



# A Review of Research on Human Resource System Strength and Its Future Prospects

Yating Li\*, Bahijah Binti Abas

Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim 35900, Perak, Malaysia.

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\***Corresponding author:** Yating Li, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim 35900, Perak, Malaysia.

## Abstract

Human Resource System Strength (HRSS) is a crucial concept in the field of human resource management. For the purposes of this study, HRSS is defined as a framework that not only emphasizes the human resource system itself but also considers employees' subjective perceptions of that system. This dual focus facilitates the effective implementation of HR practices, ultimately enhancing employees' work attitudes and behaviors, as well as improving organizational performance. While the HR system may be static, HRSS is inherently dynamic. Thus, HRSS is approached from the perspective of a dynamic and functional process. In this context, if HR policies are static, HRSS serves as a dynamic framework for studying human resources. HRSS encompasses three dimensions: distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus. This paper first reviews existing research on HRSS, examining its conceptual connotations, dimensions, measurement methods, and empirical studies through a comprehensive literature review. Subsequently, it identifies the limitations of current research and proposes future directions for the development of HRSS.

## Keywords

Human resource system strength; distinctiveness; consistency; consensus

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the importance of human resource management (HRM) has been recognized by organizations (Yang & Yang, 2020). More and more organizations hope to improve the work attitude and behavior of employees through HRM so as to improve the competitiveness of the organization. Therefore, HRM is shifting from the administrative management of personnel to strategic human resource management. However, these strategic human resource management systems only stay in the internal documents of the organization, The work of the human resource management department did not effectively convey the contents of the documents to employees, and employees could not clearly understand the contents of these policies, so the expected effect could not be achieved.

The implementation of the human resource management process, which belongs to one aspect of strategic HRM, is a new research perspective arising in recent years (Parker et al., 2019). It is a process perspective, which focuses on the study of how HRM plays a role in practice. The work content of the HRM department is very important, employees can clearly and fully understand the enterprise's HRM is more critical.

This is exactly why Bowen and Ostroff proposed the concept of HRSS. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) pointed out that HRSS can be conceptualized as the information efficiency needed to convey a strong situation. HR information can be effectively transmitted and perceived by employees and also contains three dimensions of uniqueness, consistency, and consensus. When HR is highly unique, consistent, and consensus, a high strength of HR is formed, and the organization will feel a strong situation. In this situation, Employees clearly understand the HR management policy content, affecting the attitude and behavior of employees. And the behavior and attitude of employees will share the

collective perception with the organization.

However, for the important and novel concept of HRSS, relevant theories and empirical studies are still relatively few at present. In view of this, this paper will conduct a literature review of the concept formation, dimension, measurement and empirical research results of HRSS, so as to attract extensive attention of scholars and provide references for scholars' research on HRSS.

## 2. The conceptual connotation of HRSS

In recent years, more and more scholars about how to through effective HRM to improve the performance of the enterprise, HRM research has never stopped, from the original traditional HRM to modern HRM to the development of strategic HRM, HRM work is in constant progress, Both theoretically and practically, a lot of research has been done (Das & Kodwani, 2018; Lee et al., 2019; Molina-Azorin et al., 2021), and has been paid attention to by countries all over the world, and Chinese scholars are no exception (Fang et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2018; C. Yang et al., 2019).

In previous studies, HRM is regarded as an integrated system. For example, Universalism on Strategic HRM believes that HRM practices can significantly improve enterprise performance and all enterprises are suitable for this set of HRM practices. The contingency view of strategic human resource management believes that organizational strategy affects the relationship between HRM and organizational performance to a large extent. HRM must be consistent with the strategic needs of the organization. Therefore, the organization can adopt corresponding HRM policies and measures according to the strategic goals of the organization, so as to make the working skills and abilities of employees adapt to the organizational strategy.

The above two views, whether universalism or contingency view, have corresponding defects. The concept of universalism emphasizes the universality of HRM and ignores the dynamic changes in the organizational environment. The contingency view emphasizes the dynamic change of HRM and ignores the importance of the policy content of HRM. In order to remedy these defects, Bowen and Ostroff (2004) put forward the concept of HRSS from a dynamic perspective, pointing out how an organization affects the efficiency of information transmission and creates a series of meta-attributes of HRM with a high-intensity organizational atmosphere. Therefore, HRSS is a comprehensive quality index to judge HRM rather than literally understood as strength and system strictness.

