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High-Performance Work Systems, Organisational Culture and Innovative Work Behaviour in Ghanaian Higher Education: Integrating Ability–Motivation–Opportunity and Social Exchange Theories

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Abstract
This article integrates High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS), the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework, and Social Exchange Theory (SET) to explain how these practices stimulate innovative work behaviour (IWB). It addresses a key gap in literature: by examining how HPWS influence innovative behaviours through AMO mechanisms and social exchange processes within the Ghanaian higher education sector. Using a theory-building approach based on integrative literature synthesis, the study develops a model that connects HR practices, employee capability, motivation, opportunity, trust, fairness, perceived organisational support, and organisational culture. The AMO framework explains how HR practices build employee skills, encourage effort, and create room for participation, while SET shows how employees reciprocate supportive and fair treatment through discretionary behaviours such as idea generation, problem-solving, and implementation of new methods. The study argues that these HR practices are more effective when supported by a workplace culture encouraging trust, learning, collaboration, autonomy, and responsible risk-taking. Organisational culture shapes how employees interpret and respond to HR interventions. The study contributes to HRM and innovation literature by offering a model explaining what HR systems do and why employees respond in ways that support creative and improvement-oriented behaviour. For Ghanaian policymakers and university administrators, the study is important because higher education institutions face pressure to improve teaching quality, administrative efficiency, research productivity, and service delivery. The study recommends universities develop coherent HR systems that strengthen employee ability, motivation, and opportunity, while also promoting a supportive culture where staff feel trusted, fairly treated, and encouraged to contribute new ideas to improvement.

Introduction

In today's higher education environment, innovation has become a pivotal tool for effective governance as universities are constantly under pressure to improve teaching, research, administration and service delivery. Ghanaian universities are not spared from these expectations.

These expectations continue to increase despite resource constraints and bureaucratic procedures, making employees' innovative work behaviours (IWB) important.

Strategic human resource management plays a critical role in promoting innovative work behaviour by shaping employees' skills, motivation, and engagement with organisational goals. HPWS, through integrated practices such as recruitment, training, performance management, participation, communication, and rewards, enhance employees' ability, motivation, and opportunity to contribute. Research shows that HPWS are associated with improved job satisfaction, engagement, and organisational innovation, with greater impact when these practices are implemented as a coherent system rather than individually.

Organisational culture is one such context. Culture reflects the shared values, beliefs, and behavioural norms that guide how people think, interact, and respond to change. A culture that supports trust, openness, collaboration, and risk-taking is more likely to encourage innovation. Khan et al. (2018) note that culture not only shapes employee behaviour but also influences how HR practices are received. When employees operate in an innovation-supportive culture, they are more likely to use the autonomy, skills, and support provided through HPWS to generate and implement new ideas.

This article draws on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and the AMO framework to explain how HPWS influence innovative work behaviour. While SET highlights employee reciprocity toward supportive organisations, AMO explains how HR practices enhance employees' ability, motivation, and opportunities to contribute. It addresses gaps in previous HPWS–innovation research by examining the moderating role of organisational culture within Ghanaian higher education. It presents an integrated model showing how HR systems and workplace culture interact to foster employee innovation.

Conceptual Foundations

High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS)

High-performance work systems refer to integrated human resource practices designed to improve organisational effectiveness by strengthening employee contributions. The core assumption is that organisations achieve sustainable outcomes not only through technology or capital, but through the effective development and deployment of human resources. HPWS typically comprise selective recruitment, extensive training, performance management, employee involvement, compensation, and internal mobility (Han et al., 2019; Miao et al., 2020). These practices are not meant to function independently. Rather, they are implemented as reinforcing bundles that improve the consistency of the HR system and align people management with strategic goals.

The AMO framework is among the most widely used explanations for HPWS effectiveness (Appelbaum et al., 2000). In this view, employees perform better when they possess the ability to do the job, the motivation to apply effort, and the opportunity to participate meaningfully. Motivation-enhancing practices include rewards, promotion, and recognition. Opportunity-enhancing practices include participation, empowerment, teamwork, and knowledge sharing. When organisations combine these elements effectively, they create the conditions in which employees are better able to contribute beyond routine performance.

In contemporary organisations, HPWS are associated with innovation. By equipping employees with relevant skills, encouraging commitment, and giving them room to act, these systems help create environments where creativity, experimentation, and collaboration can flourish (Appelbaum et al., 2000). At the same time, the link between HPWS and innovation is not automatic. Findings vary across industries, cultures, and institutional settings. These differences suggest that the effectiveness of

HPWS depends not only on the formal practices themselves but also on how those practices are interpreted and supported within a given organisational context.

