

## The impact of digital HRM on employee performance through employee motivation

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### ABSTRACT

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This study aims at investigating the effect of digital HRM practices on employee motivation and hence employee job performance, or in other words, the mediating role of employee motivation between digital HRM practices and employee job performance. Two digital HRM practices were used in this study: digital training and digital performance appraisal. Collecting data using a valid and reliable questionnaire from employees at industrial companies, the results show that digital training had significant effects on both employee motivation and job performance, digital performance appraisal had significant effects on employee motivation and performance appraisal, and employee motivation exerted a significant effect on job performance. Consequently, it was approved that employee motivation partially mediated the effect of digital HRM practices on job performance. It was concluded that skilled employees who are aware of their performance level are motivated to show higher levels of job performance. Theoretically, the study called scholars to carry out further results to examine the effects of other HRM practices on job performance through employee motivation. Empirically, organizations are requested to conduct training sessions and assess employee performance using digital means.

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## 1. Introduction

Employee job performance is a very crucial factor on organizations' success due to its strong relationship with employee productivity in terms of both in-role and extra-role performance. Therefore, both scholars and organizations pay great attention to such a factor. In order to explore the antecedents of employee job performance, numerous studies were taking place from which various variables were regarded as drivers of employee performance. Examples of these drivers are employee training, employee motivation, employee performance appraisal, employee development, as well as other variables like leadership styles and citizenship behavior (Mukhlis et al., 2022; Sandhu et al., 2017; Atatsi et al., 2019; Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2019; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Iqbal, Anwar & Haider, 2015). Specifically, scholars highlighted the importance of human resource management (HRM) practices as pivotal antecedents of employee performance (Younas et al., 2018; Ozkeser, 2019; Diamantidis & Chatzoglou 2019; Lumunon et al., 2021). In the digitization era, HRM practices are implemented using digital

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means, which means utilizing the Internet and technology applications to perform human resource functions (Halid et al., 2020).

In this context, some studies (e.g., Bawa, 2017; Riyanto et al., 2021; Al-Jedaia & Mehrez, 2020) underlined a significant part of employee motivation in the relationship between HRM practices and employee job performance, as employee motivation can be enhanced using HRM practices and as it improves employee job performance. Thus, employee motivation was introduced as a mediating variable in the effect of digital HRM practices and employee job performance. Based on the above-mentioned studies, the objectives of this study are twofold. First, to identify the effects of digital HRM practices on employee motivation and employee job performance. Second, to investigate the mediating role of employee motivation in the effect of digital HRM practices on employee job performance.

Achieving the objectives of this study contributes to the literature through emphasizing the effect of digital training and digital performance appraisal on employee job performance through employee motivation and calling researchers to conduct more studies using other digital HRM practices, as well as informing organizations about some factors that improve employee performance. The study is one of the first studies that consider the effect of digital HRM practices on employee job performance in the presence of employee motivation. It is expected that the result of this study is very useful for organizations to increase employee job performance.

## 2. Literature review and hypotheses development

### 2.1 Employee performance

Employee performance has been defined as “the degree to which the level of productivity of an individual employee meets the firm’s performance standards” (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2019: 179; Mohammad, 2020). In their review of the literature on employee performance, Atatsi et al. (2019) found that employee performance can be defined in terms of employee output, expected fulfillment of tasks in job descriptions, in addition to extra-role performance. Employee performance is affected by numerous factors such as employee motivation, employee satisfaction, as well as HRM practices like employee training, compensation and performance appraisal (Al-Shormana et al., 2021; Al-Alwan et al., 2020; Alhalalmeh et al., 2020; Sandhu et al., 2017), employee engagement (Al-Abbadi et al., 2021; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014), as well as leadership styles such as participative style, and democratic style (Iqbal et al., 2015). Other factors affecting employee performance include employee training and development (AlHamad et al., 2022; Hameed & Waheed, 2011), and organizational citizenship behavior, Leader–member exchange, team learning, and innovative work behavior (Boudlaie et al., 2022; Atatsi et al., 2019; Al-Lozi et al., 2018). The focus of the current study is on the relationship between employee motivation and employee performance. In terms of its measurement, employee performance was measured using items related to employee ability to execute defined duties, meeting deadlines, and achieving department objectives (Iqbal, Anwar & Haider, 2015).

