A CRITICAL VIEW ON HPWS AND EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT- FORM OF COMMITMENT MATTERS

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Abstract
This paper has examined critically the impact of HPWS on types of commitment through literature surveys of HPWS and commitment. Particularly the employee behaviors towards job stress and intensity as possible outcomes and predicted their roles between HPWS and employee commitments viz. affective, continuous and occupational commitments in Japanese organizations. The author has argued that in 'reality' HPWS may not have an 'ideally' positive effect on "affective commitment" in the presence of job stress and work intensity. There may be an increase of "continuous commitment", whereas their "normative" and "occupational commitment" probably will remain unaffected. The author has also argued possible relations of job stress and job intensity to different forms of commitment against researches showing commitments giving rise to job stress to the employees, thus a reverse phenomenon can also be observed in organizations at Japan. The arguments and view points expressed may also serve as an extension to Takeuchi et al (2007) study on HPWS in Japan.

Key words: *HPWS, Job intensity, Job stress, Commitment, Japan*

Introduction

The author has raised questions on the implications of HPWS on employee - commitment and how job stress and job intensity as outcomes of HPWS will influence inter relationships between HPWS and different forms of Employee commitments. The paper consequently unfolds reasons and arguments leading to hypothesize relationships between HPWS, employee commitments, job stressors and job intensity. Working definition of employee commitment has been adapted as state psychological attachments that lead to ideally positive relationship between an actor (individual or employee) and entity (organization and occupation). The types of commitment conceptualized in this paper are derived from Meyer and Allen commitment(1991) theory of employees' psychological attachment to their organization due to their emotional (Affective), costs or economical relationship(Continuous), obligation or duty (Normative) and occupational or job related attachment derived from Blau' 's career commitment (1993).

A large number of US researchers made intensive studies of a newly emerging work system called high performance work systems（HPWS） from the nineties Cappelli and Rogovsky (1994); Osterman (1995); McDuffie and Kochan (1995) Arthur (1994) ,McDuffie (1995), Becker and Huselid,(1998),Huselid,(1995;) and this continued in the twenties like (Appelbaum et al, 2000, Bae and Lawler 2000**,** Guthrie 2001, Lepak and Snell 2002, Zachratos et al 2005, Takeuchi et al 2007) both in the Western and non-western settings and today also being widely followed in

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different economies including that of the developing economies(Lawler et al 2000). HPWS, had its roots to HR practices related with the Japanese production systems, most significantly the lean system of Toyota, documented extensively in the book titled *"the machine that changed the world"* written by *Womack, Jones and Roos in 1990.* A number of terms had often been used interchangeably to describe HPWS– high performance work organization (Ashton and Sung, 2004), high involvement work systems (Felstead and Gallie, 2002), high performance employment systems (Brown and Reich, 1997) and high commitment management (Wood, 1999; Baird, 2002) or as high performance management HPM (Butler et al 2004).The development of new forms of work processes with the usage of high technology, the HRM practices under these high performance work systems become a critical factor for the organizational success. Such HR practices in HPWS were designed to elicit deep commitment of workers to fulfill the desired objectives of the organizations. In this respect, the concepts of human resource management and HPWS might be said to be largely similar in function and objectives.

HR practices and policies in HPWS

There had been considerable lack of consensus as to what constitutes HPWS like Becker and Gerhart (1996), Youndt et.al (1996) and the problem persisted till date (David Lepak et al 2006). There had been some conflicts in conceptualizations of the usages of same HR practices in different HR systems increasing confusions in reader's mind. Most of these HR practices known as the soft approach or the Harvard model in HRM (Beer et al 1984) or the best practices or the commitment model (Johnson 2000) and "development humanism" (Guest (1999) , were all conceptually found to be similar to Japanese people management systems. Huselid (1995) developed 13 best HR practices as "high performance work practices" and later Pfeffer (1998) outlined seven best practices similar to these practices which had a resemblance to the Harvard model. The *commitment* oriented HR systems consist of practices such as intensive training and development, socialization, promotion from within, high compensation, selective staffing to forge a stronger psychological connection between employees and organizations. (David Lepak et al 2006). Similarly authors like Osterman (1994), McDuffie (1995) Zacharatos, et al (2005) used *high intensity* oriented HR practices focusing the use of formal or self directed teams, employee involvement participatory groups, and product-related suggestions made and implemented by employees, job rotation and carrying out quality tasks. 'flexible work systems' employee problem-solving groups (or quality circles), and total quality management overall empowering employees through increased flow of information and devolution of decisions making power, leading to greater productivity. HPWS comprises both these *high involvement* and *high commitment* HR practices. Several researchers have used these conceptualizations interchangeably (Wood & de Menezes, 1998; Zacharatos et al. 2005). They had reached to a consensus that the ultimate objective of commitment, or involvement in high performance work system or some other HR systems are the same the productivity and profitability of the organization. Belanger et al (2002) have sought to justify some of the conceptual confusions surrounding high performance work system through a) Production management: which involves the greater use of flexible production systems with an emphasis of quality b) Work organization which involves the use of production processes based on knowledge and cognition, especially the use of teamwork and c) Employee relations: harnessing of employee commitment in the service of the organization. He theorized that high performance work systems practices were to be implemented in a "bundle" in order to get the maximum results. Without the supports of the similar practices the implementation of a single high performance practice may achieve little or may become counterproductive. Most referred HR practices in HPWS literatures can be tabulated below:-

