The paradox of employee psychological well-being practices: An integrative literature review and new directions for research

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The paradox of employee psychological well-being practices: An integrative literature review and new directions for research

Abstract

It is well established that many HR practices for employees' psychological wellbeing (PWB) and organisational performance conflict and even contradict one another. We address this long-standing issue by undertaking an innovative integrative literature review using the paradox metatheory as a lens. Unlike the contingency approach, a paradox perspective reflects real-world tensions as normal, which can be harnessed and be beneficial. We make three contributions; firstly, we identify contradictory employee PWB and organisational performance HR practices; secondly, we offer a solution in addressing the inherent tension between PWB and performance by developing a new sensemaking conceptual framework; and for our third contribution we offer a more nuanced perspective by distinguishing endogenous factors that organisations can influence to enhance the synergies between employee PWB and organisational performance HR practices. The intended impact of this paper is to instigate a paradigm shift and shape a new trajectory of thinking about how employee PWB and organisational performance practices can exist side-by-side.

Key words: psychological wellbeing, performance, HR practices, paradox, meta-theory

Introduction

Employee-centred HR practices, in particular wellbeing, have gained much interest from

scholars and practitioners, especially given their claimed benefits to both staff and the

organisation (Guest, 1999). Traditionally, researchers have focused on three dimensions of

wellbeing; physiological, psychological and social. Nonetheless, we argue that the

psychological dimension of the construct is paramount given the important and central role of

mental processes such as perception e.g. Chu, Thorne, and Guite (2004), and ultimately

impacting on organisational outcomes (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Hardy, Woods, & Wall,

2003). For example, psychological distress can lead to physical exhaustion and social

withdrawal from peers.

Research has also demonstrated that HRM practices lead to positive organisational

outcomes (Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014). However, scholars have recognised the

competing, and at times even conflicting, nature of HR practices in supporting both employee

psychological wellbeing (PWB) and organisational performance. An emphasis on

organisational performance through high-performance work systems (HWPS) (Aryee,

Walumbwa, Seidu, & Otaye, 2012) leads to work intensification (Combs, Liu, Hall, &

Ketchen, 2006), while organisational change may result in the use of provisional practices

(Brown, Ainsworth, & Grant, 2012) that create role ambiguity. For example, the introduction

of HR practices such as pay-for-performance can lead to adverse effects on employee PWB

(S. Park & Sturman, 2016) through increased feelings of rivalry and conflict among

colleagues, and anxiety due to the lack of security in remuneration. Given the potential

tensions between employee- vs organisational-centric HR practices, it is important to explore

and identify employee PWB practices that complement and compete with practices that

support organisational performance. This in turn requires a fresh approach in helping HR

professionals through this potentially confounding area of practice.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to synthesise existing literature on the paradoxical

challenges posed by tensions that exist between employee PWB and organisational

performance practices. In doing so, a paradox metatheory will be used to interrogate and

integrate literature, and to differentiate between employee PWB practices that complement or

compete with practices supporting organisational performance. The paradox metatheory is an

appropriate lens as scholars such as Smith and Lewis (2011) argue that paradoxes render the

dominant management model of the contingency approach inadequate because management

are required to address opposites simultaneously, circumventing the need to choose one over

the other or make trade-offs. Unlike the contingency approach, a paradox perspective views

tensions as normal, which can be harnessed and be beneficial (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

This study makes three important contributions. The first contribution of our study is

that we are the first to adopt a specific focus on paradoxes between PWB and performance

HR practices. The paradox lens has enabled us to comprehensively identify from extant

research and literature employee PWB and organisational-performance HR practices that are

contradictory with one another. Our second contribution is in addressing the inherent tension

between PWB and performance as we develop a new sensemaking conceptual framework

that demonstrates how the PWB-performance paradox can be addressed. The intention of this

contribution is to instigate a paradigm shift and shape a new trajectory of thinking about how

employee PWB and organisational performance practices can exist side-by-side. Finally, for

the third contribution, we build upon the work of Guest (2017) who adopted a symbiotic view

of PWB practices with organisational performance. Specifically, he argued that the two

should not pose a dilemma as the adoption of PWB practices ultimately contribute to

organisational performance. Nonetheless, we adopt a more nuanced view as we contend that

such opportunities for synergy are context-dependent. For example, new firms can build-in

employee PWB into firm performance practices early on and thereby imprinting the firm's

practices that coalesces PWB with organisational performance and setting a strong

precedence for future reference (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013).

The next section is a literature review on the paradox metatheory and extant research

on the psychological dimension of wellbeing. This is followed by a discussion on the

methodology employed in this integrated literature review. The findings of the review are

then presented. A discussion follows that includes the development of a conceptual

framework. Finally, emerging issues within this area are highlighted and directions for future

research are outlined.

Underpinning Theory and Literature Review

Paradoxes

Schad, Lewis, Raisch, and Smith (2016) define paradox as, '*persistent contradiction between*

interdependent elements' (p. 10), and it is one of many related forms of organisational

tensions including dilemmas (McGrath, 1982), dualities (A. Smith & Graetz, 2006) and

dialectics (Seo & Creed, 2002). Paradoxes are both inherent and socially constructed

(Luscher & Lewis, 2008). Paradox is inherent due to the intrinsic nature of some systems;

e.g. equality vs equitability; and is also socially constructed due to institutional actors' choice

of cognitive frames, dialogical mixed messages (Argyris, 1988) and 'functional stupidity' as

a consequence of a lack of reflexitivity (Alvesson and Spicer (2012).