Organisational Culture

Organisational culture refers to the shared values and norms that shape employee behaviour and influence innovative work behaviour. Supportive cultures encourage creativity, collaboration and responsible risk-taking, whereas rigid cultures may discourage innovation (Khan et al., 2020; Martins & Terblanche, 2003). According to the Competing Values Framework, organisational culture comprises four types—clan, adhocracy, market and hierarchy—with clan and adhocracy cultures generally providing stronger support for employee innovation than market and hierarchy cultures (Heritage et al., 2014). These cultural types are useful for explaining why some organisational environments more strongly support employee initiative than others.

Within the Competing Values Framework, adhocracy culture is associated with flexibility, creativity and experimentation, making it supportive of innovative work behaviour (Heritage et al., 2014; Martins & Terblanche, 2003). However, in Ghanaian higher education, formal structures and resource constraints may limit these characteristics, making leadership support essential for fostering innovation

This means that in the Ghanaian higher education sector, innovation may depend less on the presence of a purely adhocratic culture and more on how well hierarchical structures are balanced by trust, voice, employee involvement, and learning. For example, where leaders invite staff input, support experimentation and treat mistakes as learning opportunities, employees are more likely to use their skills and motivation to contribute ideas for institutional improvement. This is consistent with the view that culture does not merely influence employee behaviour directly; it also shapes how HR practices are received and interpreted (Khan et al., 2018; Montani & Tschang, 2020).

Organisational culture is therefore important in the relationship between HPWS and innovative work behaviour. When HR practices are aligned with a culture of trust, openness and collaboration, employees are more likely to see them as genuine investments in their development. This strengthens perceived organisational support and encourages employees to reciprocate by sharing knowledge, solving problems, and engaging in improvement-oriented behaviour. However, where the culture is punitive, overly bureaucratic or resistant to employee voice, the same HR practices may be interpreted as symbolic or controlling rather than supportive (Al-Tit, 2016; Khan et al., 2018).

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Theoretical Integration

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory provides a useful explanation for why employees respond positively or negatively to organisational practices. Rooted in Blau (1964), the theory argues that social relationships are built on reciprocity. When employees receive valued treatment from their organisation, they often feel an obligation to respond with positive attitudes and behaviours. In the

workplace, this explains why supportive HR practices can encourage engagement, commitment, knowledge sharing, and innovative work behaviour.

SET is based on reciprocity, trust and mutual benefit. Employees are more likely to engage in discretionary innovative work behaviour when they feel supported, trusted and fairly treated (Eisenberger et al., 2001). HPWS reinforce this exchange when HR practices are perceived as genuine investments in employee development (Jiang et al., 2012). SET suggests that perceived organisational support encourages innovative behaviour by making employees feel valued and supported. HR practices such as training, rewards and participation strengthen this relationship (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

SET highlights that employee perceptions of fairness, trust and support determine how HR practices influence behaviour. Consistent HR delivery, quality supervisor relationships and organisational justice strengthen social exchange and encourage employee initiative (Aryee et al., 2012; Colquitt et al., 2001).

SET also operates at the collective level. In workplaces where support, fairness, and reciprocity are widely experienced, employees are more willing to share knowledge, assist colleagues, and co-create solutions (Nazir et al., 2019). In this sense, SET explains not only why employees choose to contribute new ideas, but also why some organisations are able to sustain such behaviour over time.

The link between SET and the AMO framework is important because the two theories explain distinct yet interrelated aspects of the HRM–innovation relationship. The AMO framework explains how HR practices develop employees' ability, motivation, and opportunity to contribute, while SET explains why employees decide to use those abilities, motivation, and opportunities in ways that benefit the organisation. For example, training may build ability, rewards may strengthen motivation, and participation may create opportunity; however, employees are more likely to translate these conditions into innovative behaviour when they also perceive the organisation as fair, supportive, and trustworthy. AMO provides the functional mechanism by which HR practices prepare employees to innovate, while SET provides the relational and psychological mechanisms that encourage them to engage in innovative work behaviour. This combined view is central to the article's argument that HR systems influence innovation not only through formal practices, but also through employee perceptions of support, fairness, and trust.

AMO Framework (Ability – Motivation – Opportunity)

The AMO framework explains performance through three connected conditions: employees must be able to perform, motivated to perform, and given the opportunity to perform (Appelbaum et al., 2000). It is especially useful for understanding how HPWS convert HR practices into behavioural outcomes such as innovative work behaviour.

