

High-Performance human resource practices: implications for discretionary work behaviour in higher educational institutions

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Odoch Hojops, Monica Mirembe Mukoza, Barbara N. Kayondo and
Rehema Namono
Makerere University Business School, Kampala, Uganda

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Abstract

Purpose – Higher education institutions discretionally participate in THE training of citizens for a sustainable world. Empirical evidence argues the synergetic effect of high-performance human resource practices (H-PHRPs) on its outcomes. Scholars have, however, questioned the appropriateness and applicability of H-PHRPs in developing economies, one of the eye-catching debates being the implicit universality of H-PHRPs. Literature has also banded the H-PHRPS and established the antecedent role of H-PHRPS on its outcomes. This study aims to examine the relative importance of H-PHRPs on discretionary work behavior (DWB) using a sample from public university employees to confirm the external validity of H-PHRPS constructs by replicating the findings in an Eastern setting and, more so, a developing nation like Uganda.

Design/methodology/approach – In the study, the authors used relative analysis to determine the role of H-PHRPs in enhancing DWB. The authors examined performance-based compensation, employee training and development, employee empowerment, competence-based performance appraisal and merit-based promotion as the H-PHRPs. The authors selected a sample of employees from Ugandan Universities used an explanatory study design to test the antecedent role of H-PHRPs on DWB.

Findings – The research results show that individual H-PHRPs significantly affect DWB. As regards the relative importance of H-PHRPs on DWB, the findings further reveal that H-PHRPs predicts DWB over and above its individual components.

Research limitations/implications – The authors gathered the data from public universities; therefore, when applied to a scenario of private universities, the conclusions might not hold up. Therefore, to confirm the results of the current study, future research can take private universities into account. Although, the study was

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cross-sectional, high performance human resource strategies in an organization may evolve over time. This work paves the way for future longitudinal studies in the same field of study.

Practical implications – This research presents an understanding justification for human resources management strategies. Organizations' managers should improve the morale of their employees through various management practices by strategically devising human resource practices geared toward enhancing employee DWB. Organizational managers ought to prioritize the high-performance practices in order of relative importance in enhancing employee DWB. By prioritizing human resource practices, like training and pay for performance, universities are able to proportionately direct distinctive focus on human resource practices that enhance employee behaviors.

Originality/value – The findings of the research have both empirical and theoretical significance. This is an innovative study that aims to determine the relative relevance of H-PHRPs on DWB by using a sample taken from Ugandan public universities which is a developing nation. From a theoretical standpoint, the study enhances the practicability of the social exchange theory by establishing that employees exhibit DWB to reciprocate the organization for the H-PHRPs provided by the organization.

Keywords Human resource practices, Training and development, Competence-based performance appraisal, Continuity, Discretionary work behavior, Employee empowerment, Merit-based promotion

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Universities are currently facing a wave change and the extra efforts are required by the staff and more so, the frontline employees for continuity of university operations (Ahmad, 2020; Namono *et al.*, 2022). For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic required employees to take on additional responsibilities, such as organizing online teaching materials and redesigning curricula to adapt to the changes (Namono *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, discretionary work behavior (DWB) became essential for the continued operation of educational institutions. According to Burnard *et al.* (2018) effective utilization of human resource (HR) enhance the organization's ability to resiliently execute its work by effectively using its resources (such as H-PHRPs) to achieve organizational goals (such as DWB). In this study, we examined the influence of specific high-performance human resource practices (H-PHRPs) on DWB. The study established the antecedent role of H-PHRPs, which included performance-based compensation, employee training and development, employee empowerment, competence-based performance appraisal and merit-based promotion. These practices were selected based on their empirical significance in enhancing employee outcomes in various organizational contexts (Cho *et al.*, 2006; Fei and Aun, 2018). Each practice was hypothesized to have a unique impact on DWB, reflecting the diverse ways in which employees perceive and reciprocate organizational support. By focusing on these specific H-PHRPs, this study aims to provide a robust understanding of their relative importance in promoting DWB, particularly within the context of higher education institutions in a developing country setting.

