
The association of HRM practices with organizational citizenship behaviors: The mediating role of work engagement, perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange

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✎ **ABSTRACT.** Il principale obiettivo del presente studio è stato quello di esaminare se ed in che misura una percezione positiva da parte dei dipendenti delle pratiche di gestione delle risorse umane realizzate dall'organizzazione potesse influenzare i comportamenti di cittadinanza organizzativa, attraverso la mediazione del work engagement, della leader-member exchange e del supporto organizzativo percepito. Lo studio è stato condotto nel contesto sanitario e ha coinvolto un gruppo di 407 dipendenti che hanno compilato un questionario comprendente informazioni socio-professionali e misure specifiche relative alle variabili indagate. In sintonia con un approccio people-based, i risultati confermano la relazione positiva tra percezione delle pratiche HR e comportamenti di cittadinanza.

✎ **SUMMARY.** Some of the most recent contributions on HRM practices have highlighted how employees' perceptions about people management could be proximal predictors of positive attitudes and behaviors. The main aim of the present contribution was to examine if and to what extent a positive employees' HRM perception could be related to organizational citizenship behaviors, being work engagement, perceived organizational support, and leader-member exchange mediators of this association. The study was carried out in a healthcare private organization located in Southern Italy. 407 employees filled in a questionnaire encompassing socio-professional information and measures of HRM Perception, perceived organizational support, work engagement, leader member exchange, and organizational citizenship behavior. Results confirmed the crucial role played by employees' perceptions of HRM practices for organizational citizenship behaviors, supporting the people-based view of organizations.

Keywords: Organizational behavior, Work engagement, Perceived organizational support, Leader-member exchange

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, empirical evidence confirmed the positive impact of a people-based approach in Human Resource Management (HRM) on organizational performance (Siddique, Procter & Gittel, 2019; Wang, Kim, Rafferty & Sanders, 2020).

Such an approach to people management, also known as “soft approach” (Beardwell, Holden & Claydon, 2004), “high-commitment orientation” (Wood & de Menezes, 1998) or “strategic approach” (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2006), postulates that supportive HRM systems might increase employee motivation, ultimately impacting on productivity and performance (Peccei, Van de Voorde & Van Veldhoven, 2013).

Accordingly, consistent research also showed that employees’ motivation resulting from a positive HRM practices’ perception might impact on other crucial organizational behaviors, such as organizational citizenship behaviors, work engagement, leader-member exchange and perceived organizational support (Posthuma, Campion, Masimova & Campion, 2013).

Therefore, it is through a properly designed management of HR systems that the organization could reinforce employees’ motivation and engagement, thus impacting on positive organizational behavior. Moreover, it is through supportive HRM practices that the management could develop knowledge and manage learning, some of the most distinctive resources in times of change and global competition.

In fact, a vast body of research examined the relationships between HRM practices and other significant organizational variables. Some focused on the direct relationship between HRM practices and outcomes (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey & Saks, 2015; Messersmith, Patel, Lepak & Gould-Williams, 2011) and some other considered the variables that might mediate this relationship at an individual, group and organizational level (Boon & Kalshoven, 2014; Boxall, Guthrie & Paauwe, 2016; Ertürk, 2014; Gavino, Wayne & Erdogan, 2012; Kilroy, Flood, Bosak & Chênevert, 2017; Li, Sanders & Frenkel, 2012; Mayes, Finney, Johnson, Shen & Yi, 2017).

In line with this evidence, the present study aimed to contribute to the discussion about the role played by mediators by proposing an extension of the study by Alfes, Shantz, Truss and Soane (2013) addressed to test a comprehensive model framing the relationship between HRM practices and organizational performance in the

Italian context. Differently from the study cited above that involved employees in a service sector organization, the present research was addressed to extend the model to another peculiar working context, namely the health care sector, considered that recently a growing body of scientific evidences showed increasing interest in understanding how HR practices could be used to impact on individual and organizational performance in health care organizations (Baluch, Salge & Piening, 2013; Rodwell & Teo, 2008; Veld, Paauwe & Boselie, 2010). In 2013, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* devoted a special issue - “An international perspective on Human Resource Management and performance in the health care sector: Toward a research agenda” - edited by Batram and Dowling to this very topic. The papers presented showed a lively debate about this topic underlining the role played by HRM practices on some significant individual and organizational attitudes and behaviors such as employees’ engagement, job satisfaction, extra-role behaviors, burnout and civility toward patients.