Ability reflects the knowledge and skills employees need for innovation, supported by recruitment, training, mentoring and continuous learning (Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016). Strategic hiring, on-the-job learning and leadership development strengthen employee capabilities and build the intellectual capital required for innovation (Gamage, 2014; Cheraisi & Busolo, 2020; Barber, 2004; Collins & Holton III, 2004; Taleghani et al., 2013; Rahman et al., 2022). Motivation refers to employees' willingness to put effort into their work. Even highly skilled employees may not innovate if they are disengaged or indifferent. Motivation can be intrinsic, arising from enjoyment, challenge, and meaning, or extrinsic, arising from pay, promotion, recognition, or other rewards. High-performance work systems support motivation through performance-based rewards, recognition, career opportunities, job enrichment, and goal clarity. When work offers autonomy, significance, skill variety, and useful feedback, intrinsic motivation tends to increase (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Studies have also linked motivation to

employee engagement and retention, both of which support sustained innovation (Pandita and Ray, 2018; Shantz et al., 2013). Overreliance on external rewards can weaken intrinsic interest if employees come to see innovation solely as a route to rewards rather than as meaningful work (Amabile et al., 1996). A balanced approach is therefore most effective.

Linking HPWS, SET, and AMO to Innovation

Integrative Model Linking HPWS, SET, and AMO to Innovation

The integrated model developed in this article positions HPWS as the organisational catalyst, the AMO framework as the functional mechanism, Social Exchange Theory as the relational and psychological enabler, and organisational culture as the contextual moderator of innovative work behaviour. The value of this model lies in its ability to connect formal HR practices, employee capabilities, employee perceptions and cultural conditions within one explanatory framework.

Opportunity in the AMO framework refers to the extent to which employees have the autonomy, participation, information, and support needed to apply their abilities and motivation toward innovation. Practices such as job autonomy, employee involvement, open communication, and supportive leadership create conditions for experimentation, ownership, and idea implementation (Boxall & Purcell, 2003; Jiang et al., 2012). Thus, opportunity serves as the catalyst that transforms employees' capabilities and motivation into actual innovative behaviour (Morrison, 2011; Malik & Lenka, 2019).

HPWS represent the strategic starting point of the model. Practices such as selective recruitment, training and development, performance management, rewards, employee participation, among others y provide the formal HR architecture through which organisations shape employee behaviour. These practices are important because they influence whether employees have the required competencies, willingness and workplace space to contribute beyond routine duties. In this sense, High-Performance Work Systems are not isolated HR tools, but coordinated practices designed to align employee behaviour with organisational goals.

The AMO framework explains how HR practices influence innovative work behaviour by developing employee ability through skills, enhancing motivation through rewards and recognition, and creating opportunities through participation, autonomy and communication. Together, these elements enable employees to contribute innovative ideas (Blau, 1964; Appelbaum et al., 2000). When HR practices are perceived as genuine investments in employee growth, employees are more likely to reciprocate through commitment, knowledge sharing, problem-solving and new ideas (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Jiang et al., 2012).

SET explains how AMO practices are translated into innovative work behaviour by emphasising trust, fairness and perceived organisational support. Although HR practices provide ability, motivation and opportunity, employees are more likely to use these resources when they perceive organisational investment as genuine and supportive. Thus, AMO explains the conditions that enable innovation, while SET explains the relational factors that motivate employees to apply them. Organisational culture further shapes this process by strengthening or weakening trust, openness and employee willingness to innovate. A supportive culture enhances AMO and social exchange mechanisms, whereas rigid cultures may constrain employee voice and experimentation.

This integrated model is particularly relevant to the Ghanaian higher education sector. Universities and technical universities in Ghana are expected to improve teaching quality, research productivity, student support, administrative efficiency and institutional competitiveness. However, these institutions often operate within resource constraints, bureaucratic procedures and hierarchical

decision-making structures. Under such conditions, formal HR practices may not automatically lead to innovative behaviour.

The model therefore presents innovative work behaviour as a systemic outcome arising from the interaction among HR design, employee capability, motivation, opportunity, trust, fairness, and organisational culture. HPWS provide the formal structure, the AMO framework explains the functional mechanism, Social Exchange Theory explains the relational and psychological activation process, and organisational culture determines whether the whole system is strengthened or weakened in practice. This helps explain why similar HR practices may produce different innovation outcomes across institutions and contexts.