HR Policies , practices in HPWS	Authors (date of Publications)
Performance based pay	Guthrie (2001) Pil McDuffie(1996) Huselid (1995) Wood (1996) Snell and Dean (1992) Guest (1999) Appelbaum (2000) Zacharatos et al (2005)
Teams as a fundamental unit of organization	Guthrie(2001) Pil McDuffie (1996) Wood (1996) Appelbaum (2000) Zacharatos (2005)
Employee participation programs	Guthrie(2001) Huselid (1995) Pil and McDuffie (1996) Wood (1996) Guest (1999) Zacharatos et al (2005)
Formal communication programs to keep employees informed about the firm	Guthrie (2001) Huselid (1995) Guest (1999) Zacharatos et al (2005)
Regular use of employee attitudes survey	Guthrie(2001), Huselid (1995) Guest (1999)
Employee job security policies such as no compulsory redundancies.	Wood (1996) Guest (1999) Becker and Huselid(1998) Zacharatos et al (2005)
Formal training as the indicator of employers' commitment to invest n human capital	Huselid (1995) Snell and Dean (1992) Truss (2001) Zacharatos et al (2005)
Reduced status differentials between managers and employees (egalitarian)	Pil and McDuffie (1996) Wood (1996) Guest (1999) Zacharatos et al (2005)
Internal promotions or selections to fill vacant positions	Guthrie (2001) Huselid (1995) Guest (1999)
Formal performance appraisal	Huselid(1995) Wood (1996) Truss (2001)
Development appraisal	Whitener (2001) Snell and Dean (1992)
Formal grievance or complaint resolution systems	Becker and Huselid (1998) Huselid (1995) Guest (1999)
Targeted selections , recruitment	Truss (2001) Huselid (1995) Zacharatos et al (2005)
Merit based promotions	Guthrie (2001)
Formal Job analysis(Job description) Job design ,safety	Huselid (1995) Zacharatos et al (2005)

Adapted from：David P. Lepak, et.al (2006) and Macky and Boxall (2007)

How HPWS relate to employee behavior in the work places?

"There are burgeoning researches on organizational outcomes but there is far less systematic data regarding employee experiences of HPM."(Butler et al 2004**)** Most of authors believed HPWS would promote positive behavior in the employees. The HR practices normally used in HPWS has its sources from the soft Harvard model (Beer et al 1984)These HR practices were generally supposed to provide mutuality in all affairs of running business between employee – employer and the employees were significant stake holder in an organization. Guest (1999) in an analysis of a survey of 1,000 workers carried out for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and

Development (CIPD) in the UK, found that workers seemed to react positively to human resource management practices which he termed as "*positive psychological contract"* Arnold & Feldman(1982),Cotton & Tuttle(1986), Freeman and Kleiner (2000) also rated positive impact on the employees satisfaction and intention to stay in the company or increase morale of the employees as HPWS did increase the value of the human capital in the organization(Huselid 1995, Zacharatos et al 2005*)* Most authors assumed (Edwards & Wright, 2001, p. 570*)*. "Systems… are established; they influence workplace practice; employee attitudes change, with increased satisfaction or commitment; there is a consequent effect on behavior; and this in turn feeds through to the performance of the work unit and eventually the company…"

Does HPWS also have a negative effect on the employee behavior?

Even though in theory HPWS should elicit commitment, it had been identified that in practice this was not necessarily the case. There had been considerable negative impacts of HPWS amongst the employees. Ramsay et al. (2000) found some evidences of negative effect on the employees in his study in U.K. He divided the HR practices into two groups of HPWS practices .In one he included HR practices as EEO policy, employee union representation, and family-friendly policies amongst other things. The second system included grievance procedures, formal teams, appraisals and formal training. Ramsay described the first system as a 'politically correct system,' but showed a statistically negative significant relationship to the commitment while the other group of system produced no effect. He concluded that the HPWS could have a marginally positive effect on employees' attitudes to commitment but actually an overall negative effect on employees' affective commitment to their organizations.

The 'high involvement' working practices creating commitment were statistically insignificant Arthur (1994). Authors analyzing self directed teams have found to increase autonomy or empowerment allow for greater discretion over their work, which are all important aspects of HPWS (Edwards & Wright 2001). But such autonomous team work had also been linked as an augmentation of Foucault's ideas in building a new model of labor process control. Here the centre of control had shifted from the management to the workers themselves, establishing their own norms for their team's activity. The concept of self managing teams had also been closely linked to "concertive control" or "panopticism" through horizontal surveillance, and peer group scrutiny (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992**;** Hetrick and Boje, 1992 Barker, 1993*;* Barker and Cheney1994). Life in teams might also bring about stressful experiences. Individual could unambiguously identify those team members who were above average or "good" workers in addition to those who were below average or "poor" performers. Such scrutiny would support the operation of concertive control in a team by enabling the establishment of collective norms based on a detailed comparison of individual's performance. Exerting oneself in these norms of team could also give rise to "charlatan behaviors" in the organizations, detrimental to fairness of the appraisal system and could also relate to the commitment levels of the employees (Gbadamosi 2006, Parnell and Singer 2001). In the event of wrong perceptions of fairness or justice in the organizations might also give rise to disharmony of team work and in the altruism of the employees (Jex, et.al.2003, Sewell and Wilkinson 1992).

