product and service through collaboration crucial for the sustainable success of business.

Regarding the HHRM there are two issues; one is a conceptual issue and the other is empirical one. Despite of intensive debate on humanistic management (e.g. Melé 2003) there is no conceptual consideration of what the humanistic HRM is. The HHRM can be defined as a human resource management system which is oriented to the development of human virtue at the workplaces. The HHRM is not a complete novel construct. Rather, it is a modified and transformed system of the SHRM in the ethics perspectives. It, however, differ from the SSHM in term of orientation. While SHRM is a goal-oriented system in which the individual employee is positioned as a powerful means for

organizational performance, the HHRM is a human-oriented one taking into account employees as a human being, an object of the management itself. As what the HHRM is still remains open, we need to conceptually clarify the definition of the HHRM.

In addition, at issue is how much the human-oriented HRM contributes to the organizational effectiveness. As the humanistic approach increasingly get important in the current business environment, business organizations have created numerous devices and arrangement and invested lots of resources for their human resources. Intensive investment to the system of HRM tends to force them to evaluate its effectiveness. In this current study, I empirically investigate the linkage between the HHRM and organizational outcomes. In reality, even if there is a growing body of work on humanistic management, comprehensive empirical research is little. We can find a few empirical works have been done, but they showed conflicting evidences to the association between the humanistic management and the organizational performance. While Walton(2001) and Horvath(1995) provided that the humanistic management is positively associated with business performance, the recent work done by Makni et al.(2008) presented a negative link between environmental corporate social practices and financial outcomes. More important is that the prior literature is limited to individual practices such as environmental-friendly business practices. In order to understand the natures of the humanistic management in a holistic manner, we need to take a system approach. The system approach presumes that the varied individual practices are interrelated to produce the synergy effect on organizational outcomes (MacDuffie 1995: Huselid 1995: Delery and Doty 1996).

To this end, I first discuss the concept of the HHRM as a subset of the humanistic management. Second, allowing for the components of the HHRM I will create a unitary index to present the HHRM system. Third, I search for useful insights to understand the empirical aspects of the HHRM, which will be a good ground for future research of humanistic management.

1. Humanistic Management and Humanistic HRM

The humanistic HRM is a subset of the humanistic management, so we need to first discuss what the humanistic management is. In his comprehensive review of humanism,

Melé(2003) presents that the humanistic management is a business management oriented to “the development of human virtue, in all its forms, to its fullest extent (Melé 2003: 79).” The term of human virtues is ambiguous, however. In virtue ethics, human virtues can be identified as desirable characteristics which the moral people embody. Fowers(2008) suggests that human virtues are the enduring personal qualities necessary for pursuing particular goods. Meanwhile, a teleological perspective put an emphasis on the purpose (telos) of human life, and thus in this viewpoint the human virtues become desirable personal qualities to make one’s life meaningful. In the vein of the teleological perspective, Aristotle’s *Eudaimonia* is of use in understanding the substantial aspects of human virtues (Haybron 2003: Dierksmeier and Pirson 2009). *Eudaimonia* has the multi-aspects close to human flourishing in the context of virtue ethics (Haybron 2003). As it means an objective state characterizing the well-lived life or happiness, human flourishing can be a proper goal of human life. In Haybron’s term (2003), human flourishing incorporates the ideal of self-fulfillment. Thus, the self-fulfillment is a key element composing the humanistic management in the current business.

As the humanistic HRM is a sub-system of the humanistic management, it is to help employees satisfying their desires for self-fulfillment. In Maslow’s term(1970), self-fulfillment is a tendency for her/him to become actualized in what s/he is potentially. Individuals have desires for self-actualization through which they can realize their values as an important asset at the workplace. In order for the employees to satisfy their desire for self-actualization, they need both competency and opportunity to use their capacity with sustainable employment at the workplace.

Job security is a first-order condition for employees’ self-fulfillment. The current business environment of rapid change and intensified competition has forced employers to be flexible in order to cope with the fluctuating market condition. As the practices for labor market flexibility such as layoff becomes popular tools for the business companies, their employees face insecurity in employment conditions (Pfeffer 1994: Arthur 1994). When the employees feel uncertainty in their jobs, they cannot satisfy their desires for self-fulfillment. And thus the humanistic HRM should serve the sustainable condition of secure employment for their employees.