High-Performance Work Systems and AMO

A major implication of this integration is that HPWS enhance innovative work behaviour by directly strengthening employee ability, motivation, and opportunity. Selective recruitment and training build the skills required for creative problem-solving and implementation. Reward systems, recognition, and career opportunities strengthen the motivation to contribute (Jiang et al., 2012; Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009). In contexts such as Ghanaian higher education, where institutions must innovate despite resource constraints, coherent HPWS can provide a practical basis for improving teaching, administration, and service delivery.

Role of Social Exchange Theory in Sustaining Employee Engagement and Innovative Behaviour

SET deepens this explanation by showing why employees choose to expend discretionary effort in response to HR systems. When employees perceive HR practices as fair, developmental, and supportive, they develop higher levels of trust and perceived organisational support. This, in turn, encourages engagement, commitment, and innovation (Gong et al., 2009). In settings where formal innovation systems are weak, the relational mechanisms described by SET become even more important.

Synergistic Effect of Organisational Culture in Reinforcing HPWS, AMO, and SET

Culture determines whether the systems and relationships described above are reinforced or weakened in daily practice. Training, reward, participation, and support are most effective in cultures that promote fairness, openness, experimentation, and collaboration. Employees in such environments are more likely to perceive HR practices as genuine support, thereby strengthening both AMO and SET dynamics. Research by Ogbeibu et al. (2018) confirms that innovation-supportive culture strengthens the effect of HR practices on innovative behaviour. In contrast, hierarchical or punitive cultures may suppress initiative, limit voice, and reduce the trust needed for innovation.

Practical Implications

HR Policy and Practice Recommendations

The integration of HPWS, AMO, and SET offers clear guidance for HR policy. First, HR systems should be designed deliberately around ability, motivation, and opportunity. Ability-enhancing policies should emphasise competency-based recruitment, targeted training, and continuous professional development.

Second, motivation-enhancing policies should combine extrinsic and intrinsic drivers. Performance-based rewards and advancement opportunities remain important, but organisations should also recognise experimentation, teamwork, learning, and initiative. .

Third, opportunity-enhancing policies should focus on autonomy, employee voice, and open communication. Employees should have access to the information, time, and participation channels

needed to contribute ideas and improve systems. HR should work with line managers to reduce barriers to collaboration and knowledge sharing.

SET offers an important practical lesson: HR systems must be experienced as supportive, not merely designed to be so. Policies should be transparent, fair, and consistently implemented. Climate surveys, feedback systems, and listening mechanisms can help organisations understand how employees interpret HR practices. Relational HRM is critical here.

Organisations should treat innovation as a people-management outcome, not only as a technical or strategic function. Innovation-related behaviours such as idea generation, collaboration, and process improvement should be incorporated into performance systems, talent development, and HR scorecards. This would position HR as a strategic partner in building long-term innovative capacity.

Managerial Strategies to Foster Innovation using Integrated Theory

Managers play a decisive role in translating policy into daily behaviour. From the AMO perspective, they can enhance ability through coaching, mentoring, and learning support. Developmental leadership helps employees strengthen the competencies needed for innovation and signals that growth is valued.

Managers can also foster motivation through recognition and autonomy. Meaningful acknowledgement of employee effort, especially in relation to experimentation and collaboration, strengthens intrinsic motivation. Managers should give employees discretion in how they approach their work. Autonomy signals trust and encourages initiative, which is central to innovative behaviour (Amabile, 1997).

From the SET perspective, managers must also build trust through fair and transparent leadership. Employees are more likely to innovate when they believe they will not be punished for taking informed risks. When employees trust their supervisors, they are more willing to invest discretionary effort.

Managers are also cultural carriers. Through their communication, reactions, and daily routines, they reinforce whether innovation is genuinely encouraged. Managers, therefore, need to model openness, curiosity, and responsiveness if they expect employees to innovate consistently.

Considerations for Different Cultural or Industry Contexts

The effectiveness of the integrated model depends on context. National culture, industry characteristics, sectoral realities, and organisational maturity all influence how HR systems are interpreted and how innovation is enacted.

National culture matters because employees do not respond to autonomy, participation, or recognition in identical ways across societies. In high-power-distance settings, employees may hesitate to challenge authority or speak up, even when systems encourage it. In such contexts, managers must actively invite participation and foster psychological safety for opportunity-enhancing practices to work effectively (Nguyen et al., 2017).

Industry also matters. Knowledge-intensive sectors such as education, technology, and healthcare often benefit greatly from ability- and opportunity-enhancing practices, as innovation emerges through learning, collaboration, and service improvement. More regulated or resource-constrained sectors may require adapted approaches that balance innovation with compliance and financial reality.