White et al.(2003, p. 177) said "..plausible that high commitment or high-performance management will have a negative impact on the home domain of workers to the extent they are designed to elicit greater discretionary effort in pursuit of the organizations goals." The effectiveness of HPWS could be diminished through the lack of employee organizational commitment which might be directly related to the increased employee discretion that caused to increase negative job-to-home spillover. Even though as employment might continue, good

relations with management could strain. And organizations often had to struggle with "continuance commitment" of the employees**.** Similarly Danford (2003) cited research that evidently shows that HPWS go hand in hand with downsizing and led to job insecurity and cautioned that HPWS did not escape the "capitalist logic" of "maximizing profits"(p. 73). Danford et al. (2004), in a case study of British aerospace workers, found that HPWS produced a number of negative impacts on the employees. For example, employee workloads increased, older workers complained about loss of job variation, worker stress levels rose, workers and managers especially came under increasing time pressure and this also had a negative spill-over into the workers some lives. Looking at workplace changes in the EU from 19976-2000, Godard's (2004) wide ranging critical assessment of the HPWS literature also suggested quite pessimistic views that the impact on worker job satisfaction of HPWS practices such as autonomous teams could in fact produce negative effect to the employees. Also drawing on Canadian material, Kumar (2000) found a reduced quality of work-life, due to increased workloads, job insecurity, and a decline in the influence on the job and confidence in the management. Oeij and Noortje (2002) found that 32% of employees were reportedly being subjected to high speed work for over 50% of their working time, and there had been general move across Europe to an intensification of work. A New Zealand case study (Cochrane et al., 2005**)** about the implementation of HPWS in the dairy industry's Whareroa plant, (describing it as Manufacturing Excellence) found a mixed set of responses from workers. Most respondents felt they had limited involvement in key decision making of the plant even though a majority felt that the workplace had become safer. Berg and Kalleberg's (2002*)* survey of over 4000 US workers provided a similarly mixed set of findings. They reported that the increased communication and participation could lead to role overload for workers, but also at the same time could also reduced co-worker conflict, but the level of stress varied according to industry and practice. Anderson-Connolly et al. (2002), Batt (2004) found a complex pattern where some aspects of workplace transformation proved harmful to workers' well-being and decreased job satisfaction while other aspects were beneficial and contributed to increased levels of satisfaction. Some components of workplace transformation, such as autonomy contributed to the satisfaction and well-being of non-managers but were stressor to the managers.

Does HPWS increases Job/work intensification ?

Intensity in jobs or work can be understood by the intensity that covers heavier workloads, tighter deadlines and faster work paces (Gospel ILO 2003) Studies of many scholars have shown a positive relation between a better balance of work load and private life of employees in HPWS work places like Walton (1985); Osterman (1995) Berg et al. (2003) Heywood et al (2005) Appelbaum et al.,(2000).

Whitfield and Poole (1997**,** p. 757) suggested that HPM techniques typically involve higher start-up costs and needed to yield higher returns to justify their maintenance. Thus companies would look for more efforts from the part of the employees HPWS practices resulted in greater time pressure on employees, higher demands, and an increased work load (Godard 2001**;** Lewchuk, Stewart and Yates 2001). Studies reported HPWS intensified the required work effort by' speeding up the line' and by forcing employees actually to 'work harder, not smarter' to achieve greater efficiencies as these systems were basically designed to eliminate wastes, including unnecessary work time and redundant labor (Babson 1995*;* Parker 1993,Green 2004). It could be argued that a greater intensification of work could directly lead to greater labor productivity as a result of greater effort made by employees. Thus, employees would perceive that they were both more competent and had greater impact on the performance of their working areas. But equally, could produce higher levels of exhaustion, physical pain, and tension and were likely

to diminish both employee's satisfaction with work and employee motivation to continuously improve performance. Whether greater intensity had more of a positive or negative effect on employees' performance capacities should demand an empirical answer and further research in future. But general assumptions of most of the workplaces were to have a reciprocal relationship that facilitate collaborations in the domains of knowledge and skill development climates (Cook and Meyer 2007).If team members were absent, other team members had to provide a back –up cover for them as no replacement staff were provided thus intensifying work to considerable extents. Greary and Dobbins (2001) Edwards et al. (1998: 40-45*)* point out that workers were not necessarily dissatisfied with their level of effort, in the six organizations studied by Edwards et.al (1998) suggested 57% of the sample could be classified as "committed," in that they were working harder and liked doing so. But the concept of "effort" is in itself ambiguous. If the fluidity of work and the flow of production were to be improved, workers might produce more without necessarily giving more "effort" and without experiencing more fatigue. It could be possible that workers would not object to this type of improvement, but increasing the work pace and "speeding up" might become an issue (Belanger 2000). As training could lead to broaden tasks of a given job (Kalmi and Kauhenen 2005） organizations would like to get the return of their investment in the human capital in the form of increased productivity(McDuffie 1995) which could induce further intensification of works.