DWB is contextual performance, which involves taking on additional responsibilities outside of those required for the task at hand (Anjum *et al.*, 2022). Discretionary employees are able to perform exceptionally for the organization to realize its goals.

Academic staff members, who are the main employees of a university, are responsible for adapting to the new teaching demands to comply with the new work requirements (Namono *et al.*, 2022). This discretionary behavior requires university employees to go beyond their normal teaching approaches (Gonzales, 2016). Scholars such as Stamper and Masterson (2002) conceptualize DWB as a voluntary decision made by employees to engage in job and work activities that go beyond their formal or contractual obligations. These behaviors can be diverse and may include obligations prescribed by superiors (Gonzales, 2016). Regardless

of whether they are prescribed or not, employees willingly exhibit DWB, which shows their sense of responsibility toward their organizations (Stamper and Masterson, 2002).

From a theoretical perspective, individuals exhibit DWB based on the norm of reciprocity as posited in the social exchange theory (SET) (Kim and Qu, 2020; Gould-Williams, 2007). Individuals probably exhibit discretionary behaviors when they perceive that their organization has provided them with valuable resources such as those embedded in H-PHRPs (i.e. rewards and training). Prior scholars reveal that H-PHRPs generate mutually reinforcing synergetic effects (Dunford and Snell, 2001; Scholarios and Harley, 2000; Chadwick, 2010). It should be noted that SET provides for variability in the nature of exchanges (Erdogan and Enders, 2007). This study argues that different H-PHRPs may generate different perception of exchanges, and employees may respond differently to various practices based on their perception of what they receive in return. Hence unpacking the various H-PHRPs by establishing the relative importance of each H-PHRP helps to understand better the subjective assessment of how employees value the reciprocation of the exchange of their discretionary behavior with the different H-PHRPs. Our argument is supported by the empirical works of Gould-Williams and Davies (2005) who posits that human resource practices vary on their influence on employee outcomes.

The postulations of the norm of reciprocity embedded in the SET is in resonance with the empirical results of earlier researcher who established the antecedent role of H-PHRPs on employee DWB. For instance, studies by Appaw-Agbola *et al.* (2020), Elorza *et al.* (2016), Obeidat *et al.* (2016) and Alqudah *et al.* (2022) emphasize that the H-PHRPs act as a motivator for the employees to pay back the organization by exhibiting discretionary behavior.

To enhance employee performance, effective HPHRPs comprise of a range of integrated HR practices that offer opportunities for growth, training and rewards (Barnard and Rodgers, 2000; Messersmith *et al.*, 2018). The value attached by employees to each H-PHRP significantly vary and so does the DWB displayed by employees. Hence, employees may reciprocate the organization (by exhibiting DWB) based on the subjective value attached to the particular H-PHRP extended to the employee. We, therefore, argue that an organization can enhance the DWB of employees when it strategically prioritizes the correct blend of the H-PHRPs which employees attach more value as the reciprocation (in form of DWB) will also be higher (Beugelsdijk, 2008).

According to scholars Wright and Nishii (2013), our argument of variation in exchange is supported by the fact that the impact of the signal depends on the employee's perception of H-PHRP, which can vary due to individual differences among employees. This variability can have implications for behavior. The norm of reciprocity involves an economic exchange that explains how much efforts employees invest to portray DWBs that are commensurate with the H-PHRPs the employees are reciprocating (Appaw-Agbola *et al.*, 2020). This may explain why studies on H-PHRPs on DWB are mainly directed to economic sectors (see Vatankhah *et al.*, 2017; Elorza *et al.*, 2016) with limited focus on the education industry.

Since H-PHRPs and DWB operate across national, industry and company perspectives that are each characterized by prevailing values, existing research have tended to have a Western perspective, which makes it necessary to take a developing country perspective (Santhanam *et al.*, 2015). These factors can include cultural norms, resource constraints and organizational structures (Bamberger, 2008; Rabl *et al.*, 2014). Understanding the relative importance of H-PHRPs under these circumstances is crucial for tailoring HR management strategies to the specific needs of such economies. Hence, this research provides valuable insights for HR practitioners and policymakers seeking to enhance employee engagement and productivity in similar settings.