The HRM can be humanistic if it provides the employees with opportunities to

improve their vocational capabilities and to participate in the process of decision-making. In this sense, the humanistic HRM consists of numerous practices oriented for supporting employees' self-fulfillment. It has a main goal to make their employees satisfy their needs for human flourishing at the workplace. In order for the humanistic practices in HRM to be effective, they should have two-fold orientations: one is for the competency of employees and the other for participation of them in the process of decision-making. Employees have desires for building the competitive advantages both for commanding their works/tasks and for having self-esteem based on their quality performance. Thus the humanistic HRM should involve intensive programs for training and education. As the knowledge-based society proceeds, employees have growing needs for participation in the process of decision-making. As knowledge the employee has at the workplace plays a key role in creating value, participation gets more important in the chain of value creation. It is mainly because knowledge can be transformed to practical value only when the employee gets an opportunity to put their knowledge to decision-making.

And thus, the humanistic HRM consists of practices both for training and education and for promoting participation. Training and education are key tools for human resource development in which employees might obtain competency needed to satisfy their self-fulfillment. Self-fulfillment is conceptually 'social', which individuals want to do a role with social meaning. As Bernard(1968) states, business organizations are a social network for cooperation. Business firms as a social network could work in an effective way through collaborating individual members who desire to practically contribute to the organizational success (Melé 2003). The training and development programs sit at the core of the humanistic HRM as they provide the employees with competency which is a fundamental ground for their contribution to their organization.

Participation has growing importance for employees' self-fulfillment in the post-Fordism era. In the knowledge-based economy business firms depend on individuals' creative originality in successfully performing their businesses. Employees as human resources are premised to be creative enough to develop a new idea applicable to the production. In order for the creativity to function as an effective path to enhanced productivity, employees should be allowed to participate in the process of the decision-making. As well, they can be more creative when they are given self-governance during the work,

Modern management has developed lots of participation schemes for their members in the whole fields of management. As Ghosal and Barlett(1995) suggest, the participation-oriented approach rests on the premise that the organizational task is to create an environment enabling the employees to collaborate in an appropriate manner.

In the same vein, the employee involvement (EI) program is a key arrangement for the employees to participate in the decision-making process. The modern management has developed the employee involvement program including suggestion box, TQM, and QC. The suggestion box has become a powerful engine in which employees can participate with their creative ideas for all the factors influencing productivity and innovation. It premises that the creative ideas can be derived not only from members of above average intelligence, but also from those of average or below average intelligence (Marx 1995). The suggestion box offers employees the opportunity to contribute the successful business which can be a ground for the employees to feel the self-fulfillment. Now, few deny that the potential value of their employees' ideas is critical for the improvements in their technologies and productions, as idea power is the most tremendous human force in the world (Marx 1995). Both TQM and QCC are also a participatory arrangement that most of modern management adopt. Japanese companies first introduced them to assist quality-driven management in 1970s. The basis of TQM and QCC is to reduce the errors produced during the manufacturing or service process through involving the employees in the problem-solving process concerning productivity and people (Gupta and Eriksson 2004). Through the efforts of employees, suggestions are provided on how to solve the problems and increase productivity of quality goods and services (Cummings 2005).

A participation-oriented approach is also found in the area of feedback. Many business organizations introduce a participatory feedback system where the employees themselves involve in the process to evaluate their own performance. MBO, BSC, and 360-degree feedback devices are exemplary. MBO(Management by Objectives), conceptualized by Peter Drucker, is a process whereby the superior and subordinate members in a firm jointly identify its common goals and define each individual's major areas of responsibility in terms of the results expected of him(Greenwood 1981:225). BSC (Balanced Scorecard) has developed as a strategic performance management tool which

presents a mixture of financial and non-financial measures in businesses. Important is that the non-financial measure involves learning and growth of employees. In recent year, feedback mechanisms have also developed participation of employees as a partner in business organizations. The traditional feedback system takes one-way appraisal in which the superior evaluate the performance of the subordinate. The 360-degree feedback allows the subordinates to participate in assessing their own performance. The core characteristics of the 360-degree is that the assessments is used both for appraisal and for development. The key to those three participatory feedback mechanisms is that the subordinates play a major role in setting their own objectives and assessing their performance.

