



Bereavement Policy: The Impact of Worklife Balance, Organisational Justice, and Virtue Ethics on Employee-Centered HRM Practices

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Abstract. Bereavement or the death of a loved one can come at anytime and is unexpected. Previous studies have shown that employees that experience bereavement require proper organisational support in order to return back to the workforce as a productive employee. The current study proposes that work life balance, organisational justice, and virtue ethics create a conducive environment for the grieving employee. Data for the current study will be collected across multiple industries and examined via structural equation modelling using SmartPLS. Organisations that focus on these three important employee-centered HRM practices improve employee productivity, and help them adjust to these changes during the grieving phase.

Keywords: Bereavement policies · Employee-based HRM · Work-life balance · Organisational justice · Virtue ethics

1 Introduction

According to Lepak and Shaw (2008) human resource (HR) policies either focus on the financial performance of the organisation or is employee-focused. Due to a change in workforce demographics and the perception and needs of employees, it is important for organisations to adopt a employee-focused HR policy (Townsend et al. 2017). This is important for long-term organisational success. One important aspect of an employee-focused HR policy is a good bereavement policy in place. A proper bereavement policy is a challenge both for the organisations as well as the employees. In order to ensure that a good bereavement policy in place, how bereavement leave affects decision making due to the absent employee. However, there is a lack of studies that examine the antecedents of a good employee-focused bereavement policy (McKee et al. 2000). More studies are needed in this area as this affects the life of an employee at his or her most vulnerable period (Wilson et al. 2019). While it may be difficult for managers to deal with sensitive issues such as bereavement, bereavement affects at least one out of every ten employees in a year (McGuinness, 2009). The current study proposes that work life balance,

organisational justice, and virtue ethics create a conducive environment for the grieving employee. Organisations that focus on these three important employee-centered HRM practices improve employee productivity, and help them adjust to these changes during the grieving phase.

The aims of the current study are as follows: Due to the lack of studies on bereavement (Townsend et al. 2017) as well as managers feeling a sense of discomfort when dealing with the grief of employees, the current study aims to provide a framework to guide managers on how to deal with employee bereavement, as well as shed light on the importance of those practices in creating a more positive perception of employees on a company's HR policies. Additionally, the current study also aims to fill the gap due to lack of data of research in this area (Buckle et al. 2010). According to the National Council for Palliative Care (2014) bereavement affects one in ten employees, and managers not properly dealing with this problem will cause the number of employees experiencing negative affect or depression to increase.

2 Literature Review

Work life balance is the ability to accomplish work goals and balance one's personal life (Bulger & Fisher, 2012). Work life balance is an important factor that determines if a HR policy is employee-focused, due to ever changing workforce demographics and more women in the workforce (Sweet 2014). Pertaining to bereavement, Hobson et al. (2001) proposes that there is a need for organisations to help employee's deal with work-life balance during the bereavement period, because the death of a close one is a main source of stress in life. As a matter of fact is it the top two most two stressful event experienced by employees, with the first being the death of a spouse or mate, and the second being the death of a close family member. Due to this HR policies that provides proper recognition and understanding of these stressful life events, will affect the relationship between the company and the employee. If the employee is treated badly or not given sufficient duration to adjust during this vulnerable period, the employee will be resentful or distant. Thus, it is proposed that during the bereavement period, the presence of a proper work-life balance HR policy will lead to the perception of a more employee-focused HR practice. Thus:

Proposition 1: Worklife balance has a positive relationship with perceived employee-focused HR practices.

Organisational justice refers to the employee's perception that he or she has received fair treatment from the organization (Greenberg 2011). The presence of a fair and just system determines whether a HR policy is employee-focused or not. When employees are in a vulnerable state such as bereavement, a just and fair system ensures that the employee does not feel resentment due to unfair treatment. Interaction justice focuses on treating employees with respect and giving them clear explanations and communication. The perception of fairness affects the attitude and behavior of the bereaved employee

(Masterson et al., 2000). This is especially true if the performance appraisal period is close to the bereavement period, and the employee perceives unfair treatment, such as penalized for not achieving performance goals during the period of bereavement. A study by Spell and Bezrukova (2012) emphasized the importance of Employees being able to take time off and get their leaves approved during this critical period. This is especially true when organisations face insufficient manpower and may require the bereaved employee to still work or cut short his or her bereavement leave, and are given a replacement leave instead. Thus based on literature, it is proposed that:

Proposition 2: Organisational justice has a positive relationship with perceived employee-focused HR practices.

Virtue ethics emphasizes the importance of camaraderie, community, connection and a sense of belonging within the organization (Marchese et al. 2002). A strong sense of community at the workplace leads to moral goodness, flourishing, and social betterment for the employee (Cameron et al., 2004). A Strong sense of community helps foster positive emotions, social capital, and pro-social behavior. Thus not only are other employees more likely to treat the bereaved employee with care, the bereaved employee himself is exposed to the presence of positive emotions too (Caza et al. 2004). A strong sense of community also helps buffer the trauma experience by the bereaved employee, and aids in the employee in recovery. A related study by Peticca-Harris (2018) showed that a strong sense of community helped alleviate coworker grief after the death of a co-worker. Based on evidence within bereavement literature, it is thus proposed that:

Proposition 3: Virtue ethics has a positive relationship with perceived employee-focused HR practices.

3 Proposed Conceptual Framework

The current study proposes a conceptual framework whereby work life balance, organisational justice, and virtue ethics create a conducive environment for the grieving employee. Organisations that focus on these three important practices create the perception that its HR policies are employee-focused, as opposed to being financially focused (Fig. 1).

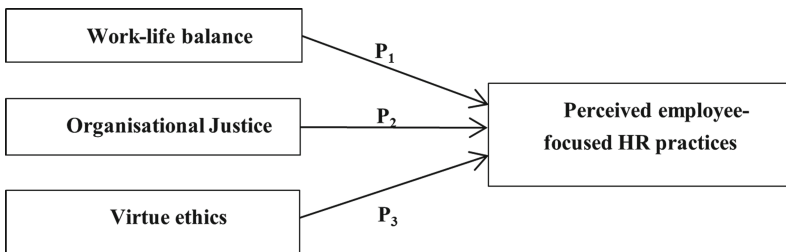


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

Due to a change in workforce demographics and the perception and needs of employees, it is important for organisations to adopt a employee-focused HR policy, especially when employees are at their most vulnerable period.

4 Proposed Methodology

Data for the current study will be collected across multiple industries and examined via structural equation modelling using SmartPLS. The path coefficients for the three latent variables and overall model fit will be examined in order to test each separate hypothesis.

5 Expected Outcome and Significance of the Study

It is expected that work-life balance, organisational justice and virtue ethics will have a positive and significant impact on employee's perception on how favourable (or unfavourable) its HR practices are during a sensitive time such as bereavement. An important contribution of the current study is that these three factors will provide a useful framework for managers to focus on, when dealing with employee experiencing bereavement. This is because, according to Townsend et al. (2017) managers oftentimes feel a sense of discomfort and uncertainty when dealing with grieving employees, and these managers may not know how to react properly. The current study thus provides a practical guide for managers to focus on just three simple, but critically important factors. By focusing on just these three factors, managers can ensure that the bereaved employee receives the utmost care when the latter is at their most vulnerable period.

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