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High commitment performance management: the roles of justice and trust

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High commitment performance management: the roles of justice and trust

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between employees' perceptions of a particular subsystem of HRM practices (performance management) and their commitment to the organisation. In addition, the study seeks to examine the mechanisms by which these perceptions translate into employee attitudes and behaviours.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 524 questionnaire responses were collected from four organisations in the UK.

Findings – The findings show that the link between employee experiences of high commitment performance management (HCPM) practices and their level of commitment is strongly mediated by related perceptions of organisational justice. In addition, the level of employee trust in the organisation is a significant moderator.

Research limitations/implications – This is a cross-sectional study based on self-report data, which limits the reliability of the findings. The findings may also be specific to a particular context. However, the results by company support their generalisability.

Practical implications – The findings lead one to believe that it is essential to observe the actual experiences of HCPM practices and outcomes at employee level, and to consider the broader organisational context, if one is to understand their effects on performance.

Originality/value – When exploring the impact of high commitment work practices on firm performance, little attention has been paid to the employee perspective: employees ultimately are the recipients of an organisation's HRM practices, and as such their perceptions of these practices affect their attitudes and behaviour in the workplace.

Keywords Performance management, Justice, Trust, Employees attitudes, Human resource management, United Kingdom

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

There has been intense interest within the HRM field regarding how HRM can add value to organisations, leading to an increasing focus on high performance work systems (HPWS) (Macky and Boxall, 2007). At the same time, commentators have increasingly argued the need to revise existing research to address some of the inherent methodological weaknesses in the field (Guest, 1997; Wood, 1999). One issue is that



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many models of HRM and firm performance are based on theoretical assumptions about the outcomes of certain HRM practices, rather than on empirical observation (Paaauwe and Farndale, 2005, p. 97). Guest (1999) also argues for more attention to be paid to the employee perspective in this debate, alongside the more common organisational level variables.

Conceptual models have started to explore the links between HRM practices and HRM outcomes. HRM practices can take three different forms: intended, actual and perceived (Wright and Nishii, 2004). Intended HRM includes the policies and practices put together at organisation level. These practices are then enacted by line management in the process of implementation, and may or may not be carried out as originally intended. The employee is ultimately the recipient of these practices, forming his or her own perceptions of them. These perceptions then influence employee-level outcomes by affecting the way the employee thinks, feels or behaves (Purcell *et al.*, 2003). This debate is often referred to as “opening the black box” between HRM and performance (Guest, 1997; Purcell *et al.*, 2003).

One dimension of the HRM/performance debate focuses on the notion that practices can be designed to create a particular HRM outcome, in this case high commitment – so called high commitment work practices (HCWP). Commitment is seen as a fundamental requirement to achieve such desirable outcomes as higher job satisfaction and lower absenteeism (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990), higher organisation citizenship behaviour and employees who are willing to “go the extra mile” (Organ, 1990). We focus here on a sub-system of practices within HCWPs: high commitment performance management (HCPM). HCPM includes performance management practices which are designed to engender commitment from employees through involvement and personal development, such as regular appraisal feedback, input into the process of target setting, choosing pay and benefit options, and appraisals leading to development opportunities and new targets. HCPM is argued to affect an employee’s perceptions of organisational actions, which leads to related employee attitudes and behaviours (Den Hartog *et al.*, 2004). We need, however, to look deeper into how this process works. The approach adopted here is to consider how the extant organisational climate affects employee reactions using theories of organisational justice and trust.

We present the argument that for performance management practices to have the effect of achieving high commitment, this depends on the extent to which employees perceive these practices to be fair, both in terms of the process and the outcomes. Organisational justice is proposed to play a key mediating role in this relationship, and has been found to explain a wide range of employee behaviours (Greenberg, 1990).

In addition, the broader macro-environment of the organisational context creates the conditions under which the employee-employer relationship is formed (Den Hartog *et al.*, 2004). This affects how employees perceive performance management practices and again influences the related behaviour and attitudes. Particularly, the extent of trust that employees have in the organisation as represented by senior management is an important aspect of organisational climate (McAllister, 1995; Macky and Boxall, 2007). Trust, it is argued here, moderates the extent to which performance management practices can lead to perceptions of justice and employee commitment.

In summary, this study explores the effect of employee perceptions of the fairness of performance management practices on organisational commitment and the impact of trust in senior management on this relationship. The related issues of commitment,

perceived distributive, procedural, and interactional justice and organisational trust are first discussed. A model of HCPM and its relationship with these variables is then constructed based on extant theory and tested in an empirical study to explore its applicability to theory and practice.