Further still, while existing literature acknowledges a connection between H-PHRPs and DWB (Appaw-Agbola *et al.*, 2020; Elorza *et al.*, 2016; Alqudah *et al.*, 2022), most previous studies have treated H-PHRPs as a unified construct without delving into the distinct impact of each practice. There is a lack of granularity, which masks the potentially varying influence of H-PHRMs on DWB. Therefore, a notable research gap exists in comprehensively exploring the relative significance of different H-PHRPs (e.g. training and development, competence-based performance appraisal, employee empowerment, performance-based compensation and merit-based promotion) on DWB.

The novelty of this research is practical and theoretical. Theoretically, the research enriches the SET by establishing that the norm of reciprocity depends on the subjective assessment of the cost-benefit analysis by the involved parties. For instance, in this study, employees subjectively assess the value they attach to each of the H-PHRPs and exhibit DWB commensurately in line with the value attached to the gain from the particular H-PHRP. Practically, by dis-aggregating the different organizational H-PHRPs, the current study delves deep to understand the usefulness of each of the components of H-PHRPs which helps managers to prioritize and direct its resources to the most influential practices by proportionately allocating its resources. The study enriches the applicability of HR practices in organizations by establishing the relative importance of the different HR practices and strategically direct the organizational resources to leveraging the most useful resources to the organization. As a result, the study offers helpful insights on choosing the focus of various interventions meant to improve DWB while proportionately prioritizing to invest more resources in H-PHRPs most valued by employees. The study also provides external validity of the study constructs by testing H-PHRPs on DWB using a service setting perspective like universities in a developing country like Uganda since developing economies like Uganda often exhibit unique contextual factors that may influence the effectiveness of H-PHRPs.

The article's remainder is systematized in three sections. Section one describes the theoretical anchor of the study, relate HPHRP and its four dimensions of motivation, compensation, growth opportunities and training to DWB. Section two explains methodological issues, including the variability in measures, sample and the analytical approaches. In the third section, we present the study findings and discussions, contributions and recommendations.

2. Hypothesis development

2.1 Theoretical review

Social exchange theory: this study is anchored on the SET by Thibaut and Kelly (2003). According to the social exchange theory, human relationships are based on a subjective cost-benefit analysis, where both parties consider the advantages and disadvantages of the relationship (Zafirovski, 2005). In the context of the workplace, economic exchange is defined by the contractual agreement between employees and their employer, such as promotion, training and motivation (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004).

The SET postulates that employees exhibit discretionary behaviors with a perception that their organization has provided them with valuable resources, rewards or benefits via H-PHRPs (Laurent *et al.*, 2021; Pellegrini *et al.*, 2018). These practices create a sense of obligation or debt in employees, encouraging them to engage in actions that benefit the organization. H-PHRPs often include employee investments which include, performance-based compensation, empowerment initiatives and training and development programs.

The SET allows for different types of exchanges and recognizes that different H-PHRPs may induce different perceptions of exchange (Cook *et al.*, 2013). Employees' responses to various practices may vary based on their perceptions of what they receive in exchange. The

theory offers a helpful conceptual framework for comprehending how H-PHRPs foster a sense of reciprocity and affect DWB. It suggests that when employees perceive that their organization provides valuable resources and treats them fairly through H-PHRPs, they are more likely to engage in discretionary behaviors that benefit the organization.

2.2 Empirical literature review

HR activities that are strategically driven should be implemented to boost organizational performance, according to management researchers (Buller and McEvoy, 2012). The concept of high-performance work practices (H-PHRPs) has been extensively studied, with researchers like Pfeffer (1998) and Huselid (1995) identifying key practices that enhance organizational performance. More recent studies, such as those by Appelbaum *et al.* (2000) and Boxall and Purcell (2016), have further explored the specific impacts of these practices on employee behaviors, including DWB. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these practices function within the context of higher education institutions, particularly in developing countries. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the relative importance of individual H-PHRPs on DWB, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of their application in diverse organizational settings.