The public and private sectors also present different realities. Public institutions, especially in developing countries, often operate within bureaucratic structures that limit flexibility. In these

environments, trust, transparency, and participatory leadership become especially important for building credibility around innovation initiatives (Kim and Park, 2020).

Organisational maturity shapes what is feasible. Smaller or early-stage organisations may not be able to implement full HPWS immediately. A phased approach that starts with low-cost, high-impact practices such as peer learning, recognition, simple feedback channels, and team problem-solving may be more effective. As organisations grow, they can build more formal systems while preserving the flexibility that supports innovation.

Perceived organisational support (POS) plays a critical role in encouraging innovative work behaviour because employees are more likely to take risks, invest extra effort, and contribute new ideas when they feel valued and supported. Supportive HR practices enhance psychological safety, organisational identification, and employees' willingness to engage in innovation (Jain et al., 2013; Ma Prieto & Pilar Pérez-Santana, 2014). The integrated model also highlights that HR practices should be meaningfully implemented rather than adopted merely as trends. In the Ghanaian higher education context, effective implementation of HR systems is essential for promoting innovation. Additionally, leadership development is crucial, as managers must move beyond monitoring compliance to fostering trust, communication, coaching, and employee participation. Such leadership behaviours strengthen the relationship between HPWS, SET, and innovative work behaviour by encouraging employees to contribute beyond their formal responsibilities

Contribution to the HRM and Innovation Literature

This article contributes to the literature by more directly linking strategic HRM to employee innovation. While earlier work has often examined HR practices in relation to productivity or broad organisational performance, this article highlights innovative work behaviour as a specific and strategically important outcome of HR design. It also shifts attention from firm-level innovation alone to the employee behaviours that make innovation possible in everyday organisational life.

Value of Integrating SET and AMO in Understanding HPWS Effectiveness

A key theoretical contribution is the joint use of AMO and SET. The AMO framework explains what HR practices are expected to do by strengthening ability, motivation, and opportunity. SET explains how and why employees respond to those practices through perceived support, trust, and reciprocity. Bringing the two together offers a fuller explanation of HPWS effectiveness by linking structural design with employee interpretation. This integration also helps explain the implementation gap in HRM: intended practices do not always become effective practices unless employees experience them as credible and supportive.

Implications for Future Research and Theory-Building

The article opens several directions for future research and theory-building. First, the integrated model should be tested empirically across different sectors, cultures, and organisational sizes. This is important because the relationship between HR systems, AMO mechanisms, social exchange processes, and innovative work behaviour may not operate in the same way across all contexts. Future studies could therefore examine whether the model operates differently across public, private, and technical universities, as well as other knowledge-based institutions.

Second, future research should examine whether organisational culture changes the strength of the social exchange relationship. In this sense, culture may influence the "exchange rate" of Social Exchange Theory. Where the culture supports fairness, trust, openness, and collaboration, employees may attach greater value to supportive HR practices and respond with stronger commitment, knowledge sharing, and innovative behaviour. However, in rigid, hierarchical, or punitive cultures,

the same HR practices may produce weaker employee responses because staff may doubt the sincerity of organisational support or fear the consequences of taking initiative.

Third, culture may also act as a filter for the AMO signal. HR practices signal what the organisation values, but employees interpret those signals through the cultural environment in which they work. For example, training may signal investment in employees' abilities, rewards may signal recognition of effort, and participation may signal an opportunity for contribution. However, if the organisational culture discourages voice, experimentation, or risk-taking, employees may not translate these AMO conditions into innovative work behaviour. Future studies should therefore examine how different cultural types, such as clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy cultures, shape the way employees interpret and respond to HR practices.

Finally, future research could examine additional mediators and moderators such as psychological capital, leadership style, perceived organisational support, psychological safety, and organisational climate. Longitudinal studies would be especially useful in showing how HR practices, social exchange relationships, cultural conditions, and innovative behaviour develop over time. Overall, the model encourages scholars to treat innovation not only as a strategic outcome, but also as a behavioural capability shaped by HR architecture, employee perceptions, and cultural fit.

Conclusion

This article concludes that HPWS, supported by the AMO framework and SET, enhance innovative work behaviour by strengthening employee capability, motivation, participation, and trust. In Ghanaian higher education, strategic HR practices and supportive organisational cultures are essential for fostering innovation and improving institutional performance. The study highlights that universities and policymakers should prioritise staff development, fair HR systems, participatory leadership, and innovation-oriented environments to build more responsive and competitive institutions.

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