While organisational tensions are ubiquitous, many are latent (Luscher & Lewis, 2008).

However, as change intensifies, such as in today's environment, these dormant tensions start

to manifest and organisations begin to face many paradoxical challenges. The multiplicity of

goals inherently invites tension as organisations strive to address competing and even

opposing needs of stakeholders (Scherer, Palazzo, & Seidl, 2013). In addition, the need to 'do

more with less' becomes proverbial as scarcity is fueled by the need to satisfy multiple goals.

Change, plurality and scarcity are potent alchemy that promotes paradoxes such as to

cooperate and compete (Chung & Beamish, 2010), explore and exploit (Smith, Binns, &

Tushman, 2010), and learn and perform (Dobrow, Smith, & Posner, 2011).

If paradoxes are not attended to, ambivalence, conflict, chaos and collapse ensue

(Schad et al., 2016). Finding a balanced approach is key, as Sundaramurthy and Lewis (2003)

argue "*Stressing one polarity exacerbates the need for the other, often sparking defenses,*

impeding learning, and engendering counter-productive reinforcing cycles" (p. 397).

Although the dominant contingency approach offers one response to tensions, it is inherently

about choices, which may not be genuinely available when confronted with paradoxes and

dualities (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The paradox perspective is about attending to all competing

demands at the same time; it views tensions as normal, and they can be functionally exploited

(Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Metatheory

Tsoukas (1994) proposed that a metatheory is a theory of theories, while Ritzer (1990) states

that a metatheory is "*an overarching theoretical perspective*" (p. 3), which is similar to Lewis

and Smith's (2014) construal of metatheory as a 'theoretical framework'. Qiu, Donaldson,

and Luo (2012) suggest that a metatheory is a paradigm, with Hesketh and Fleetwood (2006)

arguing that a metatheory is an overriding assumption and that all theory employs

metatheory. Tsoukas (1994) contends that a metatheory is particularly useful when there are

no acceptable theories of a phenomenon. He further contended that a metatheory can be used

as an organising instrument that i) guides the identification of ontological and

epistemological principles of a phenomenon, which then ii) bring together divergent

perspectives of a phenomenon, which is premised upon various applications. He argues that

undertaking the two steps should elucidate the nature of a phenomenon by revealing the

relationship between the various perspectives and the scope of the applications of the perspectives.

The metatheory approach has been used in a number of fields within management and organisation studies. For example, Poole and Van de Ven (1989) attempted to develop a metatheory of innovation, while Hesketh and Fleetwood (2006) adopted critical realism as a metatheory in examining the link between HRM and performance. In addition, Jarvensivu and Moller (2009) applied a metatheory of inter-organisational network management, while Chao and Moon (2005) used chaos, complexity, and network theories in building a metatheory to understand the complexity of culture from the perspective of a cultural mosaic.

Paradox as a Metatheory

Metatheories are effective in helping move beyond an 'either/ or' polarisation (Tsoukas, 1994). Schad et al. (2016) argue that the plurality and multiplicity in the application of paradox renders it as a metatheory. For example, paradox has been used as a tool for theorising e.g. Dameron and Torset (2014), while others have used paradox as a lens to study relationships in phenomena e.g. Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse, and Figge (2014), with some framing paradox as theory e.g. Smith and Lewis (2011).

Schad et al. (2016) claim that paradox as a metatheory offers a powerful lens as an *explanandum* of tensions, which are ubiquitous in organisations. Lewis and Smith (2014) support this view as a metatheory lens uses the principles of paradox in bridging multiple constructs, theories, context and methodologies as they argue that "*...metatheory is unconstrained by particular contexts, variables or methods, rather delineating core elements, such as underlying assumptions and central concepts, for a scholarly community*" (p. 129). A paradox metatheory is appropriate here given the complexities that are inherent in the relationship between employees' PWB and organisational performance. Such a claim is

supported by scholars such as Tsoukas (2017) who argue that the 'complexification' of

theory is needed to reflect the complexities in reality.

HR Practices-Psychological Wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing is a multi-dimensional construct that has been conceptualised in

various ways by scholars. For example, Ryff (1995) defines it as a representation of wellness,

which is conceived as "*progressions of continued growth across the life course*" (pg. 99).

Schmutte and Ryff (1997) define it as "*a general feeling of happiness*" (pg. 551). Similarly,

Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2009) conceptualise PWB as being characterised by the

presence of positive affect, the absence of negative affect, job satisfaction and life

satisfaction. Warr (1990) on the other hand operationalised PWB along three dimensions

covering satisfaction-dissatisfaction, enthusiasm-depression and comfort –anxiety. According

to Diener and Suh (1997), PWB may be in the form of thoughts or in the form of affect. This

is consistent with Ryff and colleagues model of PWB which encompasses six dimensions;

involving self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others,

environment mastery, and autonomy (Ryff, 1989a, 1989b; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). In

considering PWB, a distinction is often made between hedonic (positive emotions) and

eudemonic (positive functioning) well-being (Guest, 2017). Hedonic wellbeing is typically

represented by life/ job satisfaction and is seen as driven by the need for rewards/pleasure and

the avoidance of negative experiences e.g., Ryan and Deci (2001). On the other hand,

eudaimonic wellbeing provides opportunity for self-expression and is derived from the

assessment that one's life situation is meaningful e.g. Ryff and Keyes (1995).