The term “high performance” human resource practices has recently been used to describe these activities. They are frequently seen as a collection of cogent, interconnected HR practices intended to support desired work outcomes, such as DWB. In this study, we examine five H-PHRPs from the list of HRM best practices created by Fei *et al.* (2018), which have been widely used in earlier studies (Cho *et al.*, 2006; Messersmith *et al.*, 2018). We concentrate on how the five HPWPs – performance-based compensation, competency-based performance appraisal, employee empowerment and merit-based promotion – affect DWB.

According to research by Fei *et al.* (2018) employees view the availability of training as a sign that their employer cares about their professional development and values them. As a result, training frequently enhances workers’ attitudes toward their jobs and, consequently, extra-role conduct such DWB (Gavino *et al.*, 2012; Lowry *et al.*, 2002). The social exchange hypothesis states that substantial amounts of training opportunities can be seen as social exchanges between employers and employees that foster commitment among the workforce. Employee commitment, in turn, inspires them to support the business by going above and beyond the requirements of their jobs, including engaging in DWB. By including employees in decision-making, empowerment is also intended to increase their abilities and competencies (Kumar *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, pay decisions have a significant impact on employee motivation (Sitopu *et al.*, 2021). An objective, logical and systematic method of managing employee performance is performance appraisal (Sahay and Kaur, 2021). Employees are likely to be strongly motivated to perform better if they are promoted from within the company (Kathina and Bula, 2021; Pangaribuan *et al.*, 2022).

This study argues that the reciprocation is based on the subjective assessment of the value attached to a particular H-PHRP by the employees based on SET notion of variability in exchange which asserts that different H-PHRPs may generate different perceptions of exchange, and employees may respond differently to various practices based on their perceptions of what they receive in return. While previous studies, such as those by Wright and Nishii (2013) and Kehoe and Wright (2013), have explored the relationship between H-PHRPs and employee outcomes, this research provides a unique contribution by focusing on the higher education sector in a developing country. The findings suggest that the impact of H-PHRPs on DWB may differ in this context, offering new insights into how these practices can be tailored to enhance employee behavior in resource-constrained environments.

Additionally, there is a tendency to treat H-PHRPs as a homogenous construct, overlooking the nuanced impacts of individual practices (Kehoe and Wright, 2013). This study addresses these gaps by providing a context-specific analysis of H-PHRPs in Ugandan Universities and by disaggregating the practices to explore their individual effects on DWB. Although the interaction of the H-PHRPs is necessary to yield robust results (Kehoe and Wright, 2013), we need to understand the relative importance of the H-PHRPs so as to strategize for proportionately investing in organizational resources to the H-PHRMPs which employees attach more value to achieve commensurate reciprocation from the employees in line with the SET notion of reciprocation.

Therefore, we hypothesize:

- H1.* HPHRPs predict DWB over and above its components.
- H1a.* Employee training and development significantly predicts DWB.
- H1b.* Employee empowerment significantly predicts DWB.
- H1c.* Performance-based compensation significantly predicts DWB.
- H1d.* Competence-based performance appraisal significantly predicts DWB.
- H1e.* Merit-based promotion significantly predicts DWB.

3. Methods

3.1 Design and sample characteristics

To test hypotheses, a cross-sectional study methodology was adopted. This research sought to establish and draw conclusions about the antecedent role of H-PHRPs on DWB (Hair *et al.*, 2019). This design was chosen due to its efficiency in gathering data from a large sample within a relatively short timeframe, which is particularly useful in contexts like higher education where employee behaviors may be influenced by current institutional policies and practices. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to academic staff across ten public universities in Uganda. The 3,424 academic staff members employed by ten public universities in Uganda were the target population (National Council for Higher Education, 2018). Using the sample size calculation method from Cochran (1977), a sample of 346 respondents was selected. Respondents from each institution were selected using a simple random sampling method. For survey research, the response rate of 317 (91.62%) was sufficient (Rea and Parker, 1997). According to the demographic profile of the respondents, male made up the majority with 206 (65%), while female made up 111 (35.0%). The majority (42.6%) were between the ages of 30 and 39, followed by those between the ages of 40 and 49 (15.8%), people over 50 (24.7%) and people between the ages of 20 and 29 (14.8%). This demonstrates that the majority of respondents (more than 73.2%) fall within the age bracket where discretionary behavior is energetically displayed. Regarding tenure, 30.3% of the respondents had held their current position for a period of time between 6 and 10 years, 26.5% for a period between one and five, 24% for a period between 11 and 15 and 10.7% for a period between 16 and 20 years. In total, 8.5% had spent more than 50 years in their current position. The majority of the respondents had been employed by their respective institutions for more than five years, indicating that they had the necessary background knowledge to understand the context of the organization's activities.