### 2.1 Employee motivation

Employee motivation has been described as the way in which employees are inspired to behave in a specific way. Such a behavior is understood referring to motivation theories such as Maslow’s hierarchy needs, Herzberg’s two factor theory, equity theory and Skinner’s reinforcement theory. According to Maslow’s theory, employees are motivated based on their needs as arranged in a hieratical manner; that is, lower needs should be satisfied first. Herzberg’s theory assumes that employees are inspired based on intrinsic factors such as advancement and extrinsic factors such as salary. Stacey Adams’ equity theory postulates that employee motivation is affected by his perceptions of fair treatment in exchange relationships such as compensation. Finally, Skinner’s reinforcement theory indicates that employees repeat those behaviors that resulted in positive outcomes and do not repeat those that lead to negative outcomes (Mohammad et al., 2020; Bawa, 2017). According to Diamantidis and Chatzoglou (2019: 178), employee intrinsic motivation refers to “the degree to which an employee performs the job in the best possible way to achieve personal satisfaction”.

### 2.2 Digital HRM practices

Digital HRM refers to carrying out HRM using the Internet and technology applications (Halid, Yusoff & Somu, 2020). In fact, digitalization of HRM signifies a technical process used to convert analogue human resource information into digital information to be processed automatically, or a socio-technical process used to exploit digitalization possibilities for operational and strategic HRM purposes (Strohmeier, 2020). There are three elements of digital HRM, which are digital employee, digital work, and digital employee management (Aggarwal & Sharon, 2017). The authors characterized digital employees as those who have digital qualifications, preference for frequent rewards, learning by doing, affinity for networking, and multi-tasking capabilities. They also defined digital work as a work performed using technology. Moreover, the authors indicate that digital human management refers to using technologies to fulfil human resource functions. These functions are related to several types of HRM practices such as market-based HRM practices, compliance-based HRM practices, commitment-based HRM practices, and collaborative-based HRM practices (Jacky et al., 2019), sustainable HRM practices (Diaz-Carrion et al., 2018; Davidescu et al., 2020), high-performance HRM practices (Al-Abbadi, 2018). Generally, HRM practices can be categorized into three types, which are pre-hire practices, staffing, and post-hire practices (Manzoor et al., 2019). These practices embrace recruitment and selection, training, appraisal and compensation, job design, employee participation, employee empowerment, employee promotion, (Al-Hawary, 2015; Abu-Rumman, Al-Abbadi & Alshawabkeh, 2020). In the current study, two main HRM practices were used, which are employee digital training and digital performance appraisal.

### 3. Hypotheses development

#### 3.1 DT and EM

Organizations could enhance employee motivation through HRM strategies such as employee training and employee development (Bawa, 2017). Reviewing the literature on the predictors of employee motivation indicate that employee recognition, employee benefits, employee empowerment, and job environment (Khan et al., 2018), work environment and supervisor relationships (Hossain & Hossain, 2012) were regarded as significant factors affecting EM. Specifically, empirical results on the effect of employee training on employee motivation indicate that employee training is one crucial predictor of employee motivation (Niati, Siregar & Prayoga, 2021). Therefore, it was expected that digital training (DT) exerts a significant positive effect on employee motivation as stated in the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** *DT has a significant effect on EM.*

#### 3.2 DPA and EM

Employee performance appraisal plays a significant role in motivating employees to achieve the organizational goals through using the results of performance appraisal in employee developing, rewarding, and promoting (Al-Jedaia & Mehrez, 2020). Nonetheless, the positive effect of performance appraisal on employee motivation is subject to conditions such as performance accurate assessment and employee job description (Dangol, 2021). Previous studies (e.g., Bulto & Markos, 2017) on the relationship between performance appraisal and employee motivation show that these two constructs are positively related.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** *DPA has a significant effect on EM.*

