Impact of AMO Enhancing HR Practices in Private Higher Education Institutions on Academicians' Wellbeing: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract
Employees wellbeing is critical to organizational performance and sustainability. Similarly, understanding how human resource (HR) practices influence employee wellbeing is a crucial aspect of organizational management. The heightened competition among private higher education institutions, increasing workloads and conflicting roles demands have led to burnout, fatigue and declining health among academicians. Despite these, academicians are expected to continuously uphold their tutelary role in society. Thus, it is crucial to ensure that academicians can continue to flourish in their role through quality worklife and wellbeing. This conceptual paper proposed a framework based on the AMO Theory to examine the impact of HR practices on academician's wellbeing and determining whether organizational identification will mediate the relationship. Questionnaires grounded on previous research and adapted to suit the study context will be distributed to lecturers in thirty-seven private higher education institutions in Klang Valley using convenience sampling to gather data on how the ability, motivation and opportunity enhancing HR practices influence the physical, psychological, and social well-being of academicians. Based on literature, it is hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between HR practices and employee wellbeing and the relationship will be mediated by organizational identification. This study enable university management to focus and invest in the right practices impacting wellness at the workplace to further promote the wellbeing of academicians.
Keywords: Employee Wellbeing, HR Practices, Ability, Motivation, Opportunity, Organizational Identification.

Introduction
The concern over how work impact workers' wellbeing started as early as the 17th century. In the early years, the focus was mainly on the physical health of employees (Wallace, 2022).

Then came the Industrial Revolution which brought a myriad of challenges to the workers. Companies started implementing wellness programs when management began to see the link between employee wellness and organizational key metrics. (Merriwether, 2021)

Technology and digitalization have transformed the way people work. While technology has increased efficiency, it has also created challenges related to automation, job displacement, and the need for continuous upskilling. Organizations are constantly changing to maintain their competitiveness in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment. (Johnson et al, 2020; Selimović et al, 2021)

As work continue to evolve, so does the impact on employee wellbeing. The growing recognition of the value of employee wellbeing stems from its far-reaching effects on the organization. Organizations are beginning to acknowledge the critical role of employee wellbeing in achieving sustainable success (Krekel et al, 2019), leading to heightened interest in understanding the antecedents of employee wellbeing in organizations across the globe (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017).

Malaysia is pursuing the vision to become a highly developed nation and will need skilled and qualified people to achieve this goal. As an institution, university is the place where intellectual capital congregates, and its faculty becomes the most important resource in the generation of ideas, knowledge and innovation leading to competitiveness and sustainability. Additionally, the experience which the students will derive from higher education is, to an extent, dependent on the quality and performance of faculty members. Thus, it is imperative for institutions of higher learning to focus on practices that can enhance the wellbeing of academics given the mounting pressure and never-ending work facing educators.

Problem Statement

Malaysia as a country is committed to ensure the sustainability and wellbeing of people in the nation and have come up with several initiatives on this agenda. Among others, the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (2021 – 2025) and the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 which incorporate wellbeing in its strategic thrust is evidence of the government's commitment on the issue of wellbeing. Nevertheless, recent measures showed that Malaysia still has a long way towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 3 for Good Health and Wellbeing. The 2020 Malaysian Wellbeing Index issued by the Department of Statistics which measure the people's social and economic wellbeing showed an overall decline by 2.1 percent nationwide with the Covid-19 pandemic being the biggest cause of such decrease (MoH, 2022).

A recent Employee Wellness Report which gathered feedback from more than a thousand Malaysian employees reveals that 58% reported feeling burnout and 51% admitting to having a poor worklife balance induced by financial factors and the recent global pandemic (Employment Hero, 2021). In addition, the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2019 found that half a million Malaysian are facing depression. The negative consequences of poor mental health on the overall wellbeing of an employee and its equally adverse impact on the organization has been extensively documented (Rajgopal, 2010).

Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate various aspects of employee wellbeing, including its determinants, consequences, and interventions. However, despite the abundance of research in this field, there remains a significant theoretical gap in the current body of literature on employee wellbeing.