Thus, Gomes et al. (2010) proposed nine attributes of HR system strength on the basis of Bowen and Ostroff and verified Bowen et al.'s model structure. The results support the viewpoints proposed by Bowen et al., HR content and HR process are two completely different viewpoints. In addition, there is a certain connection between the three dimensions of HRSS proposed by Bowen, including distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus, that is, distinctiveness depends on consistency and consensus, and distinctiveness takes a larger proportion.

So, by summarizing and organizing, the definition used in the whole thesis is: The HRSS not only focuses on HR measures and policies but also focuses on employees' subjective perception of the measures implemented by HR departments and HR managers, creates employees to fully participate in the work, fully trust the organization, make the effective implementation of HR systems and policies, so as to improve the work attitude and behavior of employees, improve the performance of the organization. If the HR policy is static, then the HRSS is dynamic to study HR. Therefore, the HRSS is put forward from the perspective of dynamic and functional process.

## 3. The dimension division of HRSS

The HRSS depends on whether employees have a consistent and clear understanding of HR information policy content, and whether they know what behaviors and attitudes are recognized and expected by the organization. So, what are the characteristics of HR that can be called intensive? Bowen and Ostroff divide HRSS into three dimensions: distinctiveness, consistency and consensus.

- (1) Distinctiveness: Distinctiveness refers to the outstanding characteristics of HRM that can get employees' attention and arouse their interest in the work. These include visibility, comprehensibility, authority legitimacy, and relevance.
  - a) Visibility. Visibility refers to the degree to which the information conveyed by HRM policy content can be easily noticed and observed by employees.
  - b) Comprehensibility. Comprehensibility means that the information conveyed by the HRM department is clear and easy to be understood by employees, both in form and content.
  - c) The legitimacy of authority. The legitimacy of authority means that the promulgation and implementation of

HRM institutions are supported by legitimate positions and legitimate rights, that is, authority affects the perception process of employees.

- d) Relevance. Relevance refers to the process by which employees perceive HRM policy to be related to their own important goals.
- (2) Consistency: Consistency refers to the unity of the policy content and implementation process of HRM, that is, the measures are implemented strictly in accordance with the content so that employees can feel the consistency of the organization in the process of receiving information and effectively convey HRM information.
  - a) Adequacy. Adequacy refers to the causal relationship established between the perceived and conveyed information, that is, to make the employee fully aware of why the relevant measures are implemented and the punishment and reward regulations faced.
  - b) Effectiveness. Effectiveness refers to the goal set by the organization as close to the reality as possible, so as to reduce the inaccurate behavior of employees.
  - c) The consistency of HRM policy information. The consistency of HRM policy information means that even though there are different information implementation channels, the spirit of the information conveyed cannot be changed.
- (3) Consensus. Consensus refers to the universal sense of recognition of the HRM formed by employees in the process of the implementation of HRM. Only when employees identify with HRM and feel the fairness of the HRM policy can the consensus of HR be reached. The consensus of HRSS has two characteristics: the consensus of decision-makers of HRM and fairness.
  - a) The consensus of decision makers in HRM. The consensus among decision-makers of HRM refers to the common vision reached by decision-makers of HRM and the consensus of their joint decisions when setting goals. In this way, employees will perceive and more agree with HRM measures, so as to form common values.
  - b) Fairness. The fairness of HRM policy includes distributive fairness, procedural fairness, and interactive fairness perceived by employees. Perceived distributive fairness refers to the fairness between income and resource allocation in an organization. Perceived procedural justice refers to the degree to which employees perceive fairness in the distribution of organizational decision-making processes and outcomes. Perceived interactive fairness means that managers talk openly and sincerely with employees, respect employees, understand their demands, and solve their difficulties.

Summarized the characteristics of HRSS, which are distinctiveness, consistency and consensus (Figure 1).