#### 3.3 EM and JP

There is a significant relationship between employee motivation and employee performance (Siddiqui, 2019). Some studies (e.g., Sandhu et al., 2017) in this regard found a positive impact of employee motivation on employee job performance. Examining factors affecting employee performance, Diamantidis and Chatzoglou (2019) found that employee intrinsic motivation has a significant direct impact on employee job performance. Using a sample of government officials, the results of Kuswati's (2020) study revealed a positive significant impact of employee motivation on employee job performance. Chien et al. (2020) added that workforce motivations (financial motivation, enjoyment of work, internal self-concept, external self-concept, and goal internalization) has a significant effect on employee performance. In fact, the positive effect of employee motivation on employee job performance has been reported in numerous studies (e.g., Sulila, 2019; Riyanto et al., 2021). Therefore, it was expected that:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *EM has a significant effect on JP.*

#### 3.4 DT and JP through EM

Assuring the mediating role of EM between DT and JP requires a significant link between DT and EM, a significant link between EM and JP, as well as a significant link between EM and JP. Previous studies such as Ozkeser (2019) showed that employee training plays a significant role in improving employee motivation, which in turn enhances employee performance (Sandhu et al., 2017). According to Lumunon et al. (2021), employee training, digital transformation, and work motivation have significant effects on employee performance. The results of some studies met the first condition in terms of the significant effect of employee training on employee motivation (Ozkeser, 2019), the second condition in which EM was assumed to exert a significant effect on JP (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2019), in addition to the third condition in which employee training was supposed to show a significant effect on JP (Younas et al., 2018). Consequently, the following hypothesis was postulated:

**H<sub>4</sub>:** *DT has a significant effect on JP through EM.*

#### 3.5 DPA and JP through EM

Performance feedback is the most important component of performance appraisal by which organizations are aware of the degree of employee performance and therefore proper modifications. The relationship between performance appraisal and employee performance is affected by numerous factors such as employee motivation (Iqbal et al., 2013). Chahar (2020) found that EM plays a significant moderating role in the impact of employee performance appraisal on JP. A similar result was found by Bulto & Markos (2017). In order to determine the mediating role of employee motivation in this regard, the following hypothesis was assumed:

**H<sub>5</sub>:** *DPA has a significant effect on JP through EM.*

## 4. Research methodology

### 4.1 Sample and data collection

The population of the study comprises employees working at industrial companies, from which a sample consisted of 250 were randomly selected. Using a questionnaire to collect required data, a total of 229 questionnaires were returned and 201 were valid for data analysis purposes.

### 4.2 Research model

As depicted in Fig. 1, the theoretical model of the study shows that two digital HRM practices, i.e., digital training and digital performance appraisal are linked to employee motivation, which in turn is linked to job performance. Hence, this study seeks to test five hypotheses to investigate the mediating role in the relationship between digital HRM practices and job performance.

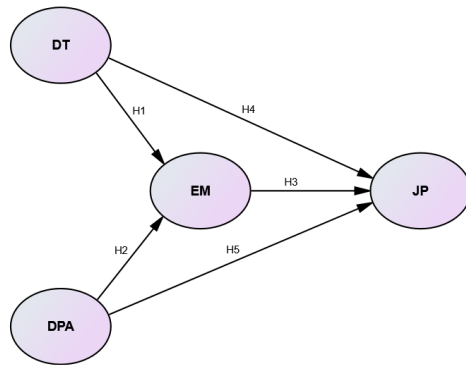


Fig. 1. Research theoretical model

**Table 1**  
Results of validity and reliability

Variables	Items	FLs	AVE	$\alpha$	CR	Result
DT	DT1	0.821	0.663	0.891	0.908	Accepted
	DT2	0.792				
	DT3	0.778				
	DT4	0.896				
	DT5	0.779				
PA	PA1	0.884	0.770	0.933	0.943	Accepted
	PA2	0.828				
	PA3	0.869				
	PA4	0.912				
	PA5	0.891				
EM	EM1	0.920	0.705	0.917	0.922	Accepted
	EM2	0.852				
	EM3	0.741				
	EM4	0.753				
	EM5	0.915				
JP	JP1	0.888	0.736	0.929	0.933	Accepted
	JP2	0.864				
	JP3	0.858				
	JP4	0.811				
	JP5	0.868				

### 4.3 Research measures

Employee training was measured using 5 items adopted from Al-Hawary (2015), and performance appraisal was measured using 5-item based on Kuvaas (2006). On the other hand, employee motivation was measured by 5 items adopted from Siddiqui (2019), and job performance was assessed using 5 items (Deng, Duan & Wibowo, 2022). Items of digital HRM, i.e., digital training and digital performance appraisal were written in line with the objectives of the current study. That is, to reflect participants' opinions in training and performance appraisal when carried out using digital means. These items were designed using a five-point Likert scale, in which 5 refers to strongly agree and 1 refers to strongly disagree.