PWB has been found to relate with a number of outcomes by scholars. For example.

Cartwright and Cooper (2008) found that people with higher levels of PWB at work are

healthier, have happier lives and live longer. Wright and Cropanzano (2000) in their field

study, demonstrated that there was a positive relationship between PWB and job

performance. Similar findings were reported by Robertson, Birch, and Cooper (2012) where

PWB was found to have incremental value over and above that of positive job and work

attitudes in predicting self-reported levels of performance. Antecedents of PWB have also

been examined by scholars, some of which include: transformational leadership e.g. Arnold

(2017); authentic leadership and attachment insecurity e.g. Rahimnia and Sharifirad (2015);

perceived organisational support e.g. Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2009); meaningful work

and perspective taking e.g. Arnold and Walsh (2015); employee perception of HR practices

e.g. Baluch (2017); emotional intelligence e.g. Carmeli, Yitzhak-Halevy, and Weisberg

(2009); HPWS e.g. Heffernan and Dundon (2016).

These results reflect the increasing interest in PWB in scholarly research. Recent

arguments suggest that given the changes in work conditions such as the influx of

information technology, financial unsettlement, economic, political and global upheavals etc.,

in order for organisations to increase their performance, they first have to take into

consideration their employee wellbeing (c.f. Guest, 2017). Employers have therefore focused

on implementing practices that could foster employee PWB. These practices, mainly within

the remit of HR management, oftentimes pose paradoxical challenges to the organisation

because of the contradictions that exist between those that positively influence PWB and

those that focus on increasing organisational performance at the expense of PWB. Therefore,

building on the work of Guest (2017) and as noted above, we aim to interrogate and

synthesise literature to differentiate between HR employee PWB practices that complement

or compete with practices supporting organisational performance and change using the

paradox metatheory lens.

HR Practices-High Performance

While there is a claimed link between HR practices promoting PWB and positive impact on organisation performance, there is a separate and distinct thread of research within what is referred to as Strategic HRM, which focuses on utilising HR practices to improve organisation performance (Combs et al., 2006). These performance focused HR practices have been coined under various terminologies such as high performance work systems (HPWS), high involvement management (HIM), and high commitment management, with scholars mostly examining relationships between what are referred to as HPWP and organisational outcomes (Kinnie, Swart, & Purcell, 2005). HPWP research pays little attention to potential effects of identified practices on individual employees, including their PWB (Guest, 2017).

Organisational outcomes associated with HPWP include increased job satisfaction, lower employee turnover, higher productivity, better decision-making, increased efficiency, and greater flexibility. These outcomes all help improve organisational performance (Combs et al., 2006). The main HR practices associated with HPWP include training and development; incentive compensation; selection; employee participation and flexible work arrangements (Combs et al., 2006). Each of these has some potential for impacting PWB, either positively, negatively, or both. For example, employee participation can have positive impact on PWB. However, the effects may vary across different occupational groups (Kinnie, et al., 2005), with members of some groups experiencing participation as empowering while others experience anxiety. It is reasonable to assume that there will also be individual differences within occupational groups. Similarly with incentive compensation, which may be experienced as positive and as negative by different groups and individuals. Negative experience of incentive compensation is likely to lead to anxiety and have a negative impact on PWB. It is therefore clear that HR practices associated with HPWP may be detrimental to

employees' PWB and, through that effect, have negative consequences for organisation

performance.

Methodology

We used two of the most commonly used databases in management studies; Scopus and Web

of Science (Klang, Wallnöfer, & Hacklin, 2014). The search process first involved the

primary topic of the study, using the Boolean terms 'health' OR 'well-being'. Using the

database's inbuilt filters, we then limited the articles to those in English in the field of

psychology and business management. By selecting only journal articles we adopted the

viewpoint of Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Bacharach, and Podsakoff (2005) who argued that such

periodicals represent validated knowledge. We then progressively searched within each

return set with the Boolean terms 'Employee' OR 'Workplace', followed by 'Organi*ational

Performance' and 'Human Resource *', using wildcards to broaden the search. Scopus had

106 returns, while Web of Science recorded 54. Sixty-eight articles were used for the study.

Table 1 shows the steps taken in the literature search and selection process.

[Table 1 near here]

   To ensure that the articles were relevant and contributed to the attainment of the study's

aim, we screened the articles for relevance and suitability. For example, articles were

excluded for five primary reasons; i) themes involved examining HR practices in improving

organisational performance in health-care organisations, ii) focus on PWB with cursory or no

mention of HR practices, iii) focus on HR practices with little or no relevance to PWB; or, in

relation to performance iv) articles emphasised the constructs e.g. organisational

commitment, with only cursory reference to PWB, and v) articles focused on detriments on

employee PWB in the context of personality and personal factors e.g. ethnicities. Table 2

shows that most of the papers reviewed were quantitative studies.

[Table 2 near here]

The articles were reviewed and evaluated using the paradox metatheory lens. While an

analytical framework was developed prior to the analysis, we adopted a reflexive approach

and adapted the framework to fit with the data as new perspectives emerged. The synthesis

that then follows from the literature review offers a new conceptual framework (Torraco,

2016) and perspective of employee PWB and organisational performance practices.

Findings

The findings are organised into four parts. The first highlights the variability in the

conceptualisation of employee PWB. The second part identifies the PWB practices that are

paradoxical to organisational performance, while the third highlights the 'mutual-gains' PWB

practices with organisational performance i.e. 'win-win' scenario. Finally, the fourth part

outlines the contexts for mutual-gains model of PWB practices on organisational

performance.