In view of the above, the present study aimed to contribute to this debate by examining if and to what extent the model proposed by Alfes, Shantz et al. (2013) could explain the association between employees’ perception of HRM practices in the health care sector with employees’ organizational citizenship behaviors in light with some potential mediators that might intervene at an individual level (work engagement), at a group level (leader-member exchange) and at an organizational level (perceived organizational support).

Evidence from this study could potentially be useful to plan and to improve interventions at the individual (i.e., enhancing work engagement and reducing employees’ risk of burnout) and at the organizational level (i.e., reducing turnover and making teamwork and collaboration more effective), if the above-mentioned mediators proved to be significant ones.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HRM practices perception and employees’ organizational citizenship behaviors

The theoretical speculations drawn above underline that undoubtedly supportive HRM practices are related to positive individual employee attitudes and behaviors (Gould-

Williams & Davies, 2005; Kehoe & Wright, 2013).

This strand of research basically draws on social exchange theory, maintaining that the norm of reciprocity regulates interpersonal relationships (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Eisenberger, Hungtington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). With special reference to the working contexts, according to social exchange theory, by receiving economic and/or socio-emotional rewards and benefits, employees feel that the organization is recognizing their contribution. Consequently, to reciprocate this acknowledgement, employees tend to develop positive attitudes and/or performing positive behaviors.

Prior research largely confirmed this evidence: employees having positive perceptions about HRM practices tend to exhibit more frequent extra-role behaviors (Anand, Vidyarthi, Liden & Rousseau, 2010), are more engaged (Saks, 2006), show lower levels of turnover intentions (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2010), and show higher affective commitment (Sanders, Dorenbosch & de Reuver, 2008).

Accordingly, for organizations, promoting supportive HRM practices means investing in employees' positive perceptions about organizational support (Allen, Shore & Griffieth, 2003), that ultimately may result in the enactment of positive organizational behaviors.

Examples of supportive HRM practices could be, for instance, training and development opportunities and constructive feedbacks and acknowledgements about performance. Similarly, fair rewards and job security are also important aspects that might signal that the organization cares about employees' satisfaction, wellbeing, motivation and is willing to invest on them. Finally, participation and involvement in decision-making could represent important feedbacks about the appreciation of employees' contributions, underlining at the same time the effort accomplished by the organization to build a positive relationship with its employees.

On the other hand, there are different kind of positive organizational behaviors that employees could perform to show the organization that they appreciate these efforts. organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) are among the most prominent and examined ones. Accordingly, this concept concretely refers to all those actions or behaviors that employees perform beyond their formal role requirements (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine & Bachrach, 2000). These are generally considered an individual positive outcome of enlightened organizational management practices as well

as a positive antecedent of individual and organizational-level outcomes, such as for instance managers' performance evaluations and promotion decisions or turnover intentions (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff & Blume, 2009). Accordingly, several empirical studies showed that employees' perceptions of HRM practices could positively influence OCB. For example, Alfes, Shantz et al. (2013) showed that there is a positive relationship between HRM practices and OCB which is mediated by employee engagement and that this relationship is enhanced if perceived organizational support, trust and leader-member-exchange were higher. Further confirmations came from a study by Newman, Miao, Hoffman & Zhu (2016), showing that HRM practices are directly linked to OCB. OCB was also proven to significantly mediate the relationship between perceived human resource management practices (i.e., retention-oriented compensation and formal training) and employees' intention to leave their job (Lam, Chen & Takeuchi, 2009). Proven that HRM and OCB are positively associated, evidence is still sparse about the potential intermediate variables that connect them. Based on this premise, as we mentioned above, it appears compelling to identify these mediators and, moreover, contrast them. The following section focuses on this very aspect.