High commitment performance management

Employee commitment denotes a belief in and acceptance of the goals and values of an organisation, a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organisation, and a strong desire to maintain membership of the organisation (Mowday *et al.*, 1979). This HRM outcome has a strong relationship with organisational success factors such as higher job satisfaction, lower absenteeism and organisation citizenship behaviour (e.g. Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Organ, 1990). It has thus been argued that individuals with high levels of commitment are more willing to devote greater efforts towards an organisation's goals and objectives (Guest, 1987). In order to support a desire for high commitment, certain HRM practices can therefore be put in place in organisations.

The term "high commitment" is frequently used (incorrectly) interchangeably with terms like "high involvement" and "high performance", the former being more prominent in the UK and the latter two in the US literature (Gould-Williams, 2004). The tendency in the "high performance" literature is to identify a set of HRM best practices which together will improve firm performance (Guest, 1987; Whitener, 2001; Wood and de Menezes, 1998). However, the variety of practices included in these different studies has led to confusion over which HRM practices should be regarded as "high performance". More recently, Boxall and Macky (2009) have highlighted that high involvement and high commitment work practices are not synonymous: although high involvement work practices tend to engender high commitment, the reverse is not necessarily the case. For example, practices which enhance empowerment have been found to have a significant effect on employee commitment (Gardner *et al.*, 2001). However, there are many studies which show that employee commitment can be achieved by routes other than those incorporating high involvement, such as pay and job security (Boxall and Macky, 2009).

Like the "high involvement" literature, the "high commitment" literature focuses on desired outcomes more than on practices themselves (Wood and de Menezes, 1998). In general, studies of high involvement or high commitment work practices have a clearer definition of the desired outcome (involvement or commitment) compared to the more generic high performance literature in which "performance" can have many interpretations (Boxall and Macky, 2009). High commitment HRM is about shaping employee behaviours and attitudes by developing psychological links between organisational and individual goals to increase effectiveness and productivity (Arthur, 1994). Correspondingly, the practices that represent a high commitment strategy include any sets of HRM policies and procedures that affect employee commitment (Whitener, 2001).

Focusing in particular on the performance management dimensions of HCWPs, these practices are recognized as increasingly central to high performing organisations. Performance management itself is "an integrated process in which managers work with their employees to set expectations, measure and review results, and reward performance, in order to improve employee performance, with the ultimate aim of positively affecting organisational success" (Den Hartog *et al.*, 2004, p. 557). The

primary aim is to provide guidance to employees on how to apply their resources for the benefit of the organisation (Gardner *et al.*, 2001). Performance management practices represent an important element in the HRM process and have particular significance for notions of high commitment (Fletcher and Williams, 1996), although as yet evidence of a direct linkage is weak (Guest *et al.*, 2003).

We argue here that there are two types of commitment-enhancing performance management practices. The first, as noted above, has a high involvement focus and includes personal involvement in setting objectives, having frequent opportunities to discuss performance and receive feedback, and having some choice over the pay and benefits received. In return for these organisational practices, the employee reciprocates with higher commitment to the organisation in line with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). The second type focuses on employees feeling they have opportunities to develop, with the reciprocal repayment of this investment again in terms of commitment and a lower intention to leave. Such practices include appraisal discussions which result in training and development opportunities and new challenges being set for the employee to work towards. Combined, we refer to these practices further as High Commitment Performance Management (HCPM): a sub-system of practices within HCWPs focusing on the three dimensions of performance management (appraisal, target setting and reward).

These HCPM practices effectively represent an intersection of the organisation's and individual's interests, and are fully facilitated by line managers and supervisors. Outcomes of these processes are generally explicit and consequently may provide a focus for employees' assessment of the organisation. Equally, decisions about performance are in many organisations frequent, regular occurrences and so capturing employee perceptions in relation to them may be more realisable than for other HRM activities. Therefore, the first hypothesis is presented as follows:

H1. The more employees are the recipients of HCPM practices, the higher their level of commitment.

It has been suggested that there is a need to understand the broader organisational context in which performance management occurs to understand its outcomes (Den Hartog *et al.*, 2004). Organisational context is explored here further in terms of the extant organisational climate, including employee perceptions of justice in HCPM practices, and their levels of organisational trust.

The role of organisational justice

In studying the outcomes of HCPM, it is interesting to explore not only what practices are implemented, but also how they are experienced by employees (Gratton and Truss, 2003). Guest (1999) argues that the way in which employees perceive and evaluate HRM practices impacts employee behaviour and attitudes. Employee perceptions of performance management practices are thus of crucial importance (Purcell *et al.*, 2003; Wright and Nishii, 2004), and can be explained with the help of organisational justice theories. Organisational justice can explain a wide range of employee behaviours and highlights the importance of the ideals of justice and fairness as a requirement for organisations to function effectively (Greenberg, 1990).

The two most prevalent forms of organisational justice discussed in the literature are distributive and procedural justice (Folger and Konovsky, 1989; Greenberg, 1990).