3.2 Measures

With some modifications to the study setting, preexisting instruments from the literature were used to measure the study variables. The study constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In this study, we focused on five specific H-PHRPs: performance-based compensation, employee training and development, employee empowerment, competence-based performance appraisal and merit-based promotion. Each of these practices was operationalized using established scales adapted from previous research. For example, performance-based compensation was measured using a scale developed by Goodman and Svyantek (1999), which includes items such as “This university makes all payments due to us in a timely manner.” Similarly, employee empowerment was assessed through a modified version of the scale by Spreitzer (1995), with items like “I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.” We adapted 16 questions developed by Goodman and Svyantek (1999) were used to measure DWB. The DWB items, for instance, might read, “I assist other employees with their work when they are absent” or “I volunteer to do things not explicitly required by the job.”

3.3 Validity and reliability

We used factor analysis, the content validity index, and the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient to ensure the validity and reliability of our research tools. To guarantee both content validity and face validity, we performed a pilot survey with ten academic staff members while taking the context into consideration. We used confirmatory factor analysis to assess the relative contributions of each scale’s items after doing a dimensional analysis of each scale. We kept all of the research variable factors for further analysis because they all loaded above the 0.5 acceptable level. According to Field (2009), the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for all variables were above the standard cutoff of 0.7. The results are presented in [Table 1](#).

3.4 Usefulness analysis

We did a usefulness analysis by contrasting the H-PHRP (a fundamental construct in this study) with other variables such as compensation, staff welfare, training and growth possibilities to assess the usefulness of a new scale in predicting variation in outcome variable beyond current measures. A series of regressions were used to predict the criterion variable, DWB and the most “useful” variable in enhancing the outcome variable was found.

To determine whether one high-performing work practice was more “useful” than the current evaluations of each aspect, we also used usefulness analysis to analyze the utility of each of its individual qualities. To accomplish this, we used a regression to insert each individual component – employee empowerment, training and development, performance-based compensation, competence-based performance appraisal and merit-based promotion – into. The composite H-PHRPs were then entered into the regression to determine the increase in multiple correlation values.

These results were contrasted with those obtained in the scenario in which the construct H-PHRPs came last in the regression equation, followed by the individual component variables. [Judge et al. \(2003\)](#) also used this comparable methodology to assess core-self-evaluation.

4. Results

The results in [Table 2](#) display the means, standard deviations and correlations of the study’s variables. There are positive correlations between age ($r = 0.12, p.05$), tenure ($r = 0.28, p.01$), HPHRP ($r = 0.29, p.01$), motivation ($r = 0.24, p.01$), growth potential ($r = 0.25, p.01$) and DWB ($r = 0.14, p.05$) of employees and education level. Tenure is positively associated with education ($r = 0.24, p.01$), age ($r = 0.31, p.01$), performance-based pay ($r = 0.16, p.01$)

Table 1. Validity and reliability

Construct	Loadings	Composite reliability	Cronbach's α	(AVE)
Employee empowerment (EE)		0.97	0.87	0.55
EE1	0.72			
EE2	0.70			
EE3	0.74			
EE4	0.77			
EE5	0.75			
EE7	0.71			
EE8	0.73			
Employee training (ET)		0.88	0.82	0.63
ET1	0.78			
ET2	0.73			
ET3	0.72			
ET4	0.78			
ET5	0.94			
ET6	0.76			
Performance-based compensation (P-BC)			0.74	0.57
P-BC1	0.72			
P-BC2	0.74			
P-BC3	0.71			
P-BC4	0.77			
Competence-based performance appraisal (C-BPA)		0.78	0.86	0.77
C-BPA1	0.83			
C-BPA2	0.78			
C-BPA3	0.79			
C-BPA4	0.84			
Merit-based promotion (M-BP)				
M-BP1				
M-BP2				
M-BP3				
M-BP4				
Discretionary work behavior (DWB)		0.98	0.72	0.67
DWB1	0.89			
DWB2	0.87			
DWB3	0.85			
DWB4	0.88			