Do HPWS increases job stress?

Many studies also found that heavy job demand, and low control, or decreased decision latitude led to job dissatisfaction, mental strain, and cardiovascular disease. Research also showed that this could be the influence resulting out from participation, rather than "participation per se", which might affect job stress and health of the employees (Israel, et al 1989).

Delbridge and Turnbull (1992) cited high trust employment relations contradicted by the process of tight surveillance and extreme standardizations of jobs. The concept of workers' empowerment or multi- skilling were a gimmick as works continually intensified leading to a " management by stress" (Berg and Kallberg 2000, pg 60). Hochschild (1997) claimed that HPWS with their participatory and supportive environments actually could become safe haven of stresses and produce conflicts at home. 61% of unionized workers surveyed "reported that their workload was either too fast, too heavy, had to be done by too few people, or in too little time" (Lewchuk and Robertson, 1996: 66). No less than 44% reported that "compared with a couple of years ago, their current job was more tense" (ibid. 67). Guest and Conway (1999) argued that the work had been intensified amongst the professional workers and the managers. Recent survey confirmed that employees with high levels of supervisory support shared information were healthier than other employees who did not. But supportive relationships between line managers and employees could possibly ease the impact of work-place stress but they might not cure it. The root cause of work intensification was the reduced staffing levels pursued by senior managers in response to the market pressures exerted by their competitors and dominant stakeholders. Some forms of supervisory support could actually increase stress. For example, the introduction of performance appraisal systems and other forms of 'feedback' could generate feelings of frustration and hostility if they were meant to evaluate pay hike rather than personal development, and particularly when employees were subjected to inadequate staffing levels and unrealistic targets. For the short term, the drive to reduce costs and/or increase profits might well have increased 'efficiency'. But in the long term, could have worrying implications not just for individual employees and their families but the health of its 'social environment' as a whole. Pressure 'from the sheer quantity of work' had the greatest impact equally both for men and women, and for the full and part-timer(JIWIS

survey 1999, Green 2001, Jex 2003).Ramsay et al. (2000) used the UK 1998Workplace Employee Relations Survey to show that workers in HPWS report greater job strain and lower pay satisfaction. Gallier et al. (1998) used earlier survey data to show the characteristics of HPWS were associated with greater "work pressure" for employees. Godard (2001) surveying Canadian workers argued that higher levels of employee involvement, through teamwork, could produce stress that counter-weighs the positive impacts on workers of empowerment and task involvement.

The ultimate response to frequent and intense periods of stress is burnout (Koeske & Koeske, 1993). The job-stressors identified were poor working conditions (Cross & Billingsley, 1994)*;* no building level support, no administrative support, role dissonance, and role ambiguity (Gersten, et al 2001, Elitharp, 2005).those who were extremely competitive, committed to work and strong in time urgency, were more likely to be subjected to emotional distress and suffer from stress symptoms (Chesney and Rosenman, 1980*;* Ganster, 1986; Lee and Ashforth, 1990). Stress could also occur as a result of role conflicts, particularly those arising out of the different expectations of superiors (Gross et.al, 1985; Moorhead and Griffin, 1995), and the various behavioral expectations of their positions (Van Sell et al, 1981). Excessive workload could increase fatigue and could reduce efficiency as a result of increased stress levels (Alluisi,1982) Time pressure deadline was examined as a potential stressor since it was an important precursor to stress (Srinivas and Motowidlo, 1987). The demands of the external environment could be greater than the time available to meet them and thus an individual facing severe time constraints might experience significant levels of stress. The proponents of fun claimed that when people have fun doing their jobs, they experienced less stress (Abramis 1989; McGhee 2000) and are less like to be absent or leave the organization (Marriotti 1999; Zbar 1999).There could be possibility that performance gains usually come with a decreased level of emotional and psychological well being, as evident by the emotional dissonance, and subsequently led to stress and burnout experienced by individuals.(Liu 2006).Such dissonance occurs when employees express emotions according to the employers' expectations (Witt, 1999) or could result because of the norms set up by the peers in a working team or when the co-workers or when the company ignored plea of social support. Social support could also play a role in elevating one's affective well being at work. There were evidences of significant negative relationship between social support and occupational stress (Beehr et al 2000). It could be plausible that employees experiencing high levels of stress would be less likely to engage in altruistic behaviors or organizational citizen behavior. If employees feel the organization had failed to fulfill their promised obligations they could less likely to give their best effort and less likely to engage in organizationally-directed citizenship behavior (Eisenberger, et al 1986)

Does HPWS, job intensity or stress influence different forms of employee commitment?