Distributive justice refers to the perceived equity of outcomes for individuals, for example, whether the performance appraisal process results in what the individual perceives to be a fair evaluation. Procedural justice refers to the individual's perception of the fairness of the process carried out, for example, to reach a final performance grading. An employee is said to be more likely to find the outcomes of HRM practices fair, if the process of those practices is perceived to be equitable (Folger and Konovsky, 1989). A process that allows employee involvement is also often perceived as being more fair (Greenberg, 1990). For example, if an employee is able to input into the process of setting targets, he or she is more likely to perceive those targets as fair.

Extant research shows that perceptions of procedural justice in HRM are related in particular to measures such as trust in management, job satisfaction and employee commitment (Folger and Konovsky, 1989; McFarlin and Sweeney, 1992). Distributive justice on the other hand is more closely related to outcome satisfaction, such as fairness of levels of pay and performance evaluations (Folger and Konovsky, 1989; Greenberg, 1990). Procedural justice is therefore a stronger predictor of evaluations of an organisation as an institution, whereas distributive justice relates more closely to specific personal outcomes (McFarlin and Sweeney, 1992).

There is some debate in the literature regarding the extent to which distributive and procedural justice can actually be measured independently. However, Greenberg (1990) presents an overview of studies that have identified measures of distributive and procedural justice which are statistically independent, and show that employees are intuitively aware of the distinction, supporting the idea that these are separate, though related measures of organisational justice.

There is also a third type of organisational justice: interactional justice. This is argued to be a subset of procedural justice (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2002), and is described as the interpersonal aspects of procedural justice (Greenberg, 1990). Whereas procedural justice focuses on the fairness of procedures relating an employee to an organisation, interactional justice focuses on the interpersonal treatment employees receive from their managers during these procedures (Chang, 2005).

Organisational justice can thus help explain employee attitudes and behaviour, triggering employee commitment in organisations (Folger and Konovsky, 1989; McFarlin and Sweeney, 1992; Organ, 1990; Purcell *et al.*, 2003). This leads to the following hypotheses:

H2a. The more employees are the recipients of HCPM practices, the more positive their perceptions of the justice of these practices.

H2b. More positive perceptions of the justice of HCPM practices are associated with higher levels of employee commitment.

As justice perceptions are expected to be strongly related to employee commitment (*cf.* Greenberg, 1990), we also anticipate a mediating effect of justice between experiences of HCPM and commitment:

H2c. Employee perceptions of the justice of HCPM practices will mediate the relationship between the experienced HCPM practices and employee commitment.

Organisational trust

In addition to the mediating role of organisational justice in the relationship between performance management practices and commitment, extant literature also shows that trust creates conditions which affect employee responses to HRM practices, including commitment (McAllister, 1995; Macky and Boxall, 2007).

There are many definitions of trust, as well as multiple types of trust which have differing effects on organisational behaviour (McAllister, 1995). A common organisational definition describes trust as: "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviours of another" (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). Trust can be looked at from both the micro (an employee's job and line manager) and the macro perspective (their employer/senior management) (Aryee *et al.*, 2002). In order to understand the broader organisational context in which HRM practices are carried out and how employee perceptions of justice are formed, it is important to consider this macro-environment. Costigan *et al.* (1998, p. 304) claim that employee trust in senior management is: "based on the outcomes of organisational decisions made by these top managers and less on direct experience of their character, words and actions." Therefore, employee trust in senior management is interpreted through the company's policies and practices, in this case performance management practices.

Like organisational justice, trust has also been shown to lead to higher levels of organisational commitment (McAllister, 1995). For example, negative feedback from a trusted manager is likely to be considered as accurate by an employee, and they will try to improve their performance. Yet an employee is likely to doubt the accuracy of negative feedback from a manager who is not trusted, and will not attempt to improve their performance (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001).

Trust is thus not only an end in itself: it facilitates the effects of other determinants on desired outcomes such as commitment, cooperation, acceptance of decisions and higher performance, but in this sense it remains an undeveloped area of research. Dirks and Ferrin (2001, p. 451) acknowledge that there is empirical evidence that trust has a main effect, but also develop a theoretical argument that trust "moderates the relationship between an interaction partner's action and the trustee's response by influencing one's interpretation of the action". Levels of employee trust in their employer/senior management can therefore be seen as impacting the link between employee experiences of HCPM practices, and their related behavioural and attitudinal outcomes in terms of commitment and perceptions of justice. This leads to the final hypotheses for empirical investigation:

- H3a.* Higher levels of trust in employer/senior management are associated with higher levels of employee commitment.
- H3b.* Employee levels of trust in their employer/senior management will moderate the relationship between experienced HCPM practices and employee commitment.
- H4a.* Higher levels of trust in employer/senior management are associated with higher levels of perceived organisational justice.
- H4b.* Employee levels of trust in their employer/senior management will moderate the relationship between experienced HCPM practices and organisational justice perceptions.