Previous studies relating to employee wellbeing have utilized wellbeing as a factor antecedent to other organizational outcomes like job satisfaction (Hennicks et al, 2022), motivation (Hassan et al, 2022), green behavior (Krekel and Prati, 2022), employees' engagement,

turnover intention, and workers productivity (Krekel et al, 2019). Scarce research are being done in the context of Malaysian, especially regarding wellbeing of academics in higher learning institution, on factors that leads to their wellbeing. Additionally, current studies mostly focus on only one out of the three core dimensions of wellbeing: physical, psychological, or social and seldom has a study seek to examine wellbeing as a holistic concept encapsulating the three dimension together.

Understanding the degree and extent of how human resource (HR) practices influence employee wellbeing is a crucial aspect of contemporary organizational management. Nevertheless, current research on the relationship between HR practices and employee wellbeing is far from giving conclusive results with research showing both negative and positive relationships at different levels (Guerci, 2022; Li et al, 2023). Thus, there is a need to identify a set of HR practices that create an environment where employees feel respected and valued, provide opportunities for personal and professional development, and encourages open communication, which enhances overall wellbeing. Existing literature on wellbeing research has so far focused on the direct relationship between HR practices and employee wellbeing. Only a few have explored the factors which intervene between HRM practices and employee wellbeing (Cooper et al 2019). One underlying cause that has just recently gained academic attention but have not been properly explored is organizational identification. This theory states that individuals' physical and mental health are substantially influenced by factors that affect their social identity. Thus, it is posited that the extent to which employees identify with their organization will mediate the relationship between HRM practices and employee wellbeing (Hameed et al, 2022). This study is thus proposed to add to the understanding how HR Practices impact employee wellbeing and to determine whether organizational identification mediates the relationship.

Research Objective
Given the current state of Malaysian's wellbeing in general and employee wellbeing specifically, it is indisputable that research that explore initiatives that foster wellbeing is very much needed. The purpose of this research is to determine whether HR practices have effects on employee wellbeing and whether organizational identification mediates this relationship. This will be done by looking at the HR practices based on the Ability – Motivation – Opportunities (AMO) Theory and the Social Identity Theory for organizational identification.

Specifically, this study is carried out to answer the following questions:
RQ1: How will the AMO enhancing HR practices adopted and implemented by private higher education institutions impact the physical, psychological, and social wellbeing of its academicians?
RQ2: To what extent will the AMO enhancing HR practices adopted and implemented by private higher education institutions impact the physical, psychological, and social wellbeing of its academicians?
RQ3: Does organizational identification mediate the relationship between AMO enhancing HR practices and employee wellbeing?

Literature Review

AMO Theory

Human Resource (HR) practices play a crucial role in shaping employee wellbeing and organizational success (Mat, 2021). Various theoretical frameworks have been developed to understand the relationship between HR practices and employee wellbeing. One theory is the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) Theory (Appelbaum et al, 2000; Pauwee, 2007) which posited that organization that succeed in creating a bundle of HR practices that synergize Abilities, Motivation, and Opportunities (AMO) will acquire positive individual and organizational outcomes (Boxall & Purcell, 2022; Mat, 2021; Tran, 2020).

The AMO theory highlights the interplay of three essential factors: Abilities, Motivation, and Opportunities by suggesting that organizations which leverage on AMO can enhance their performance and productivity. The theory premised that employees need to have the ability and motivation to be engaged in their work. Opportunities meanwhile provide the avenue for the employees to channel their abilities and express their opinion in a way that impact the organization via job design and empowerment practices. This will lead to a feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction thus increasing their wellbeing.

Figure 1: HRM systems aimed at enhancing (A) ability, (M) motivation and (O) opportunity (Jiang et al.,2012).

A study by Bos-Nehles et al (2023) examine how AMO is conceptualized and measured. The findings revealed several approaches to utilization of AMO theory. First, the use of individual AMO variables to examine the link between the ability, motivation and opportunity on various HR related aspects and performance outcomes. Second, approaching it as a bundle of AMO enhancing HR Practices and third, the use of AMO variables as mediator and moderator in examining the relationship between the variables. This study will be using the second approach that comprises of a bundle of HR practices and policies designed to enhance the employees' ability, motivation as well as providing a supportive and facilitating work environment (Applebaum et al, 2000) towards achieving greater employee engagement, productivity, and wellbeing.