The mediating role of work engagement, perceived organizational support, leader-member exchange

Given the association between HRM practices and the individual and organizational outcomes described above, most recent empirical contributions focused on the examination of those mechanisms through which HRM practices are linked to performance. As a result, these studies have advanced a few employee attitudes as potential mediators in the causal chain.

Particularly, HRM practices have been linked to job satisfaction, affective and continuance commitment, and perceptions of procedural and interactional justice (Takeuchi & Takeuchi, 2013). More recently, employee engagement, perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange have been proven to be significant mediators of the relationship between HRM practices and organizational behaviors (Alfes, Shantz et al., 2013).

Yet, work engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor,

dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzàles-Roma & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). It refers to the extent to which individuals invest themselves in their work roles, showing energy and initiative in their work. In view of the above, work engagement was proved to be a significant antecedent of task-oriented and citizenship behaviors (Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010).

In a similar vein, empirical evidence also showed that high levels of engagement are related to positive HRM practices (Alfes, Shantz et al., 2013). Indeed, it could be argued that if people experience positive relationships within the organizational context, if they feel they are valued and appreciated by the management, they would likely engage in their work investing more time and energy (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Basing on such premises, it was expected that the link between perceived HRM practices and employee behavior could be indirect and mediated by employees’ work engagement. Thus:

Hypothesis 1: Work engagement will mediate the relationship between perceived HRM practices and organizational citizenship behaviors.

Very often, the perception of HR practices is associated with the organizational support perceived by employees. With the acronym POS scholars refer to employees’ perceptions about “the extent to which their organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being” (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 501). These perceptions are strictly related to the affordances made available by the organization and above all by the motivations that according to the employees stay behind these affordances. A positive representation about these motivations will probably encourage employees to pay back the organization by performing extra-role behaviors and by decreasing their turnover intentions (Dawley, Houghton & Bucklew, 2010).

In light with these evidences, in their meta-analysis Kurtessis and colleagues (2015) discussed findings from 558 studies and concluded that several organizational factors could be antecedents of POS (e.g. leadership, employee-organization context, human resource practices, and working conditions) as well as POS could determine many different behavioral consequences (e.g., employee’s orientation toward the organization and work, employee performance, and well-being). Therefore, considering these conclusions within the wider framework of the social exchange theory, the present study argued that employees who tend to perceive a stronger

support by their organization would consequently feel more obliged to the organization, showing also higher levels of OCB. In view of the above, it could be postulated that:

Hypothesis 2: The positive association between HRM practices and organizational citizenship behaviors will mediate by perceived organizational support.

Finally, a third variable which was showed to be a key factor mediating HRM practices perceptions and organizational behaviors is employees’ perception about the relationship with their leaders (Leader-Member Exchange, LMX). The quality of this dyadic relationship, mostly based on the exchange of material and relational resources by both parties, could influence followers’ perceptions of trust and obligation toward their leaders. If the relationship is perceived to be a positive and motivating one, followers would more probably feel encouraged to perform extra-role behaviors. Accordingly, abundant research in the field showed that the quality of the LMX relationship is related to a range of individual and organizational outcomes, including extra-role behaviors (Venkataraman, Green & Schleicher, 2010). Therefore, leaders and supervisors were proven to have a great responsibility in motivating and engaging employees, in creating the conditions to encourage people to thrive and to go behind role prescriptions. In view of the above, it could be argued that engaged employees who have developed a positive LMX relationship with their supervisors will reciprocate by performing citizenship behaviors. Hence:

Hypothesis 3: The positive association between employee engagement and organizational citizenship behaviors will mediate by leader-member exchange.