There had been a strong relation between job satisfaction and commitment to the organization in HPWS workplaces (Mathieu and Zajac 1990). High commitment HR practices increased employee commitment and thus the organizational effectiveness Arthur (1994), Wood and de Menezes (1998). Macky and Boxall(2007) in their study of HPWS from a sample of 424 found a direct correlation of employee perception of HPWS as a single bundle with employee affective commitment and to behavior commitment (intention to stay back to the firm). The employee HPWS scores were positively correlated to the employee satisfaction and to the trust to the management. HR practices normatively associated with the HPWS would have a positive and additive effect to the employee attitudes. More HPWS practices if added to the bundle will have a better effect. Their causal path found variables like employee job satisfaction and employee trust

in management, had a mediated relationship between HPWS and employee affective commitment but could not find a direct causal relation between HPWS and commitment. They also did caution over zealous adoption could also lead to increased work load and hence a negative effect to the employees. HPWS might have a win-win situation between company and its employees (Machin and Wood 2005) but could have an opposite effect where the employee might suffer or could be that both the company and the employee had to pay price (Boxall and Purcell 2003).Goddard (2004)using data from a telephone survey of 508 Canadian concluded that "it is the interest of only the minority of employers to adopt the high performance paradigm fully and even when it is adopted it may not have a positive implication for workers…" (ibid pg 371).Ramsay et al. (2000) found that, on the one hand, the data pointed to some association between HPWS and higher job discretion and commitment, however, on the other hand some proof of job strains were also found. Harley (2002) in his Australian study could not find a direct relationship between HPWS with either positive or negative effect to the employees. But found HPWS were negatively associated with employee continuance commitment. Butler et al (2004) hypothesized adapting Ramsay's model of both being optimistic and exploitative. a)optimistic: HPWS could produce higher employee commitment as a result of higher levels of job discretion, job satisfaction good managerial relations and b) exploitative: HPWS could produce higher job strain through work intensification, higher job insecurity and increased job responsibility. The stressor-strain relations were stronger for individuals with higher levels of both affective organizational commitment and continuance commitment and certain types of organizational stressors might make employees more vulnerable regardless of the basis for their commitment to the organization. (Irving, P Gregor et al 2003). But how stress and intensity could relate to different forms of commitment in HPWS domain has yet been studied empirically. Could there be any causal models where employee perceptions of increased job intensification and job stress mediate HPWS and forms of employee commitment? The phenomenon can be discussed in the backdrop of HPWS practices in Japanese organizations.

HPWS in the context of Japan:

There had been a very limited study on HPWS in Japan. Takeuchi et al (2007) found positive correlations between HPWS (aggregated by both the average ratings of employee perceptions and managerial perceptions) and the collective human capital of the employees.(aggregated, managerial average ratings) and social exchange(average ratings of employee perceptions). The human capital and social exchange variables had a mediating relation to the Relative Establishment Performance of the firm (Aggregated, managerial average ratings) They adopted scales of Lepak and Snell (2000) high commitment work practices in the Japanese context by selecting 21 items HR scales. But we could not gather much information on an important aspect of work practices in Japanese organizations, how the team functioned. Even though there had been strong references of team work historically and traditionally in Japanese society and in organizations (Tudor et al 1996). Team work frequently had also been referred in HPWS literatures Pil and McDuffie (1996) Wood (1996) Applebaum et al (2000) Rubenstein and Kochan (2001). Traditionally Japanese organizations believed all employees were to have equal abilities thus used principle of equality to motivate employees to compete and simultaneously to cooperate with one another. The usage of the performance related or merit based payment hikes or promotions were limited only after employees reached at a certain age of employment in the same organization, could be well after 10 or 12 years of extensive experiences in the company (Takeuchi, Shimada in Thurow ed. book 1986). But recently this had been revised for pay hike and promotion related to performances or results. This had become an issue to many authors in Japan.

These were claimed to be negatively effective in terms of lowering motivations in the employees most importantly could lead to disharmony in team functioning in Japanese organizations (Ohtake and Karato, 2004), Kishita (2006).Takeuchi et al (2007) adopted Youndt et al (2004, 2005) to assess human capital of the organizations and justified perceptions of the managers to have high value of employees' ability, considering high resources of competitive advantage for their organizations. As a consequence HR systems would likely increase employee discretions and would emphasize achievements or results (Kerr, 1985*;* Snell and Dean 1992). Lepak and Snell (1999) in their concept of human resource architecture found that the core employees performed all the essential tasks within the organizations and the organizational human resource systems are designed to support and manage this human capital (Gramm and Schnell 2001) As discussed before a firm would invest in the human capital only if there were any expectations of return of investments. Increasingly companies were found to be strengthening development for talents through competency analysis, input on individual interests, different assessment of abilities and needs and the formulation of the action plans (Clarke 2001, Messmer 2000).

Japanese domestic firms had traditionally institutionalized a practice of lifetime employment and extensive trainings to foster human capital investments more than foreign firms in Japan (Yoshikawa et.al 2005). But when economic conditions worsen, companies might find extremely difficult to maintain such institutional safe guards. Although cutting wages and employment could be an economic necessity to improve cash flows (Cascio, 1993), this could also hurt performance by undermining employee trust, loyalty, and commitment (Mroczkowski & Hanaoka, 1997).