Social Identification Theory

Another theory used to underpin the current study is the Social Identity Theory (SIT). Social identity theory suggests that a person's sense of self is based on association with a group. Tajfel (1974) proposed a definition of social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and the emotional significance attached to the membership". SIT explores how individuals derive their self-concept and self-esteem from the social groups they belong to. This theory further states that individuals' physical and emotional health are affected by factors that influence their social identity. SIT has gained a significant place in various disciplines, including social psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management. One of the central ideas of SIT is that group membership is not merely a passive

label but a dynamic source of social identity. This identity is not restricted to personal attributes but extends to the characteristics attributed to the group. In turn, this group identity influences individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and interactions. In the workplace, it explains how employees identify with their organizations, leading to outcomes like organizational commitment and psychological health and well-being.

Drawing on this theory, organizational identification (OID) extends SIT's notions of self-esteem and social identity to the workplace, showing that a strong identification with the organization can lead to positive outcomes such as higher job satisfaction, increased commitment, and better performance. This aligns with SIT's emphasis on the positive psychological benefits derived from a strong social identity within a group.

This study proposed that organizational identification (OID) can affect employee's well-being based on how HR practices are leveraged by the organization to create an environment where employee identify strongly with the organization. Consequently, because their membership with the organization boosted their self-esteem, the employees tend to reciprocate the sense of belonging and well-being generated by the organization by displaying positive organizational citizenship behaviour. In other words, HR practices that engender a sense of belonging to the organization will in turn produce a sense of well-being in the employee.

The Dependent Variable
Employee's Wellbeing
Studies have revealed that employees who have higher levels of wellbeing experience better job satisfaction (Hayat & Afshari, 2022), heightened engagement (Syrek, 2022), and greater allegiance towards their organizations (Mat et al, 2021). Similarly, a healthy and contented employee has been shown to be more innovative and resilient, leading to improved overall organizational performance (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020; Krekel et al, 2019, Nangoy et al, 2019)

The concept of wellbeing encompasses a spectrum of physical, mental, social, and economic health of a person. Danna et al (1999) and Wood (2008) explain wellbeing as a comprehensive experience and function of an employee from a perspective of both physical and psychological dimensions. Adopting the work of Grant et al (2007) and Guerci (2022), the current study will investigate the effect of AMO enhancing HR practices on health (physical), happiness (emotional) and relational (work) wellbeing of employees.

The health aspect of wellbeing refers to the physiological and mental wellness of a person. It connotes absence of physical illness. A person is also said to be well when he is free from anxiety, depression, burn out, stress and frustration. Happiness is a subjective state of mind where a person experience a positive emotional state. From a work-related perspective, a happy employee is someone who experience positive feelings from his job. Measurements of an employee's happiness include job satisfaction, organizational commitment, good organizational citizenship behavior and meaningful worklife among others.

The relational component meanwhile refers to the interactions that occurs among members in the organization. In a workplace where the members have good relations, collaboration and teamwork are found to be better. Positive relationships also foster employee's resilience which help them to prepare for changes in their life and workplace, leading to an increased sense of wellbeing. Studies on relational wellbeing have focused on looking into aspects like managerial and peer support, cooperation, collegiality, trust and how they impact employees' perception of social wellbeing in the workplace.

The Independent Variables

Studies on the link between HR practices and organizational outcomes are abound. The body of work has shed light on the various positive and negative outcomes that HR practices have on the organization and employees. Researchers have used High Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) to examine the impact on job performance (Alatailat, 2019; Nasurdin et al, 2020), have studied the employees' perception of HR Practices on innovative work behaviour (Bos-Nehles et al, 2019) and HR Practices impact on job satisfaction and performance (Cherif, 2020; Mira et al, 2019). Some studies have also unraveled the negative impact of HR practices where a misaligned implementation of HR practices and policies may produce feelings of insecurity, stress, and work overload (Han et al, 2020; Kaushik & Mukherjee, 2022).

The current study uses the AMO model of HR practices to examine the impact of ability enhancing, motivation enhancing and opportunity enhancing HR practices and policies on the state of well-being of employees in the organization. Marin-Garcia (2016) suggested that effective HR practices subsume the three components in AMO through introducing policies that develop employee's talent and competencies, provide the right compensations and rewards; and open the doors to employees to participate in decision making and problem solving in the workplace.