In summary, our exploration of the extant literature to identify the relationships between HCPM practices and employee commitment has considered both a direct and indirect relationship between input factors and outcomes. In order to explore these relationships further, we present these in a model in Figure 1.

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Methodology

To test the hypotheses, four large organisations in the UK were surveyed in 2004/2005. For the purpose of corporate anonymity, the organisations are referred to here as Finance, Automotive, Foodstuff, and Communications, representing the sectors to which they belong. Questionnaires were distributed by internal post either to the full population of smaller business units, or a sample was selected by the organisation based on selection of the *n*th employee on a non-stratified alphabetical listing (e.g. reducing a population of 800 to a sample of 200 participants). This was done in order to ensure in total a maximum of 200 respondents per organisation to avoid over-dominance in the dataset of a single organisation. Questionnaires were completed and returned anonymously direct to the researchers. The average response rate was 63 per cent. In total, 524 responses were received from the four organisations. The profile of respondents is presented in Table I. Although Finance and Communication compose the larger share of the sample, the cases were not weighted in order to maintain the reliability of the original data.

Measures

First, six items were included regarding the HCPM practices as experienced by employees, including: appraisal frequency, outcomes of appraisal (training opportunities, targets), extent of personal involvement in target setting, and personal choice over pay and benefits. For the remaining variables, new scales were developed based on existing work and were all measured using a five-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). An alpha factor analysis resulted in

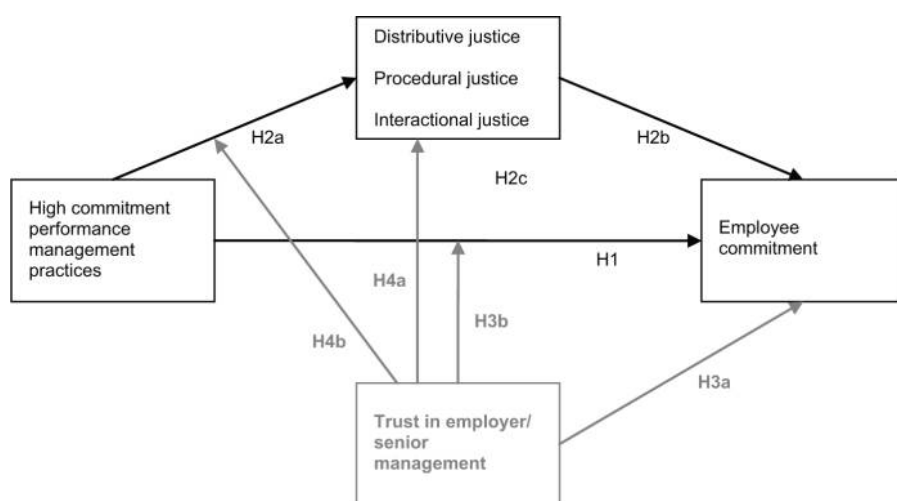


Figure 1.
Research model

PR 40,1	Organization (<i>n</i> = 524)		%
	Finance		37
12	Automotive		16
	Foodstuff		16
	Communication		31
	Grade (<i>n</i> = 519)		
	Senior management		9
	Management		34
	Professional		16
	Administrative		41
	Gender (<i>n</i> = 521)		
	Male		47
	Female		53
	Age (<i>n</i> = 523)		
	Under 20		1
	20-29		23
	30-39		29
	40-49		25
	50 or over		23
	Tenure (<i>n</i> = 524)		
	Less than 5 years		33
	6-15 years		32
	16-25 years		20
	More than 25 years		14

Table I.
Respondent profile

five factors covering justice, trust and commitment, which together account for 61 per cent of variance:

- (1) Distributive justice was measured using eight items, including validated items from the Price and Mueller (1986) Distributive Justice Index: "fair considering effort" and "fair considering responsibilities". Two dimensions of distributive justice emerged in the factor analysis: distributive justice in appraisal and objective setting (Cronbach α = 0.89) and distributive justice in reward practices (Cronbach α = 0.84).
- (2) The procedural justice measure, which included nine items, was based on Folger and Konovsky (1989), but adapted specifically for questions regarding performance management. The Cronbach α for this scale was 0.91. (Note: Three items, those pertaining to procedural justice in reward practices, loaded highly (and with similar values) onto two factors: interactional justice in reward, and procedural justice in appraisal and objective setting. It was decided to group these three items with the other procedural justice items for the purpose of clarity in the results.)
- (3) Interactional justice considered whether the employee feels he/she has been treated with dignity, sensitivity and consideration, and the quality of information used to reach decisions on performance, drawing upon the work by Bies and Moag (1986) and Skarlicki *et al.* (1999). In the factor analysis, two separate dimensions of interactional justice emerged from the six item scale: interactional justice in appraisal and objective setting (Cronbach α = 0.93) and interactional justice in reward practices (Cronbach α = 0.93);