Source: Survey data

and competence-based performance appraisal ($r = 0.16, p.01$). Employee empowerment ($r = 0.23, p.01$), performance-based compensation ($r = 0.32, p.01$), performance-based training and development ($r = 0.27, p.01$) and merit-based promotion ($r = 0.21, p.01$) are also positively correlated with DWB.

4.1 Usefulness analysis

According to *H1*, H-PHRP and DWB have a stronger relationship compared to any of their individual dimensions. In this study, we conducted a usefulness analysis, which is similar to previous research by [Judge et al. \(2003\)](#), [Sweetman et al. \(2011\)](#) and [Darlington \(1990\)](#). The purpose of the analysis is to determine which variable (employee empowerment, employee training and development, competence-based performance appraisal, performance-

Table 2. Correlation results

	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Age	3.06	0.72	-										
2 Gender ^a	-	-	-0.02	-									
3 Education	2.52	0.54	0.12*	-0.03	-								
4 Tenure	2.40	1.09	0.31**	0.08	0.28**	-							
5 Qualification	2.13	1.19	0.08	0.05	-0.07	0.24**	-						
6 ET	3.63	1.01	-0.006	-0.004	0.24**	0.10	-0.03	-					
7 P-BC	4.02	0.944	0.07	-0.03	0.25**	0.16**	0.03	0.45**	-				
8 C-BPA	3.82	0.84	0.03	-0.03	0.29**	0.16**	-0.005	0.86**	0.84**	-			
9 M-BP	3.98	0.734	-0.09	-0.04	0.14*	-0.03	-0.04	0.32**	0.21**	0.31**	-		
10 EE	3.87	0.61	-0.005	-0.03	0.15*	-0.01	-0.03	0.22**	0.11**	0.33**	0.11**	0.12**	-
11 DWB	3.92	0.71	-0.07	-0.03	0.14	-0.03	-0.02	0.27**	0.35**	0.32**	0.21**	0.23**	-

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Source: Survey data

based compensation and merit-based promotion in this case) is the most effective in predicting the variance in the criterion variable (DWB in this study). The analysis is conducted in two steps. First, the comparison variable is loaded into the regression model. Then, the subsequent variable is added to check if the model can predict any further meaningful variance. The procedure is modified accordingly.

The findings from the usefulness analysis, as presented in Table 3, indicate that H-PHRPs are significant predictors of DWB. The inclusion of H-PHRPs in the regression model contributed to a significant increase in the explained variance of DWB beyond that of the individual components. For example, the impact of employee empowerment ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$) and training and development ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$) were significant, but when H-PHRPs as a composite variable were added, the overall predictive power increased. This suggests that while individual practices are important, the collective implementation of H-PHRPs has a more substantial effect on DWB. Thus *H1* was supported.

4.2 Regression results

Hierarchical regression was used to establish the influence of individual dimensions of HPHRPs on DWB. The analysis was structured in a step-by-step manner, where each dimension of HPHRPs was added sequentially to assess its unique contribution to predicting DWB and to test the corresponding hypotheses. Model 1 included the control variables, such as age, gender and tenure, which collectively accounted for 12% of the variance in DWB ($R^2 = 0.12$). This model served as the baseline for assessing the additional explanatory power provided by the HPHRPs. In Model 2, Employee Empowerment was introduced as an independent variable. The inclusion of this variable resulted in a significant increase in the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.08$, $p <$

Table 3. Usefulness analysis

	DWB
Employee empowerment	0.19
HPHRP	0.09*
HPHRP	0.27
Employee empowerment	0.01*
Training and development	0.23
HPHRP	0.05*
HPHRP	0.27
Training and development	0.09*
Competence-based performance appraisal	0.17
HPHRP	0.08*
HPHRP	0.19
Competence-based performance appraisal	0.01*
Performance-based compensation	0.22
HPHRP	0.02*
HPHRP	0.21
Performance-based compensation	0.04*
Merit-based promotion	0.18
HPHRP	0.07*
HPHRP	0.25
Merit-based promotion	0.01*