II. Measures

1. Perceived HR Outcomes

I measured productivity as the perceived HR outcomes of the employers, which involve vocational competency, labor productivity, work morale, and desire to stay with the current employer (retention). Whereas recent strategic HRM researchers have frequently measured HR outcomes as turnover (e.g. Huselid 1995), turnover has some weakness. It is partly because using the turnover as a measure for the HR outcome is limited to the selective sector with excess demand for global talents. Rather, I considered the multiple factors representing the HR outcome which are meaningful to many employers. In addition, the perceived HR outcome has strength to measure how much the employers satisfied with their investment to their human resources. It is more useful to measure the increase in productivity than the financial performance index which depends on a lot of elements such as economic conditions, market situation, competitors, and business strategies.

I use the HCCP (Human Capital Corporate Panel) surveyed by the Korean Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET). The HCCP involves lots of useful survey to understand the various human resource practices the Korean companied

introduced. The HCCP asked questions each factors related to HR outcome, which enable us to measure the multiple aspects of HR outcome. <Table 1> shows the survey questionnaire of the HCCP for perceived HR outcomes.

<Table 1> Survey for Perceived HR Outcomes of Employers

<i>Survey Questions on Employers' perception of HR outcomes (four-point scale : "1=not improved", "4=crucial")</i>	
Vocational Competency	How much does the employees' vocational competency improve due to the human resource practices?
Labor Productivity	Which to the extent does the HR management contribute to the increase in the employee's labor productivity?
Work Morale	How much does the HR management positively effect on employees' work morale?
Retention	How effective is the HR management for employee retention?

2. Humanistic HR practices and HHRM System

I focus on four individual HR practices as key components of the Humanistic HRM system. They involve job security, training and development, feedback scheme and employee involvement program. I used the layoff rate in 2005 and 2006 to measure job insecurity which needs us to reverse interpretation in the analysis. The respondents reported the number of employee laid off during 2005 and 2006. I calculated the layoff rate over the two year as 2005 layoffs plus 2006 layoffs divided by total employees in 2004. In order to create the variable of training and development I used the questionnaire of "how much is your training budget per employees in 2006." I measured the intensiveness of training as a standardized score of the training budget. Following Way (2002)'s approach, the score is created by the amount of budget per employee divided by the maximum score in the sample (maximum score = 155.2 U.S Dollar).

'Feedback' consists of three different evaluation devices such as BSC, MBO, and 360-degree feedback. Each of five devices is dummy variable with 0 or 1, and I summed up the each standardized score and divided it by 3 to create the variable with maximum score of 1. In the same way, 'employee involvement' is also created as a variable with summing up standardized scores of four programs - i.e. suggestion box, QCC, TQM, and

six sigma - and divided by 4.

The 'HHRM system' is a unitary index that contains a set of theoretically appropriate humanistic HR practices derived from the prior work. I created the HHRM bundle using the above four practices by summing up the standardized scores of each practice. Although Becker and Huselid(1998) and Delery(1998) discuss the strengths and weakness of using an additive approach, it has a positive advantage reflecting the holistic feature of the humanistic HRM in a simple manner.

<Table 2> Definition of the Humanistic HRM and Individual Practices

	<i>Definition</i>
Humanistic HRM	HHRM is an additive index by adding up the standardized number of each four HR practices as follow.
Job Security	The reversed score of average layoff rate in 2005 and 2006
Training & Development	Training budget per employee (Standardized value)
Feedback	Whether or not to provide the feedback scheme: BSC, MBO, and 360-degree Feedback
Employee Involvement	Whether or not to provide the EI programs : Suggestion Box, Quality Control Circle, TQM, 6-Sigma Program

3. Control Variables

Allowing for the other factors associated with the HR outcomes I used numerous controls in this study including industry (comprising 16 industry dummies), workplace size (log of total employees in 2006), union density (percentage of employees with union membership), firm age (number of years operating at current location), total asset (log of the book value of asset) and long-term debt (logged value). It is well-known that industry characteristics are associated with the positive linkage between HR practices and HR outcomes (Datta et al, 2005; Zatzick and Iverson 2006). In the same vein, both workplace size and firm age are controlled because of their influences on employee performance. Union density is one of the key variables especially in Korea where unions have strong influence on employees and business management. In addition, Korean research has shown that clear difference in HR outcomes exist among workplaces with different level of union density.