The A component refer to the ability of employees to do the work assigned to them. This encompasses the knowledge, skills, ability, and other characteristics often termed as KSAOs. The KSAOs can be divided into two groups: (i) - the skills and talents that are inherent to the individual i.e., their natural aptitude and (ii) – learned capabilities. In terms of HR, the A component refer to recruitment, selection, and training to cultivate employees KSAOs to arm them with the competencies to achieve the intended job outcomes. An employee that believe he has the ability and self-efficacy to perform his job and take proactive steps to invest in training and self-development programs to add to his skills repertoire reports a better sense of well-being (Plomp et al, 2016). A study done by Chaturvedula et al (2018) among Remotely Piloted Aircraft System crew found that the personnel who have high proficiency in their job experience positive emotions and increase well-being. The literature also shows HR policies that encourage training among employees create positive impact on employee's well-being and overall productivity (Nielsen et al, 2017). Hence, it is posited that ability-enhancing HR practices that aim to improve employees' knowledge and skills to perform their work and provide employees with valuable resources to accomplish their desired career outcomes are crucial for employee well-being.

Another aspect of ability-enhancing practices focus on recruiting and selecting the right employee whose values and expectations are aligned with that of the company. It is argued that this will lead to a better person-organization fit and hence increase job satisfaction and engagement which spills over to their psychological well-being. Ability-enhancing practices have been found to positively correlate with health well-being because they guard the employee against exhaustion that arises from having scarce resource and energy depletion when an employee overcompensate while doing work that go beyond their capabilities. The rationale is that, when skills and abilities are not aligned with the job demand, individuals must make greater use of their physical, cognitive, and emotional resources to meet work challenges, with high mental and physiological costs. The cognitive and emotional overload will then manifest in terms of fatigue, anxiety, insomnia, and other health concerns that affect employee's physical wellbeing. Hence when HR practices of the organization put the emphasis towards training and development programs that hones employee's skills, both

intellectual and emotional, employee's wellbeing are enhanced. Based on these arguments, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Ability-enhancing HR practices have a significant positive effect on employees' well-being.
The M dimension is the motivation, attitude and affect that the employee have in relation to their work which refer to the employee's willingness to spend effort and go the extra mile in the fulfillment of their task. Studies have shown that motivation has a positive relationship to performance. Possessing the required competencies alone will not guarantee the performance of the employees who are not motivated. Conversely motivation have been proven as key drivers of employees' performance in many studies (Kuswati, 2020; Nuriman, 2021; Sugiarti, 2023). Motivation-enhancing HR practices are designed to increase employee extrinsic or intrinsic motivation to perform towards achieving organizational goals (Jiang et al., 2012).

There are a plethora of HRM practices that companies can adopt and implement to influence employee motivation. Examples would be performance-related pay and flexible work. Undeniably, compensation scheme that is based on performance can boost the employee's sense of self-esteem because the incentives and reward can be perceived by the employee as indication of acknowledgment and appreciation of his contributions to the company. Additionally, this will nurture a sense of meaningfulness because employees perceive that their personal behaviors have contributed to better organizational outcomes. Self-esteem and sense of meaningfulness and competence are primary psychological resources that lead to higher happiness and well-being.

Nonetheless, it should be highlighted that performance-based pay and flexible work design affect employees' motivation differently. The former provide extrinsic motivation where firms link employees' work efforts to external rewards (Jiang et al, 2012). The latter motivates employees intrinsically, providing employee with control over their work which ultimately results in a more motivated, satisfied, and productive workforce (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). Other typical examples of motivation enhancing HR practices would include performance management, competitive compensation, incentives and rewards, promotion and career development, and job security. When these bundles of HR practices are well-designed and -implemented, employees will feel that their efforts are valued by their organization, which will then lead to greater well-being. Based on the above, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Motivation-enhancing HR practices have a significant positive effect on employees' well-being.
O is the opportunity or the means through which the employees' ability and effort are garnered and used to provide employees with the chance to determine the way they do work (autonomy) in terms of work outcome and even work design. Opportunity enhancing HR practices are those related to policies that grant autonomy to employees as well as providing them the opportunity to participate in decision making and to share information across the organization. Examples of such practices are flexible job design, work teams, employee involvement, and information sharing channels.