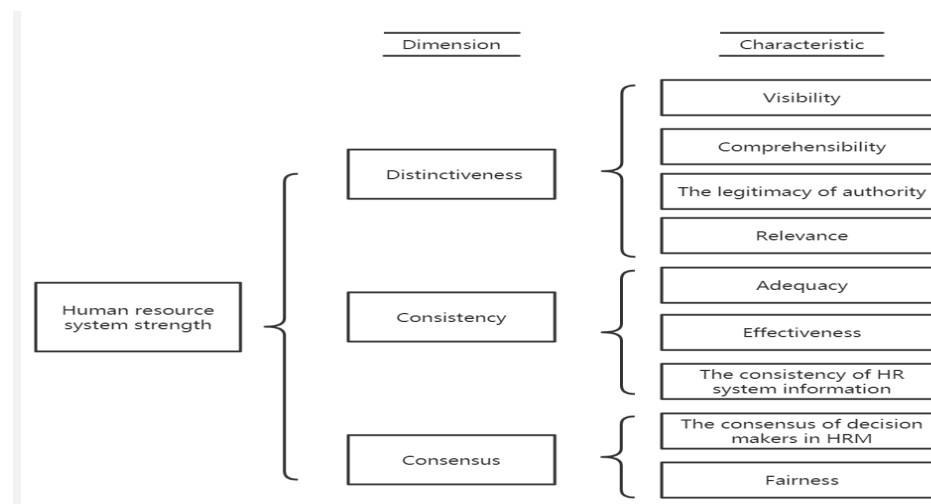


Figure 1. The dimension division of HRSS.

#### 4. HRSS measurement

Coelho, Cunha, Gomes, and Correia (2012) Based on the theory of Bowen development scale, the questionnaire about the HRSS gave 16 items, including 5 items of consequences, 6 items of consistency and 5 items of consensus. 6 out of 5, the questionnaire has good validity and reliability, in order to achieve the purpose of measurement, the

theoretical model of simplified can promote the development of empirical research, to obtain enough samples.

Delmotte, Winne, and Sels (2012) made a new scale for the three dimensions of HRSS and obtained favorable results through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. The model was verified to be reliable, and it was found that distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency were independent structures. This measurement tool was systematically and scientifically developed as the most mature HRSS measurement tool covering all dimensions at present. Delmotte et al. directly manipulated it from the dimensions and characteristics of HRSS and designed a 31-item scale, including 10 questions of distinctiveness, 9 questions of consistency, and 12 questions of consensus. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the HRSS scale and the subscales of distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus were 0.92, 0.85, 0.80, and 0.82, respectively, all above 0.70, showing good reliability.

## **5. The empirical research of HRSS**

Through the strength of involved in human resources management system of literature collection and analysis, found the study of human resource management to strength has made certain progress, but the lack of a system and expounded, after finishing summed up the strength of the human resource management involves literature has antecedent and consequence variables, such as moderation variable, then to analyze these variables. In this way, a rich research framework can be put forward.

### **5.1 Antecedent variable of HRSS**

An in-depth exploration of the influencing factors of HRSS is of great significance for the construction of the HR system. The scholar shows that the antecedents of HRSS are complex and diversified, not determined by a single factor. Jia et al. (2018) find that authentic leadership is significantly positively correlated with HRSS (Jia et al., 2018). Chacko and Conway (2019) pointed out that HR event valence (i.e., Whether the HRM event was perceived as positive or negative) has a positive correlation with HRSS (Chacko & Conway, 2019). There is little literature on the antecedent variables of HRSS. It is hoped that future scholars can pay more attention to the research on the antecedent variables of HRSS.

### **5.2 The consequences of HRSS**

As for the research on the consequences of HRSS, existing studies include those in which HRSS directly acts on consequences and those in which HRSS acts on consequences through mediating effects. Therefore, the analysis of consequences is carried out from two perspectives, namely, proximal influence and distal influence.

#### **5.2.1 Proximal influence**

de la Rosa-Navarro et al. (2019) obtained two dimensions of HRSS in the study, namely consistency and a new factor, known as HRM reputation (also a combination of uniqueness and consensus). And it is found that HR system reputation has a positive impact on organizational citizenship behavior (de la Rosa-Navarro et al., 2019). Xie (2021) analyzed that HRSS has a significant positive effect on retail enterprise performance, and retail enterprise climate can effectively regulate the relationship between HRSS and retail enterprise performance (Xie, 2021). Bednall, Sanders, and Yang (2022) pointed out that HRSS plays a mediating role between HRM practice and employee response, active behavior, employee work performance, and perceived organizational effectiveness (Bednall et al., 2022). Zhou and Zhou (2022) found that HRSS was significantly positively correlated with green innovation of manufacturing enterprises, and incentive environmental regulation had a more significant positive regulating effect on HRSS and green innovation of enterprises (Zhou & Zhou, 2022).