<Table 3> Descriptive Statistics⁽¹⁾

Variable	Mean	s.d	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. HROutcome	8.54	3.73															
2. Competency	2.48	0.69	.83														
3. Productivity	2.31	0.75	.84	.64													
4. Work Morale	2.52	0.74	.85	.61	.61												
5. Retention	2.17	0.81	.81	.53	.58	.62											
6. HHRM System	3.22	1.58	.39	.35	.33	.35	.31										
7. T&D	0.48	0.99	.41	.40	.32	.37	.28	.65									
8. Feedback	1.03	0.98	.45	.39	.34	.39	.38	.64	.57								
9. Employee Involvement	1.38	1.14	.29	.24	.25	.24	.24	.52	.42	.38							
10. Job Security ⁽²⁾	0.14	0.87	.10	.07	.10	.09	.06	.74	.11	.11	.11						
11. Ln Asset	18.1	1.66	-.001	.001	.001	-.01	.003	.04	.08	.08	.05	-.03					
12. Ln Employee	6.12	1.08	.24	.21	.21	.17	.22	.47	.48	.33	.30	.24	-.04				
13. Ln Debt	18.0	2.11	-.007	-.005	-.005	-.03	.01	.04	.07	.06	.04	-.01	.84	-.03			
14. Age	28.1	17.3	.02	.03	-.04	.03	.05	.02	.03	.07	.11	-.04	-.09	.19	-.09		
15. Industry	8.26	4.2	-.003	.01	.01	-.04	.01	-.08	.000	-.03	-.25	-.03	-.05	.05	-.04	-.43	
16. Union Density	0.22	0.28	.07	.05	.04	.06	.06	.14	.17	.17	.14	.01	.01	.26	.01	.34	-.12

(1) N=397

(2) I created 'job security' variable by reversing the score of average layoff rate in 2005 and in 2006

III. Analysis and Discussion

My analysis reveals that the human-oriented approach is positively associated with HR outcome. <Table 4> reports that the humanistic HR practices and the system as a bundle of the practices has strong impact on the perceived HR outcomes, which means that employers perceived the return on investing their employees in a human-oriented manner. In the regression of individual HR practices, training and development program, participatory feedback system, and employee involvement program have positive linkage with the HR outcomes with statistical significance. It infers that employers' investment in the humanistic HRM system produces the high value of their HR.

<Table 4> Humanistic HRM and Perceived HR Outcome

	Employers' Perceived HR Outcome	
	<u>System Level</u>	<u>Individual Practices</u>
HHRM system	0,654*** (0,225)	-
Job Security	-	0,56 (0,20)
Training & Development	-	1,11** (0,51)
Feedback	-	1,89*** (0,41)
Employee Involvement	-	1,33** (0,58)
N	397	397
R-squared	0,19	0,28

Note : I controlled numerous variables including total asset, debt, the number of employees, union density, workplace age, and 16 industries in this regression.

<Table 5> presents that the impact of the humanistic HRM differs along with the multiple components of HR outcomes. First of all, job security is found not to be associated with the HR outcomes. It is opposed to my hypothesis that job security as employers' people-first philosophy is a first-order condition for employees' self-fulfillment. It may be partly because the employers' philosophy, even working as a guiding

principle, is not directly perceived to their employees. As a result, the effect of the job security approach is embedded in the human-oriented practices without showing direct impact on the perceived HR outcomes.

〈Table 5〉 Humanistic HRM and Satisfaction Factors

	Employers' Satisfaction Factors of HR Outcomes			
	Vocational Competency	Labor Productivity	Work Morale	Retention
Job Security	0.003 (0,049)	0.009 (0,051)	0.029 (0,036)	-0.004 (0,043)
Intensive T&D	0.291*** (0,105)	0.109 (0,125)	0.305*** (0,112)	0.112 (0,121)
Feedback	0.316*** (0,089)	0.276** (0,11)	0.385*** (0,093)	0.45*** (0,101)
EI	0.154 (0,124)	0.38*** (0,138)	0.152 (0,131)	0.331** (0,16)
N	397	397	397	397
R-squared	0.24	0.21	0.22	0.20

Note : ***, ** = p-value < 0.01, < 0.05, respectively.