METHOD

Sample and data collection

Participants to the study were employees in a large healthcare organization in South Italy. They were invited to fill in a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed to all employees ($N = 700$) during working hours and were returned after 1-2 weeks. The distributed protocol was introduced by means of a short text explaining that the study dealt with employees’ perceptions about HRM practices. Participants were told that the information provided was dealt with strictly confidential, and that the outcomes from the different respondents would be aggregated and analyzed

as a whole. Finally, they were told that there were no right or wrong answers, given the fact that the study was concerned with personal perceptions. Additional ethical approval was not required because the study did not provide medical treatments or other practices that could origin psychological or social malaises to participants. Data were collected in October 2017.

A total of 407 of employees participated to the study (response rate = 58.1%). 229 (56.3%) were women, while 178 (43.7%) were men. Regarding age, 72 (17.7%) were younger than 30 years, 91 (22.4%) were aged 31-40 years, 117 (28.7%) were aged 41-50%, 100 (24.6%) were aged 51-60%, and 27 (6.6%) were older than 60 years. As concerns to their educational level, 171 (42%) held a high-school degree or lower, while 229 (56.3%) held a university degree (7 missing values, 1.7%). In terms of organizational tenure, 96 (23.6%) had been working for less than 5 years, 75 (18.4%) for 5-15 years, 76 (18.7%) for 15-25 years, 92 (22.6%) for 25-35 years, while 68 (16.7%) had been working for more than 35 years. As for their employment contract, 297 (73%) were permanent employees, 57 (14%) held a fixed-term contract, and 52 (12.8%) other employment arrangements (1 missing value; .2%). Finally, as for the professional categories, most of them were professional nurses (56.3%), some medical doctors and paramedical staff (28.2%), few were employees working in the administration (7.8%), some outsourcing human resources (5.2%) and in the end 2.5% (10 missing values) did not declare their professional role within the organization.

Measures

- *Perception of HRM practices.* The 9-item (e.g., “I feel fairly rewarded for the amount of effort I put into my job”) scale by Gould-Williams and Davies (2005) was used. Responses were assessed through a 5-point scale, from not at all = 1 to completely = 5. Cronbach’s alpha was .90. Scores ranged between 1 and 5.
- *Perceived Organizational Support.* The 8-item (e.g., “The organization really cares about my well-being”) Italian version (Battistelli & Mariani, 2010) scale by Eisenberger and colleagues (1986) was used. Responses were assessed through a 5-point Likert scale, from completely disagree = 1 to completely agree = 5. Cronbach’s alpha was .90. Scores ranged between 1 and 5.
- *Leader-Member Exchange.* The 7-item (e.g., “How would

you characterize your working relationship with your manager”) scale by Scandura and Schriesheim (1994) was used. Responses were assessed through a 5-point scale, from e.g. rarely/not at all/absolutely not = 1 to e.g. very often/very much/absolutely yes = 5. Cronbach’s alpha was .92. Scores ranged between 1 and 5.

- *Work engagement.* The 9-item (e.g., “At my job, I feel strong and vigorous”) Italian version (Balducci, Fraccaroli & Schaufeli, 2010) of the scale by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) was used. Responses were assessed through a 5-point frequency scale, from never = 1 to always = 5. Cronbach’s alpha was .90. Scores ranged between 1 and 5.
- *Organizational Citizenship Behaviors.* The 15-item (e.g., “Help others who have heavy workloads”) Italian version (Argentero, Cortese & Ferretti, 2008) of the scale by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman and Fetter (1990) was used. Responses were assessed through a 5-point frequency scale, from never = 1 to always = 5. Cronbach’s alpha was .73. Scores ranged between 1 and 5.

Data analysis

Preliminary analyses were carried out before proceeding in examining associations between study variables. The expectation maximization method (SPSS 21) was computed to substitute three missing values. Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations, were computed to describe variables and their associations with other variables.