- (4) Based on work by Cook and Wall (1980) and Gabarro & Athos (1976), the measure for trust in employer/senior management asked for employee perceptions of the sincerity, equity and integrity of senior management. Eight items were included. The trust in employer/senior management scale had a Cronbach α of 0.90.
- (5) Employee commitment was measured using seven items from the 15-item Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday *et al.*, 1979). The scale was found to be reliable (Cronbach α = 0.83).

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The data were controlled for the impact of structural and demographic variables: organisation, age, tenure, and job grade. Although significant differences were found in a number of variables based on these divisions, the data has not been weighted as within the organisations the respondents were found to be representative of the populations. However, it is acknowledged that such demographic variables do account for some of the variance in the outcomes measured (see, for example: McFarlin and Sweeney, 1992). Age was measured based on five groups in ten-year intervals from under 20 to over 50. Tenure was based on four groups in five-year intervals from under five to over 25 years of service. Job grading was worded specifically for each company so that it would be meaningful to the respondent. With the help of an HR representative in each company, these specific job grades were mapped onto five general levels of job grade for comparability purposes (ranging from manual worker to senior management).

Table II shows the descriptive statistics for all variables. A number of correlations between variables are significant, with the highest being between procedural justice in performance management and interactional justice in appraisal and objective setting (0.649). This might be expected given the theoretical discussion of the interrelatedness of these two concepts. Equally, there is a high correlation (0.639) between age and length of service, which again might be expected. However, none of the correlations exceed 0.700: this, along with the prior research discussed above, indicates that the factors are sufficiently different measures of separate variables. Harman's single factor test was performed to test for the presence of common method variance bias (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). All variables were entered into a principal components analysis with varimax rotation. The results of the analysis indicated eight factors with eigenvalues greater than one, and no single factor accounted for more than 33.1 per cent of the covariation. The results indicate that common method variance is not expected to affect the results.

Results

First, the relationship between experienced HCPM practices and employee commitment was explored, followed by the inclusion of the hypothesized mediating variable, organisational justice (see Table III). Summated scales for the organisation justice factors were constructed using mean values. Tests included control variables, which in all cases were entered first into the equation, followed, as appropriate, by the other independent variables. It is noteworthy that organisation is frequently a significant variable. This is likely due to the fact that the reference organisation selected is Communications, the only public sector organisation included in the sample. This point is discussed further next.

Table II.
Mean, standard
deviation, Spearman
correlations and
reliability

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Grade ^a	2.89	1.04	—														
2. Age ^b	3.45	1.11	−0.455**	—													
3. Tenure ^c	2.16	1.05	−0.537**	0.639**	—												
4. Frequency of appraisal ^d	3.45	1.08	0.078	−0.201**	−0.125**	—											
5. Involvement in setting objectives ^e	3.56	0.92	−0.306**	0.157**	0.184**	−0.028	—										
6. Personal targets set in appraisal ^f	0.73	0.44	0.139**	−0.190**	−0.165**	0.322**	−0.002	—									
7. Training opportunities offered in appraisal ^f	0.55	0.50	−0.027	−0.040	−0.076	0.190**	0.031	0.304**	—								
8. Choice over pay ^f	0.12	0.33	−0.073	−0.045	−0.079	0.046	0.035	0.126**	0.046	—							
9. Interactional justice in appraisal/objective setting	3.69	0.62	−0.117**	−0.015	0.011	0.173**	0.159**	0.264**	0.305**	0.087*	0.928						
10. Interactional justice in reward	3.28	0.79	−0.352**	0.213**	0.164**	0.020	0.165**	0.005	0.183**	0.127**	0.495**	0.926					
11. Procedural justice in performance management	3.32	0.68	−0.188**	0.010	0.047	0.179**	0.159**	0.219**	0.315**	0.132**	0.649**	0.581**	0.909				

(continued)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
12. Distributive justice in appraisal/objective setting	3.37	0.84	-0.092*	-0.105*	-0.113*	0.155**	0.154**	0.258**	0.253**	0.134**	0.469**	0.318**	0.481**	0.888			
13. Distributive justice in reward	2.77	0.90	-0.193**	0.125**	0.101*	-0.013	0.070	0.046	0.141**	0.135**	0.267**	0.263**	0.320**	0.390**	0.836		
14. Trust in employer	3.21	0.68	-0.128**	0.032	-0.093*	0.021	0.126**	0.163**	0.189**	0.173**	0.389**	0.292**	0.383**	0.422**	0.367**	0.899	
15. Employee commitment	3.50	0.67	-0.103*	0.150**	0.011	-0.091*	0.091*	0.097*	0.182**	0.141**	0.285**	0.187**	0.243**	0.327**	0.325**	0.591**	0.830