Conceptualising Employee PWB

Our analysis of the literature revealed that authors conceptualised PWB broadly, including

job satisfaction e.g. Boxall and Macky (2014); diversity management e.g., Guillaume,

Dawson, Otaye-Ebede, Woods, and West (2017); happiness and job involvement e.g. Huang,

Ahlstrom, Lee, Chen, and Hsieh (2016); as the inverse of emotional exhaustion e.g. Shantz,

Arevshatian, Alfes, and Bailey (2016); as a degree of depressiveness e.g. Stengård, Bernhard-

Oettel, Näswall, Ishäll, and Berntson (2015); as the inverse of burnout e.g. van Mierlo, Rutte,

Vermunt, Kompier, and Doorewaard (2006); and as within the continuum anxiety-

contentment e.g. Wood and de Menezes (2011). Given the broad conceptualisation of PWB,

many HR practices can be construed as directly or indirectly supporting employee PWB. For

example, although 'challenging jobs' is usually part of performance-enhancing initiative, it

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may be conceived as an employee PWB practice in enhancing job satisfaction, although

challenging job assignments in turn may also be perceived as stressful and cause self-doubt

(Šarotar Žižek, Treven, & Čančer, 2015). Some jobs are inherently stressful, for instance,

customer-facing staff performing emotional labour can experience distress as they feel

estranged from their true self (Sloan, 2008).

Paradoxical PWB Practices

Some authors found that although HPWS may instigate employees' higher levels of

satisfaction and greater intrinsic rewards from their work, employees, at the same time, may

experience greater anxiety and more intense work rhythms, increased workloads and strains

that ultimately act as a barrier to high performance (Decramer et al., 2015; Van De Voorde &

Beijer, 2015). An unintended consequence of the introduction and on-going demands of high

involvement management (HIM), rather than create an increased sense of coherence or a

feeling of being valued by the organisation (therefore increasing PWB) (Wood & de

Menezes, 2011), lead workers to question the organisation's valuation of them and the

comprehensibility and meaningfulness of what surrounds them (Wood, Van Veldhoven,

Croon, & de Menezes, 2012). Research shows a nuanced picture in that performance-related

practices involving enriched jobs can be complementary with employee PWB but at the same

time their performance-related practices i.e. HIM, are counter-effective to employee PWB

(Fan et al., 2014). Such inconsistent results extend to the practice of performance appraisal,

as it can be either motivating or demotivating. Its effectiveness is highly contextual,

dependent on how it is designed and implemented e.g. de Koeijer, Paauwe, & Huijsman,

(2014). Additionally, participative management has been shown to be negatively associated

with employee social well-being (Boreham, Povey, & Tomaszewski, 2016), while,

remarkably, empowering leadership practices have no significant impact on PWB (J. G. Park, Kim, Yoon, & Joo, 2017) (see Appendix 1 for summary of findings).

Job resources e.g. autonomy and discretion are paradoxical with high efficiency practices and business models such as just-in-time (JIT) and total quality management (TQM) as they may impede productivity (Schabracq & Cooper, 1997). Other practices such as quantitative flexibility, which is generally advantageous for organisations, is detrimental to employees in terms of job security (Schabracq & Cooper, 1997). Although it is not surprising that practices that support work systems such as lean may enhance organisational performance but may be detrimental to employees' PWB e.g. Townsend & Wilkinson (2010), it is nonetheless counter intuitive that enhancing employees' job resources to enable them to better cope with such work systems can also be to employee psychological detriment. There are elements in job design to build-in autonomy to enhance PWB (R. Park & Searcy, 2012) such as flexible working arrangements (FWA). FWA not only increases job autonomy but it can also increases work life balance (WLB) (Rudolph & Baltes, 2017) and therefore PWB (Boreham et al., 2016). However, other research revealed that FWA could lead to insecurity (Lange, 2013) with some scholars identifying more nuanced relationship necessitating FWA/ WLB practices to be coupled with effective team design to be effective (Liu & Wang, 2011). Figure 1 illustrates the paradoxical PWB practices with practices supporting organisational performance.

[Figure 1 near here]

Other PWB practices that may have counter impact are employee communication practices enabling participation and involvement. The positive impact of such practices is limited as through the passage of time staff may feel the practices become invasive and stressful (Cañibano, 2013). The need to accommodate 'more' communication may also impede the speed of decision-making (Boxall & Macky, 2010). Further PWB practices aimed

at enhancing collegial relationships with co-workers can be undermined by competitive

organisational climate supported by individual-based competitive reward schemes (Reio &

Ghosh, 2009), which confuses staff at best and causes frustration and withdrawal of extra-

role behaviours at worst. The impact of some PWB practices may need further research as

some practices do not result in the envisaged impact e.g. health and wellness practices on

mitigating turnover (Caillier, 2016) or enhancing work-life balance (Bui, Liu, & Footner,

2016).

Mutual Gains PWB-Performance Practices

Literature also shows practices that generally provide a win-win scenario for employee PWB

and organisational performance. Learning and development (L&D) practices tend to have an

overall positive impact (Reio & Ghosh, 2009) especially if they cater for employees'

professional and personal development (Kira & Balkin, 2014). While most L&D practices are

directed at maximising employees' abilities (e.g. talent management) to increase job

involvement and ultimately performance (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant,

2005), such practices can also help improve performance by enabling employees to better

cope with stress e.g. enhancing emotional intelligence e.g. Karimi, Cheng, Bartram, Leggat,

& Sarkeshik, 2015. van Mierlo et al. (2006) found that practices that stimulate learning

mitigate the effects of work intensification. L&D practices that stimulate individuals through

task design can reduce emotional exhaustion and thereby increase PWB (Rudolph & Baltes,

2017).