After the economic bubble burst, the Japanese economy grew at an average annual rate of 1.7% between 1992 and 1997 and saw further declines to 0.2% between 1998 and 2002. This financial sluggishness with global competitiveness increased the pressure for economic efficiency on managers, and shareholders, leading to the advent of hybrid form of corporate governance and HRM (Aoki et al 2007). The lifetime employment system had also started declining and now could exist in few companies and could have a bleak future (Ahmadjian & Robinson 2001, JILPT 2006).

Consequently, during the prolonged recession, many firms had restrained hiring and encouraged middle-aged and older employees to opt for early retirement, thus increasing the workload of employees in the "core" age groups, and raising the likelihood of more work accidents.(see notes iii) The increase in workload per individual were due to recent measures to reduce workforces, and intensified competitions among workers due to the introduction of performance-based wage systems resulting in excessively long working hours(Japan Labor Bulletin no 42 Pg 2-3). But larger workload did not result in increased salaries or promises of better treatment in the future(ibid pg 9). Statistics showed the salaries Japanese employees received were much lower than USA or Europe (See Fig 3).

There had been increased "service overtime" overtimes without any payments in Japan. In a survey conducted recently by Genda (2003)figured the most reasoned for working hard many hours voluntary were "to reach the norms assigned to me" (44.7%). While 21.6 percent answered, "to improve my own ability," a large percentage gave negative reasons for working overtime without pay, "because my colleagues also worked overtime without pay" (22.4%)(ibid. Pg2)But it actually appeared that the main reason was that "they are afraid to stop working" (Genda 2003).

Another possible reason could be the fading popularity of enterprise unions in Japan. Most of these enterprise unions were controlled by their companies with identity closely linked with its firms. There were few independent resources to counter management pressures. Thus the labor movement failed badly to secure implementation of a 40-hour work week for all workers (Weathers 1997).

Thus from the findings of Takeuchi et al (2007) it can be said when the employees were given more discretionary powers to carry out their works diligently and the pressure of the results and performance in work would increase intensity of job functions. This might be needed to achieve company goals particularly return on investment on human capital as discussed before, along with a lure of increased incentives or rewards of the employees. It thus becomes reasonable to predict further that in such pressure and induced competitions amongst the employees might bring disharmony in the working teams, possibly negative emotions and create stressful workplaces. With an increase incidents of over work and unpaid overtimes or *service overtime*,(see note i) leading to occasional death or job burn out known as *kharoshi* (see notes ii) may prevent employees' emotional attachment or trust in the management thus to their affective commitment. But to be eventually rewarded in the end and unable to find a suitable job in other organizations would probably lead to increase their continuous commitment to the organizations and the occupational commitment for the career oriented individuals. These careerists may feel these stressors were just professional hazards in their occupation as research showed educated workers were deeply disappointed to seniority wages and long term employment system in Japanese organizations (Kiyokawa and Oba 2003).

Then why do Japanese employees work harder? Dilemma of forms of commitment

Barnlund (1989) said commitment in Japan exists as a complex construct controlled by the concept of *on* and *giri.* Wierzbicka (1991) said *om* is given (favor) *om* carries the sense of obligations of repayment on reciprocity with it. The repayment could be seen in a positive or in a negative light but it has always been viewed as an obligation known as *giri,* and still continued as a powerful cultural norm even today. The "*giri* is never independent of what people might say" (ibid pg 366) even is a matter of honor and integrity Minami (1971). Markus and Kitayama (1991) supported "one's behavior is determined and contingent on to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be thoughts feelings and actions of others in the relationships" (p227) Hofestede (1991)reasoned this because Japan being a collective society , "what is expected is more important than enjoying what is done." They have to be committed in order to maintain harmonious relationships within the in group Triandis (1989). There has been no Japanese word that directly expresses the word "commitment". Japanese interpretation to the meaning of commitment is "connection, membership, responsibility, cooperation, and interest to the in group" (Ruth Guzley et al 1998, pg 12).

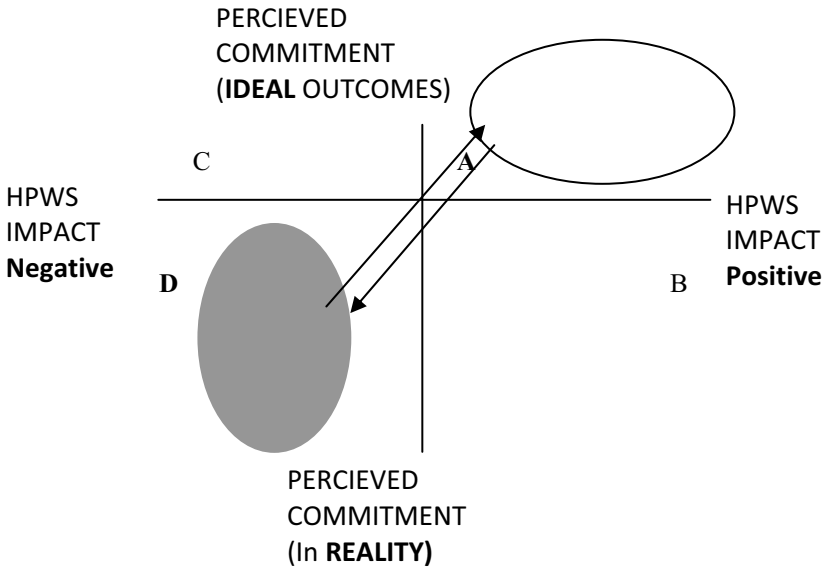
Traditionally there had been a unique Japanese working culture known as *gambaru*(Kodansha 1996, Meek, 2004) meaning to exert one's best efforts towards group objective without trying to disappoint the related members of the group. This was an essential virtue of the samurai warriors and still being used to denote rigorous continuous efforts. It symbolized one had to endure, persevere, and to be patient and a long suffering of unpleasant situations without complaining or anger. This was an essential attitude for collective survival and success.