Notes: $n = 524$; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; a_1 = Senior management, 2 = Management, 3 = Professional, 4 = Administrative; b_1 = < 20 years, 2 = 20-29, 3 = 30-39, 4 = 40-49, 5 = > 50 years; c_1 = < 5 years, 2 = 6 to 15 years, 3 = 16-25 years, 4 = > 25 years; d_1 = never, 2 = < 1 p/a, 3 = 1 p/a, 4 = 2 p/a, 5 = 3 p/a, 6 = 4 p/a, 7 = > 4 p/a; e_1 = Not aware of targets, 2 = Manager only, 3 = Manager with me, 4 = Me with manager, 5 = Me only; f_1 = Yes, 0 = No

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Table II.

Table III.
Multiple regression
results

Independent variables	Dependent variable: (Standardized β)				
	Employee commitment	Employee commitment <i>H1</i>	Employee commitment <i>H1</i>	Organizational justice <i>H2a</i>	Employee commitment <i>H2c</i>
<i>Control variables</i>					
Organization: finance	0.270***	0.292***	0.256***	-0.059	0.243***
Organization: automotive	0.442***	0.442***	0.470***	0.204***	0.382***
Organization: foodstuff	0.352***	0.325***	0.324***	0.004	0.299***
Job grade	-0.173***	-0.176***	-0.164**	-0.220***	-0.086
Age	0.136*	0.138*	0.137*	-0.030	0.178**
Tenure	0.024	0.044	0.038	0.018	0.041
<i>HCPM practices</i>					
Frequency of appraisal		0.013		0.192***	-0.039
Involvement in setting objectives		0.045		0.096*	-0.006
Personal targets set in appraisal		0.030		0.129**	-0.016
Training opportunities offered in appraisal		0.159***		0.220***	0.081
Choice over pay and benefits		0.073		0.074	0.046
<i>HCPM single variable</i>			0.163***		
<i>Organizational justice</i>				0.389***	
Interactional justice in appraisal/objective setting					0.132*
Interactional justice in reward					0.000
Procedural justice in performance management					0.081
Distributive justice in appraisal/objective setting					0.157**
Distributive justice in reward					0.096*
<i>R</i> ²	0.192	0.233	0.217	0.236	0.328
Total <i>F</i>	20.119***	12.916***	18.663***	13.196***	19.778***
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.183	0.215	0.205	0.218	0.304
ΔR^2		0.041	0.025	0.044	0.128
<i>n</i>	514	480	480	482	475
					452

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Reference organization = Communications (the only public sector organization included)

H1 proposes a positive relationship between HCPM as experienced by employees and levels of employee commitment. Column 2 (*H1*) of Table III shows the results of the regression analysis. One practice shows a significant relationship – training opportunities offered in appraisal. The variance explained increases by 4.1 per cent above that explained by the control variables alone. To test this relationship further, a single HCPM practices score was calculated by summing the component parts; this new variable also shows a significant relationship with commitment (Table III, column 3). Therefore, the direct link between experienced performance management practices and employee commitment is confirmed.

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H2 suggests:

- employee experiences of HCPM are related to their perceptions of organisational justice;
- there is a positive direct relationship between perceived organisational justice and employee commitment; and
- this will mediate the relationship between experienced HCPM practices and commitment levels.

First, the results of *H2a* are shown in column 4, Table III. In order to calculate a single organisational justice dependent variable, the mean score across the five dimensions of organisational justice was calculated. Four of the five HCPM practices are shown to have a significant relationship with perceived organisational justice, explaining 24 per cent of variance with the control variables included. These results show that perceptions of justice of HCPM practices improve particularly the more frequently employees experience appraisal, the more involved they are in setting their own targets, and the more frequently appraisal discussions result in development opportunities and new targets being set. As above, the test was also rerun using the single HCPM variable including all five elements; this combined variable again shows a significant relationship with organisational justice (Table III, column 5).

Second, looking at column 6 (*H2b*) in Table III, distributive justice in appraisal, objective setting and reward, and interactional justice in appraisal and objective setting have a significant positive effect on employee commitment. Only employee perceptions of interactional justice in reward do not affect their level of commitment to the organisation.

Exploring the mediating effect of justice, column 7 (*H2c*) of Table III shows that the addition of organisational justice to the equation has increased the variance explained from 23 per cent to 33 per cent, and the performance management practices are no longer significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, indicating a full mediation relationship. In other words, in addition to the actual presence of HCPM practices, these practices must be perceived to be fair in order for their full effect on commitment levels to be observed.