Notes: Entries in the table are multiple correlations (Multiple R). Numbers in the second stage are changed in multiple correlations (ΔR)

Source: Survey data

0.01), with a standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.01$). These results indicate that employee empowerment is a strong and significant predictor of DWB, supporting *H1a*. Therefore, *H1a* is accepted, confirming that Employee Empowerment positively impacts DWB. Model 3 added Training and Development as a predictor. The inclusion of this variable further increased the explained variance by an additional 8% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.08, p < 0.01$). The standardized coefficient for Training and Development was significant ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.01$), suggesting that opportunities for training and development are crucial in encouraging employees to engage in discretionary behaviors. This finding supports *H1b*, leading to the conclusion that *H1b* is accepted: Training and Development positively impact DWB. Next, Model 4 incorporated Performance-Based Compensation into the regression model. This addition resulted in a 4% increase in the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04, p < 0.05$), with a standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.05$). The significant positive relationship between Performance-Based Compensation and DWB indicates that when compensation is tied to performance, employees are more likely to exhibit DWBs. Thus, *H1c* is accepted, confirming that Performance-Based Compensation positively influences DWB. In Model 5, merit-based promotion was included, contributing an additional 3% to the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03, p < 0.05$). The impact of merit-based promotion on DWB was also positive and significant ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.05$), suggesting that promotion systems based on merit enhance employees' willingness to go beyond their formal job requirements. Consequently, *H1d* is accepted, as Merit-Based Promotion positively impacts DWB. In Model 6, Competence-Based Performance Appraisal was added to the model. This further increased the explained variance by 5% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.05, p < 0.01$), with a standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.01$). This finding indicates that Competence-Based Performance Appraisal significantly predicts DWB, supporting *H1e*. Therefore, *H1e* is accepted, confirming that Competence-Based Performance Appraisal positively impacts DWB. The final model, which included all the dimensions of HPHRPs, explained a total of 47% of the variance in DWB ($R^2 = 0.47$). The findings indicate that each dimension of HPHRPs significantly contributes to DWB, with Employee Empowerment, Training and Development and Competence-Based Performance Appraisal showing the strongest effects. These results underscore the importance of implementing a comprehensive HR strategy that integrates multiple high-performance practices to create a work environment conducive to discretionary behavior.

5. Discussion and conclusion

University employees must carry out their work assignments in a way that goes above and beyond the ordinary if universities are to prosper in the current dynamic of the educational industry. Using data from the academic staff of Uganda's public universities, the study aimed to advance understanding of the relationship between high performance HR procedures and DWB. The study's findings demonstrated that H-PHRPs significantly enhance workers' discretionary behavior. The results of the study show that high performance HR management strategies improve employees' DWB. The findings of the study are consistent with those of Aboramadan *et al.* (2022), who discovered that high performance HR strategies improve employees' extra-role behaviors, such as DWB. The study's findings are likewise consistent with those of Aboramadan (2022) and Abboh *et al.* (2022), who found that H-PHRPs increase employees' willingness to perform above and above expectations. The findings of this study align with those of Elorza *et al.* (2016), who found that employee empowerment and performance-based compensation significantly influence DWB. However, this study diverges from Vatankhah *et al.* (2017) in its finding that merit-based promotion had a more pronounced impact in the higher education context. These differences may be attributed to the unique cultural and institutional factors present in Ugandan Universities, suggesting that

context-specific adaptations of H-PHRPs are necessary to maximize their effectiveness. The study's findings are further supported by the social exchange theory's arguments that employees behave discretionarily at work because they feel obligated to repay the organization for the H-PHRPs it has supplied to them.

While previous studies have found a direct link between high-performance human activities and employee DWB (such as Aboramadan *et al.*, 2022; Abboh *et al.*, 2022; Aboramadan, 2022), this study aims to determine the relative importance of high-performance HR Practices on DWB. Specifically, it analyzes the impact of various high-performance HR Practices on employee DWB within the context of a university setting.