Other 'functional' HR practices include recruitment and selection involving hiring staff

with spiritual vitality and ethical character, tailoring compensation and benefits packages to

provide equitable pay scales tends (Wright, 2010), and widening and improving employee

engagement and voice practices to understand employees' PWB needs as well as to convey

organisational performance requirements that ultimately allows the discovery of mutual gains thresholds e.g. Conway, Fu, Monks, Alfes, & Bailey (2016). PWB schemes, including occupational health and safety, such as counselling to improve PWB, can reduce absenteeism and therefore improve performance and general wellbeing e.g. Ogunyomi & Bruning (2016). Tsai and Wu (2010) argue that such interventions help create a climate that promotes organisational citizenship behaviours as employees become more satisfied with their job. HR practices that enrich jobs through the creative design of tasks stimulate employees and thereby increase commitment and performance e.g. Mihail & Kloutsiniotis (2016). Other PWB practices to enhance the work environment include investing in physical infrastructure (ergonomics, safety) (Sadatsafavi & Walewski, 2013), and 'situational engineering' involving techniques designed to alter physical work environments (Wright, 2010).

Context for Mutual Gains

Clearly there are many contingent factors that enable PWB and organisational performance practices to exist in harmony (Ogbonnaya, Daniels, Connolly, & van Veldhoven, 2017) such as age of employees (Kooij et al., 2013) and national culture (Malek, Mearns, & Flin, 2010), In addition to these exogenous factors that organisation's may not be able to influence, there are however endogenous factors that can be shaped such as focusing on innovation and creating a positive organisational climate without using work intensification practices (Heffernan & Dundon, 2016), and establishing selection practices aimed at recruiting employees that have high organisation and/or job-person fit (Mostafa, 2016).

Employee perceptions are a strong antecedent of the impact of HR practices for PWB and performance e.g. Shantz et al. (2016). For example, change in organisational logics e.g. public service to for-profit enterprise, may cause employees to perceive changes in HR practices with suspicion e.g. Townsend & Wilkinson (2010). Such a situation is typified in

many universities where financial performance is highly prized (including surrogates such as student recruitment and research funding) above other social goals. Employees' perception of organisational support is also crucial. For example, Zhang, Zhu, Dowling, & Bartram (2013) found that employees who perceive the relationship with their employers as an economic exchange will in turn view HR practices for high performance as exploitive. Whereas employees that perceive the relationship as a social exchange will in turn view HR practices for high performance as a win-win situation in favour of both employees' well-being and organisational performance. Employees' perception of organisational justice (distributive, procedural and interactional) also has a strong impact on the effects of PWB and organisational performance practices. Toh, Morgeson, and Campion (2008) showed that paradoxes may not emerge if HR practices are consistent with organisational values, in particular when oranisational values view employees' PWB as synonymous with organisational performance e.g. Sadatsafavi & Walewski, (2013).

Many 'progressive' organisations will claim that a host of PWB practices are inscribed in policy. However, it is how the practices are introduced and implemented that counts e.g. Woodrow & Guest (2014). The implementation of practice can be improved with effective communication focusing on the manner in which HR policy and intended outcomes of HR practices shared (Sparks et al., 2001). Van De Voorde and Beijer (2015) suggest that line managers need to effectively convey the purpose of HPWS practices to improve employees' attribution of the practice. Wood and de Menezes (2011) propose that organisations communicate clear-cut outcomes, in particular related to enriching jobs, by enhancing consultation and improving information sharing. In addition, there are some practices that line managers can implement to buffer the impact of performance attributions such as implementing stress management programmes. Line managers therefore play an important role e.g. how well they adopt and balance HR-related roles i.e. 'Employee Champion' and

'Strategic Partner' (Shipton, Sanders, Atkinson, & Frenkel, 2016). It is equally crucial that

managers are well trained to implement participative leadership e.g. Metz, Brown, Cregan, &

Kulik (2014).

Discussion

The notion that some PWB practices may conflict with organisational performance may not

be new as the fabric of modern organisations themselves are counter to employee PWB

(O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014). Nonetheless, it is important that organisations are equipped to

deal with paradoxes as they occur as no one organisations will have 'perfect' circumstances

befitting both PWB and organisational performance. Smith and Lewis (2011) argue that a

paradoxical perspective requires management to address opposites simultaneously,

circumventing the need to choose one over the other or make trade-offs. Ultimately they

suggest that the solution to paradoxes demands *"…creative sensemaking…"* (p. 395). This

section discusses how management are able to address paradoxical issues due to PWB and

organisational performance practices through sensemaking.