H3 introduces the notion of the importance of trust in the employer/senior management as an additional contextual variable, which may help explain levels of commitment. First, the relationship between trust and employee commitment was explored. Based on ANOVA analyses, column 1 (*H3a*) of Table IV shows that trust is very strongly and positively related to employee commitment. Second, to explore *H3b*, the single summed experienced HCPM practices variable was used. When looking at the role of trust as a moderator of the HCPM practices – employee commitment relationship, Table IV, column 2 (*H3b*) shows the positive significant interaction effect

	Employee commitment				Organizational justice			
	<i>H3a</i>		<i>H3b</i>		<i>H4a</i>		<i>H4b</i>	
	<i>F</i>	df	<i>F</i>	df	<i>F</i>	df	<i>F</i>	df
Organization	10.904***	1	10.258***	1	4.842**	1	3.352*	1
Job grade	1.393	1	0.451	1	4.123**	1	3.578*	1
Age	10.506***	1	12.694****	1	2.105	1	0.140	1
Tenure	0.039	1	0.111	1	0.296	1	0.299	1
<i>HCPM</i>								
<i>Trust in employer</i>	8.398****	39			6.081****	40		
<i>HCPM</i> × <i>trust in employer</i>			2.594****	124			2.962****	126
<i>R</i> ²	0.466		0.529		0.385		0.549	
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.417		0.358		0.328		0.382	
<i>n</i>	514		480		515		482	

Table IV.

Factorial ANOVA results

Note: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; **** $p < 0.001$

of HCPM practices and trust in employer. Support is thus found for both hypotheses: the level of trust an employee has in the employer effects the extent to which HCPM practices are linked with higher commitment. Although the variance in organisational justice explained (R^2) increases from 47 per cent to 53 per cent, there is a decrease in the adjusted R^2 figure (from 42 per cent to 36 per cent). Given that adjusted R^2 corrects for the number of variables in the model, this implies the new model ($H3b$) is less efficient in its ability to predict organisational justice than the previous model ($H3a$).

$H4a$ explores the relationship between trust and organisational justice. Table IV, column 3 ($H4a$) shows that there is a positive significant relationship between trust and justice perceptions with the control variables included. $H4b$ then explores the moderating role of trust in the relationship between experienced HCPM practices and perceived organisational justice. Again Table IV, column 4 ($H4b$), shows a strong positive effect. This shows how trust in the employer plays a significant moderating role in the relationship between HCPM practices and employee perceptions of organisation justice: the more trust, the higher the chance employees will consider the HCPM practices to be fair.

Discussion

This paper set out to look at the relationship between employee perceptions of HCPM practices and their commitment to the organisation. In addition, the study was designed to explore the mechanisms by which these perceptions influence particular employee attitudes and behaviours, and the effect of the broader organisation context on how this mechanism works.

All the hypotheses received some support. There is a strong positive relationship between employee experiences of HCPM practices and perceptions of justice, and between perceived levels of justice and employee commitment, which is in line with previous studies (Folger and Konovsky, 1989; Greenberg, 1990; McFarlin and Sweeney, 1992). The link between HCPM practices and commitment is fully mediated by perceptions of organisational justice, especially distributive and interactional justice. This supports the notion of the importance of justice in explaining employee attitudes and behaviours (Greenberg, 1990). Looking at the role of employee trust in the

organisation, this is found to moderate the relationship between HCPM and perceptions of justice, and between HCPM and levels of commitment. The theoretical argument presented by Dirks and Ferrin (2001, p. 463) that trust moderates the relationship between an interaction partner's action and the trustee's response has thus been tested here and found to be supported by the empirical data.

Thus the main findings to emerge from the study are threefold. Firstly, at a theoretical level, the study contributes to the growing literature on how HRM practices and their impact as perceived by employees result in HRM outcomes (Guest, 1997; Purcell *et al.*, 2003). In particular, the findings explain some of the "black box" workings: HCPM practices achieve their aim of higher commitment provided these practices are perceived to be fair, which in turn is facilitated by high levels of trust in the organisation (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001). HCWPs should thus include performance management elements which allow employee involvement (Gardner *et al.*, 2001) and opportunities for development, but they also need to be built on processes and interactions that are considered fair by employees.