After controlling for indicators’ asymmetry indexes, structural equation modelling analyses (Lisrel 9.3) using maximum likelihood estimation methods (along with the indicators’ covariance matrix) were used to evaluate the measurement and structural models concerning study variables and their associations. Given that the sample size was too small for complying with the rule of at least ten cases for each parameter to be estimated (Kline, 2015), we relied on item parceling for estimating latent constructs. This technique has several advantages over item level indicators, such as better model fit, more precise parameter estimates, increased reliability, less biased estimates, and reduced levels of skewness and kurtosis (Bandalos, 2002; Little, Cunningham, Shahar & Widaman, 2002). Exploratory factor analyses were carried out for each scale and their respective items were assigned to parcels in countervailing order according to the size of the factor loading so that the

parcels would have approximately equivalent factor loadings (Weston & Gore, 2006).

Several fit indices were included: the chi-square test (χ^2), the Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; with 95% confidence interval lower and upper limits, hereafter 95% CI [LL, UL]). CFI and NNFI $\geq .90$, as well as SRMR and RMSEA $\leq .10$ may suggest acceptable fit, while CFI and NNFI $\geq .95$, as well as SRMR and RMSEA $\leq .08$ may suggest better fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Anyway, models' goodness of fit evaluation should rely on evidence from all indices for subsequent acceptance or rejection.

Table 1 depicts study variables' descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations.

Perception of HRM practices positively correlated with perceived organizational support ($r = .79, p < .001$), work engagement ($r = .40, p < .001$), leader-member exchange ($r = .44, p < .001$), and OCB ($r = .19, p < .001$).

Perceived organizational support positively correlated with work engagement ($r = .39, p < .001$), leader-member exchange ($r = .47, p < .001$), and OCB ($r = .21, p < .001$).

Work engagement positively correlated with leader-member exchange ($r = .32, p < .001$) and OCB ($r = .51, p < .001$).

Finally, leader-member exchange positively correlated

with OCB ($r = .25, p < .001$).

Parcels' asymmetry indexes were checked before estimating measurement and structural models. Asymmetry ranged between -1.21 and $.44$, while kurtosis between -0.43 and 1.22 , showing that assumptions of normality were not violated (i.e., values were below the ± 1.96 cut-off as recommended by Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006) except for Vigor's second parcel's value (2.22) that was slightly higher than the recommended threshold.

Given the cross-sectional nature of our study, before estimating the structural model, a measurement model was estimated in order to provide evidence about the distinctiveness of study variables and the reduced effect of common method variance. We compared a one-factor model, with all parcels loading on the same factor, with a five-factor model with parcels loading on their respective latent variable.

As Table 2 shows, there is a remarkable improvement from the one-factor model to the five-factor model in terms of goodness of fit indexes, thus adequate empirical support for the distinctiveness between study variables allowed to estimate a structural model.

A structural model encompassing hypothesized relations between study variables was estimated. Perception of HRM practices was associated with perceived organizational

Table 1 – Study variables' descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1) Perception of HRM practices	2.80 (.67)	(.90)				
2) Perceived organizational support	3.05 (.81)	.79***	(.90)			
3) Work engagement	4.25 (.60)	.40***	.39***	(.90)		
4) Leader-member exchange	3.43 (.83)	.44***	.47***	.32***	(.92)	
5) Organizational citizenship behaviors	4.13 (.43)	.19***	.21***	.51***	.25***	(.73)

*** $p < .001$; Cronbach's alphas on the diagonal.

Table 2 – Comparison between measurement models

	χ^2	<i>df</i>	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	NNFI
One-factor model	2181.15	90	.239	.152	.49	.41
Five-factor model	172.93	80	.053	.033	.98	.97

Legenda. *df* = degree of freedom; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; NNFI = Non-Normed Fit Index.

support, work engagement, and leader-member exchange. Conversely, these three latter variables were associated with organizational citizenship behaviors (see Figure 1).