Sensemaking is homologous to 'organising' in that it aims at restoring cognitive order

(Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Sensemaking occurs in both immanent conditions and times of

crisis. The genesis of sensemaking varies: it occurs when reality simply does not match

'theory-in-use' (Schwandt, 2005); when an individual 'feels' something is not right (Weick,

2006); there is a presence of disruptive ambiguities, crisis and disasters (Weick, Sutcliffe, &

Obstfeld, 2005); threats to identity, epiphanies and even planned changes (Maitlis &

Lawrence, 2007). Our conceptual framework (Figure 2) uses sensemaking as an approach in

addressing the PWB-performance paradox, specifically building upon Luscher and Lewis'

(2008) work, that demonstrates how effective managerial sensemaking helped firms to

address paradoxical challenges in times of change. The framework has five stages; mess,

problem, dilemma, paradox, and achieving. Organisations move through the stages via four

activities; evidence-based enquiry, multiple perspective taking, double loop learning, and

reframing.

[Figure 2 near here]

A mess is a complicated situation and may occur when organisations attempt to balance

a firm-wide performance-orientated approach by employing PWB policies, without

consideration of existing policies; for example when work-life balance policies contradict

performance management indicators (Ackoff, 1993). A difficult situation may deteriorate into

a 'mess' as HR are unable to reconcile policies to reflect senior managements' intentions,

resulting in line managers implementing the policies inconsistently. Confusion therefore sets

in. To gain clarity, evidence-based enquiry is used as it encourages the specification of

outcomes (symptoms) and potential root causes that contribute to the problematic situation

(Rousseau & McCarthy, 2007). This approach helps to verify that the issues are genuine and

not mere misunderstandings. For example, line managers may point out where the

inconsistencies lie in written policies in providing opportunities for employee autonomy but

at the same time having to adhere to strict standard operating procedures.

As the situation becomes clearer, people are able to identify the discrete problems.

Problems are difficulties that a person or one party faces (D'Zurilla, Nezu, & Maydeu-

Olivares, 2004). However, when aggregated and viewed collectively, the problematic

situation appears severe. A technical approach to problem solving is inadequate as solving

one problem may exacerbate another e.g. 'shifting the burden'. For example, line managers

may adopt a contingent 'if-then' approach, but this may in fact undermine the reason for the

PWB policies as employees feel there is a lack of procedural justice. To address this

situation, multiple perspective taking must be adopted, involving eliciting and understanding

the view point of others (Grant & Berry, 2011). This approach helps in gaining a more

complete picture of the situation; i.e. 'connecting the dots'; which identifies that there are

competing and even contradictory views. For example, while employees acknowledge that

some wellbeing policies such as FWA may not always be for altruistic reasons, they believe

that the policy in itself has benefits even though its 'returns' are long term orientated, which

is in contrast to management's view who may believe that wellbeing is important but for

short-term, instrumental reasons.

Dilemma sets in as people in an organisation feel 'stuck' as the options available are

polarities that have both advantages and disadvantages (Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Joo, 2013).

When one polarity is favoured, adverse outcomes transpire. For example, with a conviction

that challenging jobs lead to learning for performance, management are intent in

'challenging' employees to learn but this stresses employees as they may not be able to cope

with the challenges and feel that they have to constantly show that they have 'learned', which

is not always demonstrable. Double loop learning is a helpful aid in this situation as it

involves questioning one's own beliefs and way of thinking (Argyris, 2002). Questions that

arise from a double loop learning process may include 'why is there a dilemma in the first

place?', 'is this dilemma self-imposed as we take things for granted?' For example, through

double loop learning management may appreciate that psychological safety is crucial as

people tend to be vulnerable when they learn, especially when stretched doing challenging

jobs, and that management must learning is not always a predictable process (Abubakar &

Arasli, 2016).

Ultimately, organisations then find themselves in a paradoxical situation. A paradox

occurs when there are persistent contradictory interdependent elements (Schad et al., 2016).

For example, performance-orientated practices such as performance-based compensation

packages create competitive environments that strain relationships between colleagues and

invites conflict, which undermines efforts to enhance employee communication and

collaboration. In addition, managers may view that an emphasis on wellbeing practices such as work-life balance undermine performance-related initiatives as it gives employees excuses for not 'seeing out the work' even after completing their mandatory working hours for that day. Reframing allows organisations to address paradoxes as it helps to change one's interpretive framework (Maitlis, 2005), which provides a coherent configuration of assumptions, rules, and boundaries (Bartunek, 1984). For example, the reframing of a paradoxical situation allows managers to view such a situation not as one that is debilitating but as a catalyst for creativity in new ways of doing things. Reframing enables managers and employees to accept that paradoxes do not go away but workarounds nevertheless can be identified and developed (e.g. such as adopting this sensemaking framework).

Conclusion and Future Research

By adopting a specific focus on paradoxes between PWB and performance HR practices, we make our first contribution by comprehensively identifying employee PWB and organisational-performance HR practices that are contradictory with one another. Recent research has established that HR practices have varying effects on different occupational groups, and also unpredictable impact through inconsistent implementation by line managers (Kinnie, et al., 2005). There is also the potential for confusion, and contradiction, across HR practices. While it is well established that HR practices in relation to organisational performance are more likely to have positive impact when 'bundled', there is still a tendency to introduce a single practice for a single purpose. One example is FWA to support PWB. This can ignore the impact in other areas, especially organisation performance. This is in part a cause of confusion through contradictory objectives; e.g. is FWA primarily to promote PWB at the expense of performance? Or, if FWA is introduced to promote organisation performance by reducing employment costs, is this at the expense of PWB? These questions

lead to our first contention here. This is that such questions will be at the heart of future

research and concern in professional practice (Guest, 2017). The focus will be on how to

reconcile the apparent contradictions.