## 5. Data analysis and results

### 5.1 Validity and reliability

Validity was tested based on the values of factor loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE), on the other side, reliability was checked using Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability (CR). Threshold values of factor loadings (FLs) and AVE are 0.50, and for Cronbach's alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) and composite reliability (CR) are 0.70 (Al-Shorman et al., 2021; Al-Alwan et al., 2022). Results of validity and reliability as shown in Table 1 indicate that the current scale is valid and reliable. All factor loadings are greater than 0.50, AVE values are greater than 0.50, alpha coefficients and CR values are higher than 0.70.

### 5.2 Hypotheses testing

Prior to testing research hypotheses, the measurement model as shown in Fig. 2 was tested to check its model fit degree. The results show that this model meets the thresholds as measured by Chi-square to degrees of freedom (CMIN/DF), the goodness of fit index (GFI), the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). It was pointed out that CMIN/DF = 2.89, which is less than 3, GFI and CFI = 0.896 and 0.911, respectively, which are higher than 0.90, and RMSEA = 0.074, which is less than 0.08 (Al-Hawary & Al-Syasneh, 2020). Based on these results, a structural model was constructed to test research hypotheses. The structural model as shown in Fig. 2 indicate a good model fit as Chi-square to degrees of freedom (CMIN/DF) equals 2.81, which is less than 3, and values of the goodness of fit index (GFI) and the comparative fit index (CFI) are greater than 0.90 and RMSEA equals 0.064, which is smaller than 0.08 (Al-Zyadat et al.,

2022; Alolayyan et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2015). Therefore, the results revealed by the model are accepted. In summary, both measurement and structural models showed acceptable degrees of model goodness of fit. Detailed results of those portrayed in the structural model are listed in Table 2.

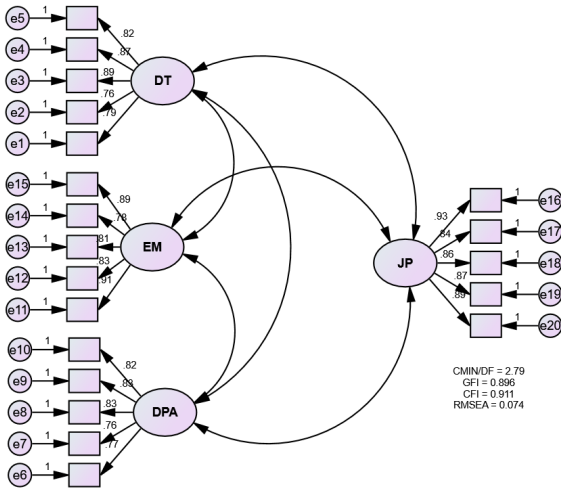


Fig. 2. Research measurement model

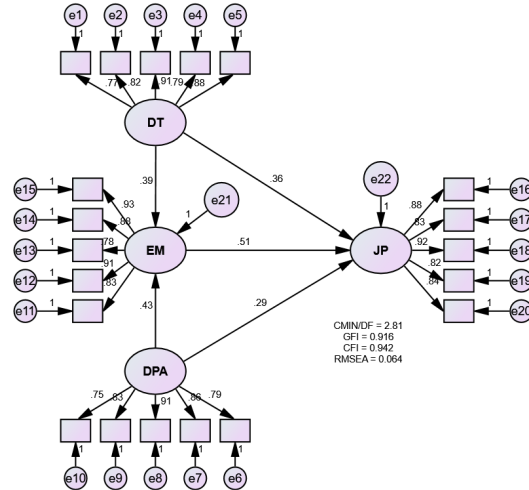


Fig. 3. Research structural model

The results in Table 2 show that DT has a significant direct effect on EM ( $\beta = 0.39, P = 0.000$ ), DPA exerts a significant direct effect on EM ( $\beta = 0.43, P = 0.000$ ), EM shows a significant effect on JP ( $\beta = 0.51, P = 0.000$ ), DT and DPA have significant mediating roles in the relationship between EM and JP ( $\beta = 0.112, P = 0.003, \beta = 0.201, P = 0.002$ ).