Opportunity-enhancing HR practices are employed to foster an environment where employees are invited, even encouraged to express their ideas and shoulder responsibility for goal setting and problem solving. By implementing these HR practices, employees are provided with the resources and means to fulfill their needs for self-achievement and, thus, experience better well-being. These practices entails soliciting employee's involvement and

participation in key decision making such as job design and goal setting, decentralization, and increased job autonomy (Jiang et al., 2012). Indeed, when employees are entrusted with the responsibility to lead and control the outcome of their work, when they feel that their have a both a say and a choice in matters that impact their career, this would elicit a feeling of usefulness, worthiness and being appreciated, consequently fostering a feeling of happiness and wellbeing. Based on the above, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Opportunity-enhancing HR practices have a significant positive effect on employees' well-being.

Mediating Variable

Ashforth & Mael (1989) first proposed the definition of organizational identification (OI) as "perception of oneness with or belongingness to" the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 34). Edwards & Peccei (2007) chose to describe OI as a psychological link between the organization and the individual where the latter experience a deep cognitive bond with the organization as social entity. Another definition offered by Dutton et al (1994) states that organizational identification is "the degree to which a member defines him or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization" (Dutton et al., 1994, p.239). As a form of the social identity theory, organizational identity is based on the argument that the state of one's physical and emotional health is influenced by a host of social factors including the sense of belonging to a group or group membership. Arguably this sense of well-being is derived from the meaning, support, and camaraderie that a person get from such membership.

Research on OI starts to gain momentum in the late 1990s where studies began to examine the link between OI and organizational behaviour. Lee et al (2015) opined that OI has a unique value as determinant of behaviour and attitude due to its inherent nature that is associated with individual and organizational identity. It is the feeling of 'we' and 'us' that provide the impetus for positive behaviour like job engagement, organizational citizenship behaviour and job satisfaction which drives organizational outcome (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015).

The effect of OI on attitude and behaviour have been investigated from many perspectives (Lee et al, 2015). Edwards & Peccei (2010) found that OI as a mediator has impact on employee's involvement and turnover intention. Several other studies have also employed OI as a mediator. For example, Cheema et al (2020) used OI to examine the relationship between corporate social responsibility and organizational citizenship behavior while Chughtai (2021) investigates the mediating role of organizational identification and psychological safety in the relationship between servant leadership and two employee outcomes: employee voice and negative feedback seeking behavior. OI has also been established to be a predictor of job satisfaction which influenced employee's readiness to change (Shah et al, 2017), job performance (Wallumbwa et al, 2011) and employee commitment (Al-Jabari & Ghazzawi, 2019).

In relation to HR practices, it has been shown by various past research that the environment and culture created by HR practices and policies influence how employees feel and behave. Authors have used various theories like social exchange theory (SET) and the job-demand resource (JDR) theory to elucidate the relationship between HR practices and employee's individual outcome. Other studies however used the social identification theory (SIT) arguing that SIT might be a more relevant theory to explain how HR practices facilitate organizational identification and subsequent well-being of the employees. Subba (2019) for example established that perceived organizational support is an antecedent of organizational

identification and HR practices like access to information, growth opportunity and fair treatment are factors that lead to perceived organizational support.

Extant research advocates that a person's group membership carries weight towards the individual psychological health and well-being in the workplace. However, the exact outcome of organizational identifications for wellness and health are still very much undecided. On the one hand, there are findings that show how individuals' increased identification with an organization is positively related to their well-being through the increased support that also increases resilience. On the other hand, it was also argued that identification may have adverse impact on health and well-being as increased identification is found to correlate with longer work hours and workaholism. Nonetheless enough evidence can be garnered to argue that organizational identification is positively associated with not only psychological wellness but also physical well-being. Based on the arguments set out above, the research proposes the following hypotheses:

H4: HR practices have a significant positive impact on Organizational Identification.
H5: Organizational Identification mediates the relationship between ability enhancing HR practices and employee well-being.
H6: Organizational Identification mediates the relationship between motivation enhancing HR practices and employee well-being.
H7: Organizational Identification mediates the relationship between opportunity enhancing HR practices and employee well-being.