In addressing this issue, we offer our second contribution by developing a new

sensemaking conceptual framework that demonstrates how the PWB-performance paradox

can be addressed. The underlying contention is that there is a need to reframe the apparent

contradiction as a paradox. Contradictions are conceived as problems. In contrast, paradoxes

are conceived as natural occurrences in social systems, and as opportunities for positive

learning and change. Our central argument is that future research needs to adopt the concept

of paradox as a metatheory to analyse and understand how HR practices can complement

rather than contradict each other. The conceptual framework in Figure 2 is our contribution to

enabling and supporting future research into HR practice, which promote both PWB and high

performance.

Finally, we offer our third contribution by identifying contexts for mutual gains as we

build upon the work of Guest (2017) who adopted a symbiotic view of PWB practices with

organisational performance. Specifically, we complement his work by adopting a more

nuanced perspective in identifying endogenous factors that organisations can influence to

enhance the synergies put forth by Guest (2017). Our contribution chimes with the work of

some authors; e.g. Torre (2012); who have suggested that empirical studies on the effects of

HPWS on psychological PWB is mixed, and therefore a 'sceptical view' is appropriate given

the paradoxical nature of the relationship and the near-impossibility in categorically

attributing the impact of HWPS on PWB. For example, workers involved in HPWS may

register higher levels of satisfaction and greater intrinsic rewards from their work, but at the

same time they may experience greater anxiety and more intense work rhythms. Authors

suggest a causal chain approach be adopted as an analytical approach as the impact of HR

practices is complex with many latent and mediating factors e.g. Ang et al. (2017). Torre

(2012) argues that a more tailored approach is required as the context in which the practices

are introduced and the needs of the individual must be considered. The conclusion of the

study is also consistent with other findings related to communication and perceptions of

employees on HR practices e.g. Shuck and Reio (2014).

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*part of sample reviewed

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Tables and Figures

Table 1: Literature search and screening steps

Steps	Database	
	Scopus	**Web of Science**
Terms used: Health OR Well-Being	3,858,734	1,557,881
Limit to fields: Psychology and Business Management, and English and Articles only	217,234	34,744
Terms used: Employee OR Workplace	18,507	30,092
Term used to search within previous search result set 'Organi*ational Performance'	778	139
Term used to search within previous search result set: 'Human Resource *'	106	54
Merged set	160	
Duplicates removed	140	
Review of abstracts to determine relevance of articles:	93	
Final number of articles used in analysis	68	

Table 2: Type of paper reviewed

Field of study		% of 68 articles
Empirical	Quantitative	67.6
	Qualitative	2.9
	Multi-method	4.4
Conceptual/ Review		17
Total		**100%**