The structural model showed satisfactory goodness of fit indexes ($\chi^2 = 221.57$, $df = 84$, RMSEA = .063, SRMR = .063, CFI = .97, NNFI = .96) and thus was retained. In particular, perception of HRM practices positively predicted perceived organizational support ($\beta = .70$, $p < .001$), work engagement ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$), and leader-member exchange ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$). In turn, organizational citizenship behaviors were positively predicted by work engagement ($\beta = .62$, $p < .001$) and leader-member exchange ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$), while perceived organizational support was not a significant predictor ($\beta = -.06$, *ns*). Perception of HRM practices explained 49% in perceived organizational support's, 21% in work engagement's, and 24% in leader-member exchange's variances, while 40% in organizational citizenship behaviors' variance was explained by the predictors. In regard to indirect effects, it was found that only work engagement mediated ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) the association of perception of HRM practices with organizational citizenship behaviors.

CONCLUSIONS

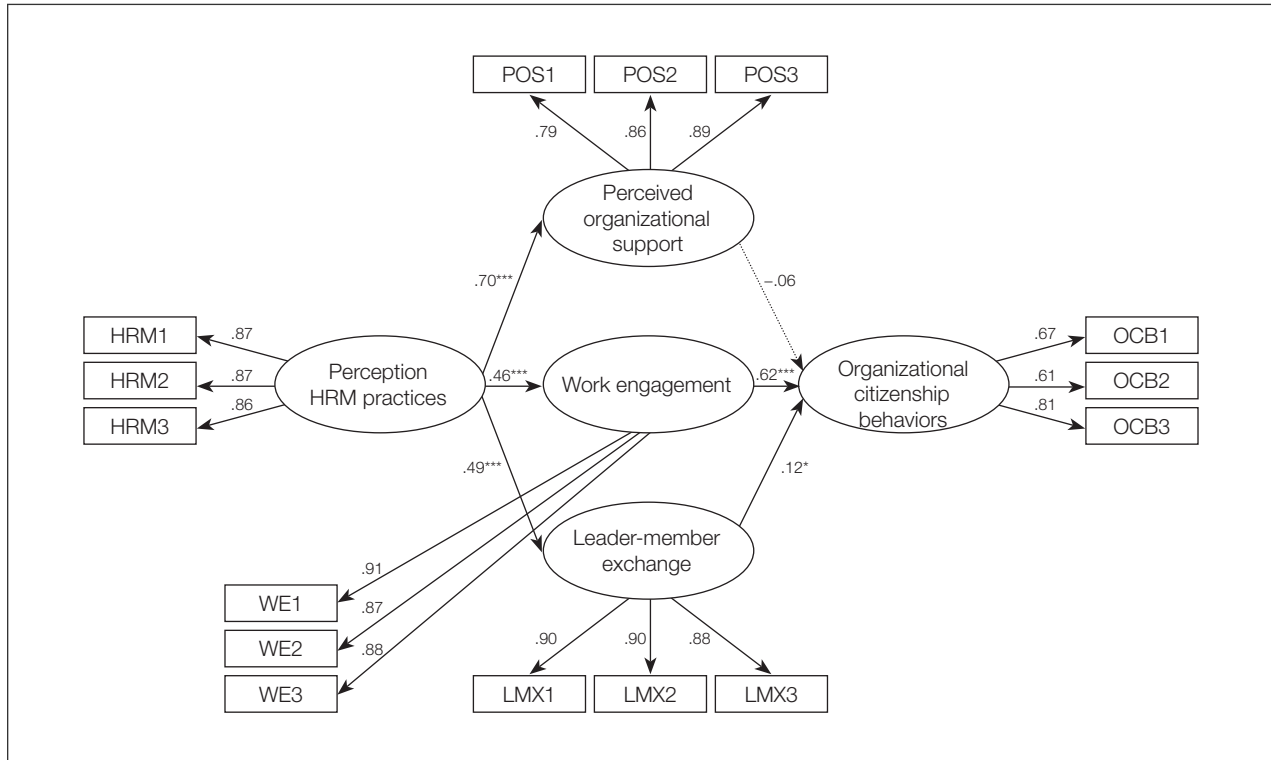
The main aim of the study was to examine the relationship between employees' perception of HRM practices and organizational citizenship behaviors, assessing the mediating role of work engagement, leader-member exchange and perceived organizational support.