Thus, based on the pertinent literature discussed above, a conceptual framework on examining the impact of AMO enhancing HR practices and the wellbeing of academics is presented below:
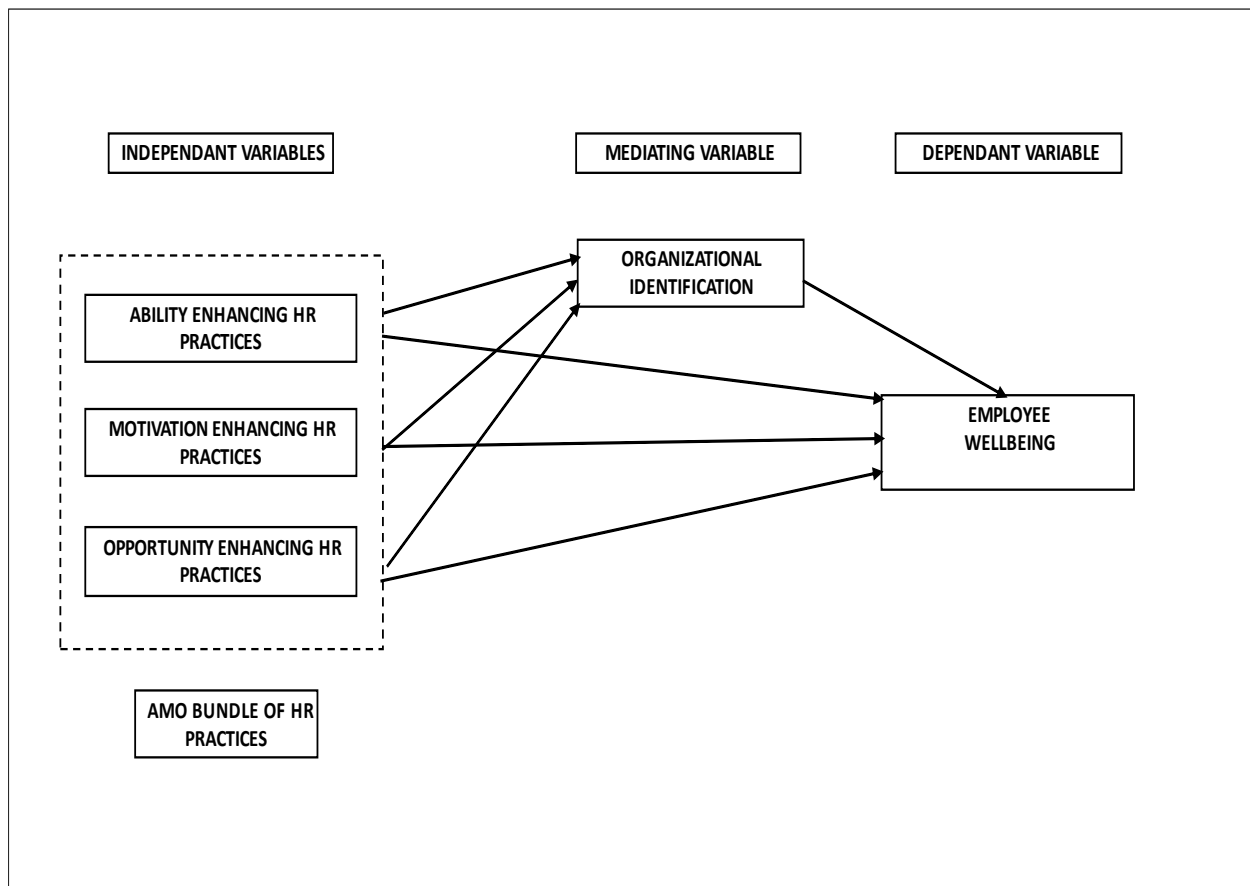
Figure 2: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Conclusion

The continuing dominance of well-being in the personal and professional realm at both local and international level highlights and strengthen the importance of further research into the topic by academics and practitioners alike. Adopting a more holistic perspective, using a variety of measurement, expanding the scope of study into various industries and context will lead to a better understanding of how HR practices can be designed, delivered, and implemented in a way that can foster and promote employee wellbeing. Where other studies have employed theories like social exchange theory, conservation of resources theory and self-determination theory among others to underpin their research, this study chose to investigate the antecedent on employee well-being using from the AMO HR practice lens while considering whether the feeling of oneness and sense of belonging that an employee experience will have correlation to their feeling of health, happiness, and social wellbeing.

Acknowledgement

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