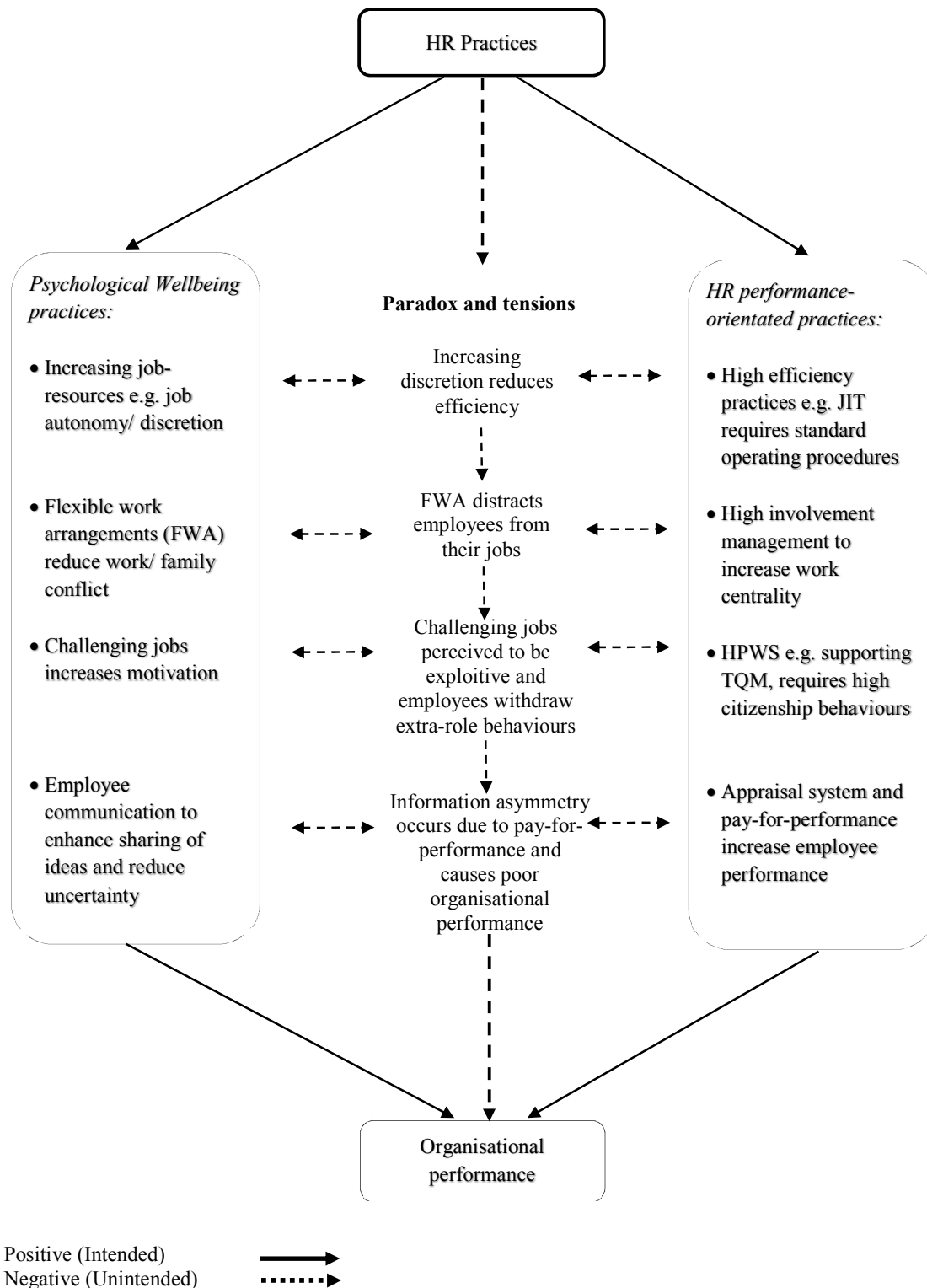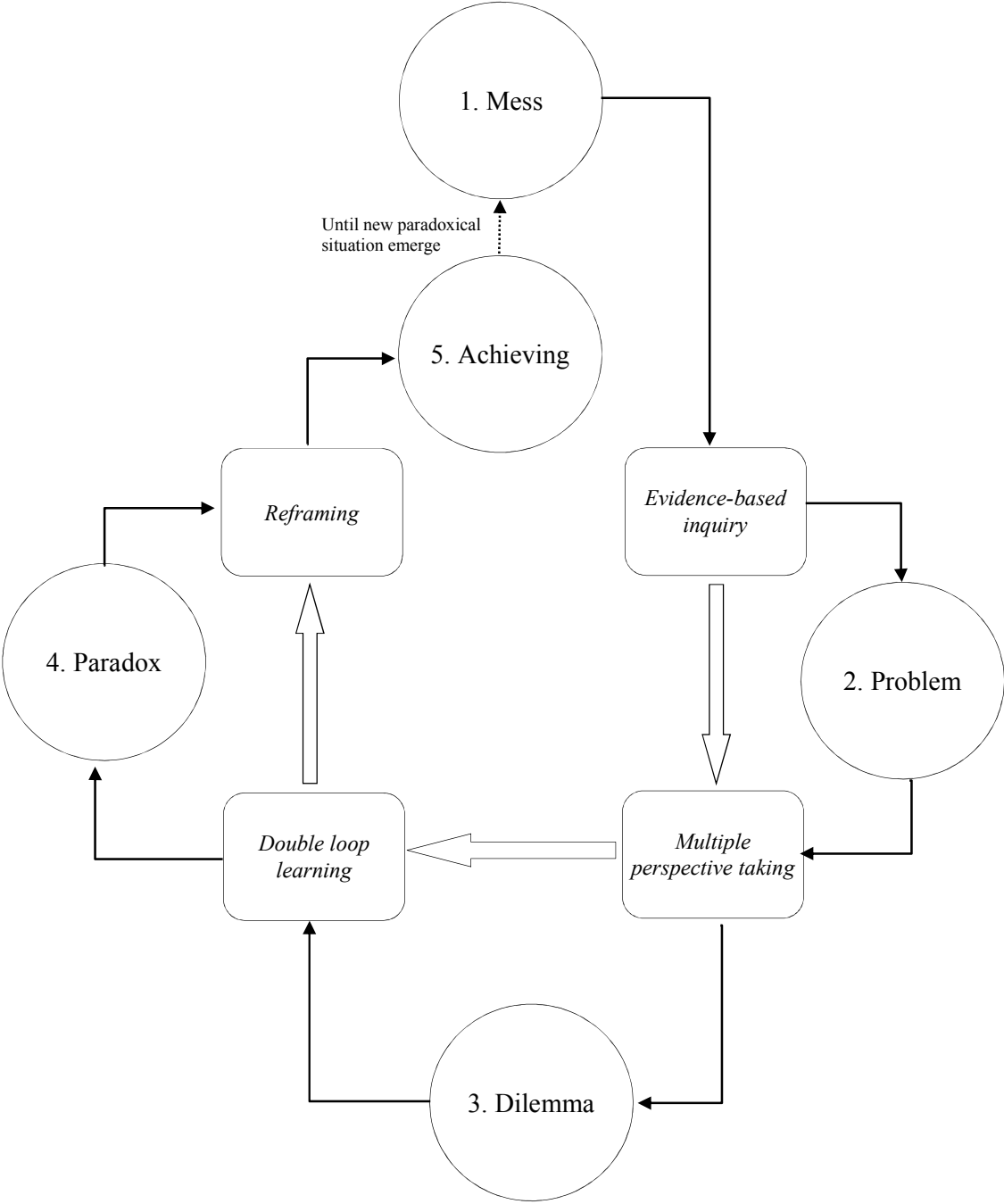**Figure 1: Illustration of the paradox between HR PWB and HR performance-orientated practices**

Positive (Intended)
Negative (Unintended)

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Figure 2: Conceptual framework: Sensemaking approach in addressing PWB-performance HR practices paradoxes

1. Mess

Until new paradoxical situation emerge

5. Achieving

Reframing

Evidence-based inquiry

4. Paradox

2. Problem

Double loop learning

Multiple perspective taking

3. Dilemma

*Adapted from Luscher and Lewis (2008)