Discussion of findings

Findings partially confirmed the hypotheses and showed interesting implications both for theory development and HRM professional practice.

Accordingly, results suggested that HRM practices were positively associated with OCB even if only work engagement (H_1) acted as significant mediating variables. In line with the study by Alfes, Shantz and colleagues (2013), results from the present study in the Italian context showed that work engagement could be considered as a strategic factor to indirectly enhance organizational performance if combined with a positive perception of HRM practices. This result could be precious for HR specialists highlighting that there is no automatic connection between the development of people-based HRM practices and employees' positive organizational behaviors, if there is no personal affective investment in work experience. Yet, direct effects of HRM practices on work engagement and of work engagement on organizational citizenship were found but HRM practices and organizational citizenship were significantly related only through work engagement. Therefore, nurturing and supporting workers' engagement toward one's own work could be a concrete suggestion for HRM policy-makers.

Conversely, neither perceived organizational support nor LMX were found to be significant mediators (H_2 and H_3). Yet, results about POS are controversial since it could act as a significant moderator of the relationship between HRM practices and OCB (Alfes, Shantz et al., 2013), as a mediator (Asgari, Silon, Ahmad & Samah, 2008), as an

Figure 1 – Structural model between study variables

*** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$.

antecedent of job-related affect (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) or as an outcome of positive people management practices (Ahmadi, Tajabadi, Nagahi & Nagahisarchoghaei, 2014). On the other hand, research on LMX showed that it certainly plays a crucial role in strengthening HRM perceptions, encouraging employees to engage into citizenship behaviors because of a positive P/O relationship, also in the health sector (Casimir, Ngee, Ng, Wang & Ooi, 2014; Trincherro, Borgonovi & Farr-Wharton, 2014). However, results from the present study did not confirm this hypothesis. A possible explanation could call into cause the peculiarities of health care occupations that are generally craft-based and sometimes characterized by a low need for management and supervision (Leggat, Bartram & Stanton, 2011). Accordingly, professionals in the healthcare sector (both medical and paramedical staff) generally prefer

working autonomously and might have difficulties in fitting to a context that often requires teamwork, coordination, and integrated work processes.

Therefore, this is an aspect that could certainly be taken into account by future research in order to plan and perform an effective people-based HRM plan also in this specific sector.

Hence, the study was aimed to examine how employees perceive HRM strategies and not simply HRM practices as they are intended by the organization (Alfes, Shantz et al., 2013). This difference is highly important since examining what employees think about the efforts made to value their contribution could help organizations and consequently managers to concretely harmonize practices to employees' needs and therefore to create a shared vision of the organizational aims that would lead to higher performance.

Limitations and directions for future research

Besides the significant results depicted above, some limitations need to be addressed to suggest potential future avenues for research.

First, the study was cross-sectional and referred to a limited and most specific professional category (i.e., healthcare employees), therefore results cannot not be generalized. Yet, as underlined in the discussion section the homogeneity of the sample could also be seen as a limitation because of some peculiarities of their work often experienced as a vocation (e.g. high levels of work engagement, high autonomy, scarce occasions for teamwork, etc.) and by the specific organization of processes and practices even with reference to HRM in that concrete context. Indeed, results of the present study should be further specified by further investigations considering a wider sample of workers, belonging to different professional categories, and considering both employees in the public and private sector.

Although issues concerning common method variance were controlled both statistically (i.e., through confirmatory factor analyses contrasting a single-factor model against a five factor model) and procedurally (e.g., items were randomized with the questionnaire) (Podsakoff, Bommer, Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 2006), a longitudinal research design, addressed to follow the same organization across time, would have allowed to assess the impact of specific organizational change interventions (e.g., business process reengineering, staff acquisition and/or downsizing, leadership transitions, etc.) on employees' perception of HRM practices and therefore on their organizational behaviors.