Interestingly, each humanistic practice is associated with the perceived HR outcome in a different manner. First, both intensive training and development programs and the feedback system have a positive linkage with employees' vocational competency. As shown in 〈Table 5〉, the impact of the feedback system is more than that of the training and development. It infers that employees desire to be involved in the process of setting the goals and missions and the participatory feedback scheme plays major roles in improving their vocational capabilities. Second, employers perceived that labor productivity depends on the participatory arrangement of employee involvement devices and feedback system. To the contrary, intensive investment on training and development of employees is not directly associated with the increase in labor productivity. It shows the difference between the strategic HRM and the humanistic HRM. The training and development program is a key element consisting of the SHRM. As discussed before, the SHRM is a goal-oriented approach based on the resource-based approach (Barney 1991:

Pfeffer 1994). As Pfeffer(1994) argued, intensive vocational training programs are critical to labor productivity through making people a source for the competitive advantage. In my analysis, investment on training and development may contribute to building up the employees' capability. It, however, does not link to the substantive increase in labor productivity. Thus the training and development programs can work as an effective way for successful business when the programs are complemented by the participatory practices. In this sense, the humanistic HRM is more powerful than the SHRM is in term of the HR outcomes.

Third, employers perceived that the training programs and the feedback system have a positive linkage with work morale. Work morale is a critical factor for successful business as the employees working with discretionary power are the powerful resource for the competitive advantages in the business organization (Bailey et al. 2001). For the employees work morale, the feedback system has stronger power than the training and development programs do. Fourth, both the feedback system and the EI program work as a successful device to make employees staying at their current workplaces. As the world economy fluctuates uncertainly these days, employers increasingly concern about retaining the competitive talents. Employee retention is one of the most important engines to the stability and growth of an organization. The success of a business depends on low employee turnover. Retaining existing employees ensures better sales, greater customer satisfaction, and greater coworker satisfaction. It is why the modern HR management invested more resources on the retention strategies. In my analysis both the feedback system and the employee involvement program, the participation-oriented HR practices, is positively associated with employee retention. Training employees have, however, little impacts on retaining them. It is partly because the well-trained employees are more likely to move for better job opportunities. It does not mean that building up the employees' vocational capabilities is less valuable. Rather, the vocational training can work as a successful contributor when the employees are provided enough opportunities to participate in the process of decision-making.

VI. Conclusion

The concept of humanistic HRM based on employees' self-fulfillment provides a useful insight to the humanistic management. In particular, the empirical evidence presented here shows that the humanistic HRM with the human-oriented approach has stronger effects on the success of business than the prevailing strategic HRM oriented for goals does. As has been discussed, the humanistic HRM supporting the employees' desires for participation produces higher quality human resource. It infers that the modern management should shift its strategic focus from the goal-oriented approach to the human-oriented one. For a long time the strategic management has obtained a dominant status as a guiding principle to survive the changing business context. It has contributed to the development of sophisticated management philosophy and tools. The people-first approach is one of the most important achievements which are distinguished from the Taylorist ideology. In the view of the strategic HRM, the people are premised competitive talent, and thus building vocational competency becomes more and more important. However, the strategic HRM should be modified with the guidance of business ethics. The management should see its employees as human with desires for their self-fulfillment. In other words, the employee is not only competitive human resource but they also are human itself who should be respected. As much attention has been paid to the business ethics, the humanistic approach becomes more and more important. I argue that the self-fulfillment is a core factor constructing the humanistic HRM allowing for the knowledge-based economy. In order for the employees to realize their desires for self-fulfillment they should be served enough opportunities to be trained and to participate in. As has been discussed, the training and development programs are necessary for the success of business. They are not, however, the necessary and sufficient condition. Rather the participation-oriented HR practices have stronger power to motivate the employees to exert their discretionary power in doing their jobs. According, the modern management is called investing more resource to sophisticated devices of employee participation and involvement which can ensure both employee satisfaction and the business success.

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