Table 2  
Results of hypotheses testing

Hypotheses and paths						Direct effects		Indirect effects	
						$\beta$	P value	$\beta$	P value
H1	DT	→	EM	-	-	0.39	0.000	-	-
H2	DPA	→	EM	-	-	0.43	0.000	-	-
H3	EM	→	JP	-	-	0.51	0.000	-	-
H4	DT	→	EM	→	JP	0.39	0.000	0.112	0.003
H5	DPA	→	EM	→	JP	0.43	0.000	0.201	0.002

6. Discussion

The first hypothesis (H1) assumes that digital training is positively related to employee motivation. Using the current data, this hypothesis is supported. Such a result was found in previous studies (e.g., Khan, 2012; Momanyiet al., 2016; Ozkeser, 2019; Niati, Siregar & Prayoga, 2021). In fact, the aim of digital training is to equip employees with new skills about performing their job tasks using digital means. The importance of these means is that it makes training available for employees without time and place restrictions. The second hypothesis (H2) postulates that digital performance appraisal has a significant direct effect on employee motivation. In line with some previous works (e.g., Bulto & Markos, 2017; Al-Jedaia & Mehrez, 2020), H2 was accepted. The importance of employee performance appraisal is that the results of such appraisal can be used in employee development, employee promoting, and employee compensating. Basically, motivated employees show higher levels of performance as stated in the third hypothesis (H3), which was echoed in previous studies (Sandhu et al., 2017; Siddiqui, 2019; Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2019; Kuswati, 2020; Riyanto et al., 2021). In terms of the mediating role of employee motivation in the relationship between digital training and digital performance appraisal as stated in the fourth (H4) and the fifth (H5) hypotheses was supported in these two hypotheses. That is, employee motivation mediates the effect of digital training on job performance, as well as employee motivation mediates the effect of digital performance appraisal on job performance. These results found an empirical base in previous studies like Sandhu et al. (2017), Younas et al. (2018), and Ozkeser (2019) who showed a significant part of employee training in employee motivation enhancement, therefore, employee performance. Lumunon et al. (2021) found that employee training and employee motivation are significantly and positively associated with employee performance. Moreover, Bulto and Markos (2017) and Chahar (2020) highlight the importance of employee motivation in the effect of employee performance appraisal and employee job performance.

### 6.1 Theoretical and practical implications

The current study is one of the studies that investigated the effect of digital HRM practices, i.e., digital training and digital performance appraisal, on employee performance through employee motivation. Theoretically, researchers are encouraged to conduct further studies to investigate the impact of other digital HRM practices on employee job performance. Practically, the study indicates that both digital training and digital performance appraisal are essential practices to enhance employee job performance, and the positive effects can be improved by employee motivation. Therefore, organizations are requested to save cost and time in conducting training sessions through using digital means, evaluating employee performance via digital means to ensure accurate and transparent assessment of employee performance and providing them with quick feedback on their performance.

### 7. Conclusion

It was concluded based on the results that skilled employees are motivated to carry out their job duties. On the other hand, employees' awareness of their performance level encourages them to do their best to reach performance standards. Digital training can be carried out without time and place restrictions, and digital performance appraisal can be conducted with more transparency. Employees who are motivated have higher levels of job performance. Still, employee motivation enhances the effects of digital training and digital performance appraisal. Henceforth, digital training, digital performance appraisal, and employee motivation are three key pillars of employee performance.

### 8. Limitations and future work directions

This study is limited to investigating two digital HRM practices, which are digital training and digital performance appraisal using a sample of employees selected from industrial companies. Therefore, researchers are recommended to examine the effects of other HRM practices on employee job performance using samples from different industries in order to generalize the effect of digital HRM practices. Furthermore, researchers could carry out new studies on the effect of digital HRM practices on employee outcomes such as employee satisfaction and employee intention to leave. In addition, further studies are required on the effect of digital HRM practices on employee outcomes considering manager's voice.

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