Second, self-report measures were used for this study to collect information on HRM practices and employees' attitudes and behaviors toward the organization, relying on a partial and subjective view of the variables investigated. Future research could address this limitation by integrating some objective measures of the same constructs (e.g. employees' participation to HR development and training initiatives, supervisors' assessments and/or comparison with organizational Key Performance Indexes, KPI).

A final limitation that also opens avenues for future research was linked to the temporal collocation of the data collected. The study was conducted in 2017 before the pandemic emergency which profoundly impacted on organizations. Accordingly, even if some most

recent studies in the field still confirm also in this "new normal" the pivotal role of HRM practices in influencing employees' positive organizational behaviors (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke & Zimmermann, 2020; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), the radical transformations occurred within organizations, following to the adoption of remote working modalities and to the consequent emergence of e-leadership patterns, will heavily influence employees' followership, on team identification, on work engagement and consequently on citizenship behaviors. Therefore, in the long run, results coming from the present study will not probably mirror the radical changes occurred to organizational models and behaviors in the post-pandemic context

As recently suggested by some scholars in the field (Hamouche, 2021; Ngoc Su, Tra, Huynh, Nguen & O'Mahony, 2021) within this frame, the unpredictability of the organizational scenario will lead to a complete revision of HRM practices that will surely contribute to redesign some employees' behaviors. Performance management, for example, should no more be bound to the accomplishment of tasks in a definite working time and space rather it should be redesigned as a "smart" management of objectives, that could follow the employees' needs. Similarly training and development practices should be addressed to equip employees with the technical skills as well as with soft skills (e.g., change management, self-efficacy, resilience) that could help workers in mastering technology and in enhancing their employability potential which is particularly special in times of crisis. Furthermore, organizational communication will become even more important to support change, to share a new digital culture, and to motivate employees to cope with these transformations. In this perspective, HRM efficacy is linked to some critical figures: managers and leaders. They could act as a positive model inspiring employees to change, motivating them to react to this difficult moment and deeply affecting trust and engagement. Yet, new flexible leadership styles need to be developed to balance and adjust the individual to the organizational needs.

As a result, although interesting, findings coming from the present study paved the way to future research investigating if and to what extent some pivotal psycho-social constructs like work engagement and organizational citizenship would still be nurtured by traditional people and team management models and in turn would impact on the same positive organizational behaviours.

Implications for practitioners

Given the limitations described above, this study suggested possible implications mainly in terms of organizational practices. Findings highlighted a positive mediated relationship between employees' perception of HRM practices and organizational citizenship behaviors. In fact, this result was enriched by the evidence that work engagement could fruitfully contribute to mediate this relationship. Conversely, although previous evidence coming from the studies reviewed in the paper and confirming the mediating role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between HRM practices and different kind of employee outcomes (Nasurdin, Hemdi & Phei-Guat, 2008), the present study showed a non-significant contribution of this variable to the research model investigated.

However, the main findings supported a general conclusion about the crucial role played by HRM practices in influencing performance and a positive P/O relationship, thus encouraging organizations to adopt and to maintain a people-based approach to human resource management. Yet, one of the main practical implications that could derive from the study is related to the need to reconsider some core HRM functions such as recruiting, training and development initiatives, capitalizing these practices

as precious occasions to communicate with employees, to motivate and engage them and to share the goals and objectives that concretely make the sense of what they do every day.

This implication is fully attuned with results coming from the most recent 'sustainable performance paradigm' (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012) supporting the role played by people-based HRM practices in designing healthy organizations. According to this view, organizations are the people who live in them: only through their engagement, their motivations, thanks to their skills and knowledge the organization could meet its goals. Considered this evidence and moving from the results discussed above, the main current challenge for HR management is to know the people who work for the organization, to know their motivations, their beliefs, the meaning they attach to work. This information is essential to plan actions and practices that could best interpret their needs and their features, finally reinforcing the person/organization fit.

Conflict of interests. On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Data availability. The dataset generated during and/or analysed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Informed consent. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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