Such *gambaru* attitude to sacrifice personal desire and individual needs for the good of their company than their private life could be a result of *tatemae* (public self) and not always *honne* (real self) thus were forced to do so to conform to the norms of society. Japanese workers demonstrated commitment to avoid ostracism in the company leading to *kharoshi* or job burnout (Miyamoto 1995).

In reality however Kang (1990) found that the workers' mobility in Japanese domestic firms were highly constrained by their reputation, and acquisition of un-transferable skills to other firms. Japanese workers are not culturally or intrinsically more committed. Rather, the Japanese

organizational environment shaped worker attitudes and behavior in such a way that the end result we observe was a low turnover, which could be "misconstrued as higher worker commitment" (Ono 2006).In reality it could be very costly for workers to quit the organization in Japan they have worked for years, since they normally could not find almost no alternative organizations to employ them for better, at least, in the same conditions. So they had to remain in the company even if they no longer had any emotional attachments to their organizations. Organization usually believed that development of "continuance commitment" goes with the development of "affective and normative" ones. The idea that "they (employees) must be having emotional attachment to the company and have ethically correct ideas, as they never quit the company" usually prevailed and accepted by top management. As a result, the employees had to pretend as if they had certain level of affective and normative commitment to the organization as high as they did on continuance commitment in order to prevent the top management to uncover their "spurious loyalty" to the company. (Watanabe and Takahashi 1999). Today Japanese employees have become more multi commitment, not only want to be committed to their jobs but also to their family, his likes and dislikes (Tokoro 2005) But the falling numbers of permanent core employees (see fig 1) and increasing disparity of "working poors" could now point fingers to the once glorified egalitarian Japanese organizations for possibly abusing the Japanese *ganbaru* culture by imposing employees to over work, forcing unlimited exhaustions leading to *kharoshi.* Saruta (2006) after his extensive study on HR practices in Toyota Production system concluded "if workers fails to retain their own independence of will and become subordinate in the body and soul to Toyota with no hope in a precarious future then this system cannot be given high appraisal…that exploits subcontractor companies and workers has a detrimental influence at social and regional levels…" The Toyota ways failed "to respect workers family and social life and lacks a sense of plentitude in the working environment" (ibid pg 504).

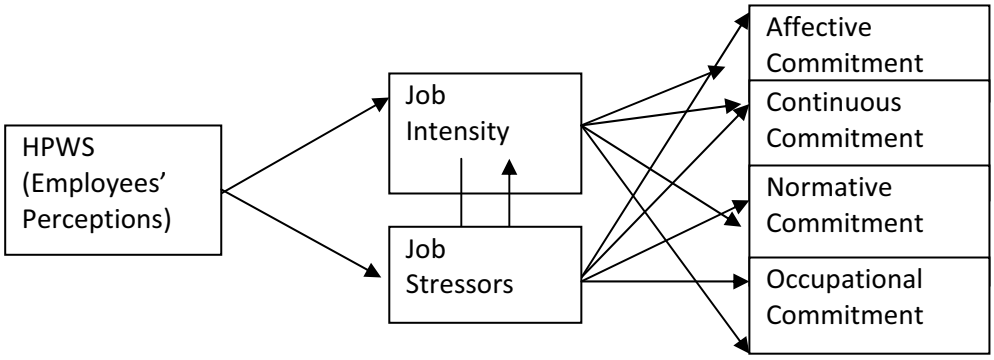
This phenomenon can be explained by the matrix shown below by referring to the Oba's theory of "value – conscious matrix" (Oba et al 2007), Oba (2008 forthcoming).



Adapted from Oba et. al. (2007) "Gakumon ryoku no susume"

Let us relate this issue of HPWS and employee commitment relationship by drawing to axis X and Y. The perpendicular Y axis is the perceived commitment axis. The positive side of the Y axis is the perceived the *ideal* commitment, positive outcomes of HPWS policies where the employees voluntarily exert efforts having supposedly high emotional affective attachment to the company. Whereas the lowermost of the y axis, is the *reality* of perceived commitment showing negative effects of HPWS. This zone may have some compulsions on the employees to exert efforts having less emotional affective commitment towards the company. The horizontal X axis is the impact of HPWS on employee commitment. It shows about the employees' perception of HPWS, how they value these policies. Left hand sides are the positive impact and the right hand sides are the negative impact zones. The zones A, B, C and D are denoted as four possible relationships between HPWS impact and perceived commitment. We could see a shift of the most ideal situation of perceived commitment from A zone to the D zone. We can denote people in the A as Alive (lively) and people in the D as Depressed. This shift of commitment from the *ideal* perspective of lively employees to the *reality* perspective of depressed people may be due to negative fall out of excessive job intensifications and increasing job stress of the employees in HPWS work places. Thus if we can control these two mediating variables of job intensifications and job stressors in HPWS workplaces we can see a reverse shift from D to A.