Discretionary work behavior is particularly important in universities due to the dynamic nature of the education environment (Dehning, 2020). Therefore, this study concludes that high-performance HR Practices do significantly affect DWB. By contributing to the body of knowledge on DWB, this research adds value to the understanding of the relationship between high-performance HR Practices and employee behavior in a university context. Still, joint H-P-HRPs jointly influence the DWB if employees rather than in isolation. From the findings, we conclude that, in line with the tenets of social exchange theory, H-PHRPs enhances employees' DWB since the employees will reciprocate the organization in exchange for the H-PHRP provided to the employees by the organization.

6. Contributions of the study

6.1 Contribution to theory

This study offers valuable contributions to the theoretical understanding of DWB and H-PHRPs. First, it deepens the application of SET by demonstrating that the reciprocity between employees and organizations is influenced by the subjective value employees attach to specific H-PHRPs. Unlike previous studies that treated H-PHRPs as a unified construct, this research disaggregates these practices to explore their individual effects on DWB. By doing so, it highlights the variability in employee responses based on their perceptions of what they receive from the organization, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of the motivational processes underpinning DWB. Additionally, this study broadens the scope of H-PHRP research by examining these practices within the context of higher education institutions in a developing country. The findings challenge the assumption of universal applicability of H-PHRPs by showing that their effectiveness may vary depending on cultural and economic factors. This contribution is particularly significant for expanding the external validity of SET and H-PHRP constructs beyond their typical Western-centric focus, offering a theoretical framework that is more inclusive of diverse organizational contexts.

6.2 Contribution to practice

From a practical standpoint, this study provides actionable insights for HR management, particularly within higher education institutions. The research identifies specific H-PHRPs – such as employee training, empowerment and performance-based compensation – as critical drivers of DWB. By disaggregating these practices, the study offers HR practitioners a clearer understanding of which practices to prioritize to enhance employee engagement and performance. Furthermore, the study's findings suggest that managers in higher education institutions should consider the unique contextual factors of their organizations when designing and implementing HR practices. This is especially relevant in resource-constrained environments like those found in many developing countries. By tailoring H-PHRPs to align with both organizational goals and employee expectations, institutions can create a more supportive environment that encourages employees to exceed their formal job responsibilities. The study also provides practical recommendations for improving employee

motivation through merit-based promotion systems and targeted empowerment initiatives. These insights are particularly valuable for HR practitioners seeking to foster a culture of DWB, which is increasingly essential in the dynamic higher education environment.

7. Recommendations

The current study provides insightful recommendations for practicing managers. First, organizational managers should strategically prioritize those H-PHRPs that have the most significant impact on DWB. This study identified employee training and development, empowerment and performance-based compensation as key drivers of DWB. By focusing on these areas, institutions can enhance overall employee performance, engagement and organizational effectiveness. In addition, higher education institutions should consider implementing or strengthening merit-based promotion systems that reward DWB. Such systems can serve as a powerful motivator for employees, encouraging them to go beyond their formal job responsibilities. By linking promotions and rewards to demonstrated discretionary behaviors, institutions can foster a culture of excellence and commitment among their staff. It is also crucial that HR practices are tailored to the specific context of the organization. The study's findings suggest that the effectiveness of H-PHRPs may vary depending on cultural, economic and organizational factors. HR practitioners should customize these practices to align with the unique needs and goals of their institutions. For example, in resource-constrained environments, it may be beneficial to focus on low-cost but high-impact practices like employee empowerment and recognition programs.

8. Limitations of the study and areas for further

The limitations of this research form the basis for recommendations for additional research. First, a cross-sectional survey design was used in this study. Further research is needed to develop a comprehensive picture of discretionary behavioral change over time and to lessen the impact of time lags in causal effect studies because DWB is changing with time and the workplace environment. Second, due to the disparities in the favorable environment characteristics between private universities and the state universities in Uganda where the research was conducted, it is possible that the results cannot be generalized to those institutions. Therefore, more studies should be carried out to confirm the same results using data from a private university.

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Corresponding author

Odoch Hojops can be contacted at: hojopsodoch1@gmail.com