#### **5.2.2 Distal influence**

Chacko and Conway (2019) pointed out that perceived event signal HRSS is positively correlated with daily work engagement through employees' clear expectations, and clear anticipation perception plays a key role in perceived event signal HRSS and daily work engagement. A useful tool for managers to better understand HRSS is employee expectations (Chacko & Conway, 2019). Zhu, Zhang, and Zhu (2020) find that organizational commitment plays a partial mediating effect on the impact of HRSS on service-oriented organizational citizenship behavior. Symbolic employer brand has a significant negative moderating effect on the relationship between HRSS and organizational commitment (Zhu et al., 2020). Jia, Chen, and Jiao (2021) find that HRSS positively affects knowledge sharing, and self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between HRSS and knowledge sharing (Jia et al., 2021). Alfes, Shantz,

Bailey, Conway, and Monks, et al. (2022) indicated that employees' perception of HRSS would improve employees' response to organizational changes through organizational support and positive emotions. The change environment has a positive impact on the overall change attitude of employees (Alfes et al., 2019). Zhang, Zhu, Liu, and Cai (2022) showed that HRSS had a positive impact on employee creativity through work skills and occupational adaptability, and found that the strong intrinsic motivation of proactive personality weakened HRM's extrinsic incentive function. Active personality plays a negative moderating role between HRSS and employee creativity (Zhang et al., 2022).

### 5.3 HRSS plays a moderating role

Jia, Wang, Yan, and Tang (2016) found that the competency of teachers in research-oriented universities had a positive role in promoting job performance. HRSS has a moderating effect on the relationship between teachers' competency and job performance in research universities (Jia et al., 2016). Yan, Jia, and Luo (2017) found that HRSS moderated the relationship between the transformational leadership behavior of line managers and employee followability, and high HRSS weakened the impact of the transformational leadership behavior of line managers on followability (Yan et al., 2017). Based on the attribution theory, Babar, Obaid, Sanders, and Tariq (2022) found that HRSS moderated the relationship between performance evaluation quality and employee performance. When HRSS was higher, the relationship between performance evaluation quality and employee performance was closer (Babar et al., 2022).

## 6. Prospect of future research

This paper reviews the existing research on HRSS from four aspects: formation, dimension, measurement, and existing empirical research. It can be seen from the existing research that the research only pays attention to the theory but ignores the practice, and most of the research is superficial and not in-depth enough. For example, the three dimensions of distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus of HRSS are interrelated and influence HRSS together. What is the mechanism of interaction? What are the effects of these three dimensions on organizations and individuals respectively? In view of this, the research on various aspects of HRSS needs to be enriched and expanded. Further research on the future can be conducted from the following aspects.

First, discuss the antecedents of HRSS. It can be seen from the literature review that there are relatively few researches on the antecedents of HRSS, and the mechanism of HRSS should be deeply discussed from the organizational level, individual level, and environmental factors. For example, current line managers will be more involved in HRM activities and how line managers affect HRSS. In the future, antecedent variables of HRSS can be discussed at multiple levels to deepen the understanding of HRSS and provide references for enterprises to improve HRSS.

Second, discuss the consequences of HRSS. It can be seen from the literature review that the influence of HRSS on the individual level is relatively more, which generally focuses on the influence on the attitude and behavior of employees. However, HRSS explores the organizational level relatively little. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) pointed out that each dimension of HRSS has a significant impact on enterprise performance, so the impact of HRSS on relevant variables at the organizational level can be discussed in future studies. For example, organizational product innovation performance, innovation behavior, and market performance, or the influence of HRSS on multiple levels.

Third, in the review of existing literature, the influence of HRSS on the results of variables mostly focuses on the positive side, and the negative impact is basically not involved. Therefore, the positive and negative effects of HRSS on individuals and organizations can be further explored in future studies.

## 7. Conclusion

HRSS is very important for enterprises and can promote better development of enterprises through HRSS. Through the whole article, we can understand the research status of HRSS in various aspects and put forward suggestions for future development. In general, the research on HRSS should be continued. We hope that enterprises can attach importance to this aspect and promote better development of enterprises.

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