The second main contribution of the study is a further definition of the variables which constitute organisational justice. Based on previous research, we would expect to see the strongest relationship to be observed between procedural justice and employee commitment (Folger and Konovsky, 1989; McFarlin and Sweeney, 1992). Distributive justice in contrast has previously been most likely to be related to personal satisfaction outcomes, rather than broader organisation assessments such as commitment (McFarlin and Sweeney, 1992). The study however shows that perceptions of the distributive justice of HCPM practices have the strongest impact on employee commitment. This may be specific to the organisations selected, as they were all undergoing major change programmes. Further research is required in this area to uncover whether in times of change, or other significant organisational events, distributive justice takes on a different priority for employees. Indeed, it is acknowledged that little is known about the differential effects of various aspects of organisational change on different aspects of the attitudes of those individuals affected by the change, such as levels of commitment (Fedor *et al.*, 2006).

The significant effect of organisation observed in the results may also indicate that the findings are specific to a particular context. To explore this further, the research models were tested in each of the four separate company datasets (see Appendix). The results indicate that the factors are reliable in all four cases, with *H2a*, *H2b*, *H2c*, *H3a* and *H4a* all fully supported in each individual organisation. *H4b*, suggesting the moderating role of trust between HCPM and justice, found support in three organisations. *H1*, suggesting a direct link between experienced HCPM practices and employee commitment, and *H3b*, suggesting the moderating role of trust between HCPM and commitment, were supported in two organisations. In general, these results support the generalisability of the findings, although further research would be needed in multiple settings to test this further.

Finally, in continuing the discussion as to whether the three dimensions of organisational justice identified – procedural, distributive, interactional – do indeed exist as separate dimensions in the perceptions of employees (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2002; Greenberg, 1990), this study has shown that separate factors did emerge in most of these dimensions. Only in the area of reward did employee opinions on procedural and

interactional justice items overlap. In all other dimensions, distributive, interactional and procedural justice items created separate factors.

Conclusions

In our exploration of the “black box” debate on the link between HRM and performance, we have seen how creating a set of practices for high commitment performance management that engender feelings of perceived justice amongst employees leads to increased levels of employee commitment, moderated by employee levels of trust in the employer.

For organisations, this study emphasizes the importance of justice and trust to achieve desired performance outcomes. As Folger and Konovsky (1989, p. 128) conclude: “to be maximally effective in sustaining employee commitment to an organisation and trust in its management, those making allocative decisions [...] must take procedural justice into account”. Our findings refine this statement to emphasize the moderating role of trust in achieving employee commitment and perceptions of justice, as well as emphasizing the importance of three different types of justice. The key is thus to find ways of triggering discretionary behaviour in employees and management in order to stimulate organisational commitment (Purcell *et al.*, 2003). Particularly for the organisations involved in this study, our findings suggest that increased focus on improving perceptions of justice, through ensuring line management are capable of carrying out HCPM practices, may help improve commitment to the organisation during change.

Despite the interesting findings emerging from this study, it is important to note that the research is based on self-report data on levels of commitment: future studies could try to measure this also from a line management perspective, for example, to help minimize possible problems of common-method variance. In addition, we proposed a causal model for the linkage between organisational justice and employee commitment and the role of trust, and although the findings from our cross-sectional study were consistent with the mediating and moderating models proposed, alternative causal paths may be possible. A full exploration of the causal links requires a longitudinal study.

The study presented here leads us to believe that it is essential to observe the actual employee experience of HCPM practices and outcomes at employee level if we are to understand their effects on firm performance.

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Appendix. Single company comparative results

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	Finance	Automotive	Food	Communication	Full dataset
<i>Reliability (Cronbach α)</i>					
Interactional justice in appraisal and objective setting	0.935	0.927	0.914	0.925	0.928
Interactional justice in reward	0.929	0.930	0.894	0.904	0.926
Procedural justice in performance management	0.906	0.910	0.886	0.925	0.909
Distributive justice in appraisal and objective setting	0.897	0.893	0.878	0.865	0.888
Distributive justice in reward	0.838	0.862	0.822	0.812	0.836
Trust in employer	0.876	0.862	0.858	0.927	0.899
Commitment	0.832	0.797	0.753	0.784	0.830
<i>Regression (standardized β)</i>					
H1 (commitment) HCPM	0.099	0.363***	0.191*	0.113	0.163****
H2a (justice) HCPM	0.368****	0.392***	0.580****	0.249**	0.389****
H2b (commitment) Justice	0.332****	0.336**	0.472****	0.429****	0.359****
H2c (commitment) HCPM	0.024	0.147	0.063	0.126	0.082
Justice	0.328****	0.266**	0.461****	0.453****	0.354****
<i>ANOVA (F-values)</i>					
H3a (commitment)	3.931****	3.996****	2.353***	4.407****	8.398****
H3b (commitment)	2.353****	1.494	1.642*	2.124***	2.594****
H4a (justice)	3.451****	2.945***	3.354****	3.876****	6.081****
H4b (justice)	2.256****	4.400****	1.564*	3.046****	2.962****

Note: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; **** $p < 0.001$

Table AI.

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