From the above discussions we can now propose hypothesis in the context of employees' perceptions of HPWS in Japan:



The proposed model showing a relationship between HPWS, Job stressors, Job intensity, Affective, continuous and occupational commitments of the employees, where Job stressors and Job intensity may act as mediating variables.

The employee perceptions of HPWS have positive relations to employee job stressors and job intensity.

Job Intensity and Job stressors are positively correlated.

HPWS has negative impact with affective commitment through Job Stress and Job Intensity.

HPWS has a positive impact with each of normative, continuous and occupational commitment.

Job stressors and job intensity has positive impact with continuous commitment.

Job stressors and Job Intensity each has no impact with occupational and normative commitment of the employees.

Does "*HRM use soft rhetoric to disguise hard reality*" as if "a wolf in sheep's clothing"? Caroll Gill (2007) .Organizations actually adopts both hard and soft models of HRM in a

functional system to realize goals, objectives (Gill 2007).In her arguments she cited references of Wilmott (1993) who asserted that "HRM's unitary rhetoric disguises the pluralist needs of employees turning them into 'willing slaves' who forgo their own interest as they believe the organization will take care of them. This unitary rhetoric disguises employee pluralist needs and facilitates advantages to the organizations at the expense of employees Vaughan (1994). Quite interestingly authors in Japan also started to opine that "empowerment" disguises a transfer of responsibility from the organization to the worker (Kishita 2006). Is HPWS also a party to this disguise?

John Budd (2004) conceptualized employment with a "human face" rather than as a purely economic transaction and emphasized the importance of ethics and human rights in employment relationship. The performance oriented HR policies, market oriented efficiency had embrace a utilitarian ethical foundation that advocated to maximize aggregate welfare by creating the "greatest good for the greatest number." Utilitarianism possibly glorifies consequences. Performance is the main and ultimate goal. The ends justify the means. Does HPWS ignore the human face of employment?

Conclusion and implications

Increasing cost of production is an important issue but costs of job stress and lack of committed employees will further exacerbate such costs. Challenge is to find ways to strike the balance by using HPWS like a velvet hammer in the workplaces. HPWS practices that balance employer and employee interests will be more successful, while those who will strike this hammer too hard likely to fail (Delaney and Godard, 2001)**.** In fact, the moderate adoption of high-performance work practices has been found to increase employee satisfaction, esteem, and commitment (Godard, 2001)**.** HR policies need not make employees give their lives to sacrifice for job sake but to dedicate their career to the organizations. Further researches in collaboration with the academics, corporate and the labor representatives should be directed towards these goals.

Notes

i) The survey, conducted in June 2002 and targeting 23,000 workers, showed that 17.8 percent of the respondents "frequently" performed "service overtime;"(overtime without payment)6.2 percent answered that about half of their overtime hours were unpaid; and 23.5 percent said that they "occasionally" worked overtime without pay, for a total of 47.5 percent. Of this 47.5 percent, the average amount of unpaid overtime was found to be 29.6 hours: 30.5 hours for male workers and 20.5 hours for female workers.(Japan Labor Bulletin (2003) No. Vol 42: No: 2)

ii). Among male worker According to the results of the Labour Force Survey, the percent of male employees who worked 80 or more hours of overtime a month — the yardstick for judging karoshi moved around 18 percent between 1993 and 1999, but exceeded 20 percent in 2000, and has increased for the three consecutive years since. By age group, it is workers aged 30 to 34, followed by 35 to 39 year olds and then those aged 40 to 44 who are hit the hardest (including those who responded that they did not work unpaid overtime), a conspicuously large number in their early 30s worked more overtime than any other age group, an average of 11.8 hours, while the same age group registered the highest proportion, 2.9 percent, of those whose overtime hours totaled 80 or more in a month. (Japan Labor Bulletin (2003) No. Vol 42: No: 2)

iii).The Japan Federation of Employers' Association (1995) categorizes the employment portfolio in three groups: (1) long-term skill-building group (employment agreement with no limited term; with pay raise, severance pay and pension; in core positions, including management, career positions and technical personnel; some 20 percent of all), (2) highly-skilled professional group (employment with limited term; with no pay raise, no severance pay or pension; professionals (planning, sales, research/development, etc.), (3) flexible employment group (employment with limited term; with no pay raise severance pay or pension;

general, technical and sales staff). It is advocated that these groups be used flexibly in companies. (Position Paper 2006 on Management and Human Resources Summary of "Part 2 Management and Labor Issues" December 13, 2005 Committee on Management and Labor Policy, Nippon Keidanren.)

Graphs and figures:

Fig (1a) Decrease in the permanent employees in the Japanese companies.
Fig (1b) Compensation of Japanese employees' vis-à-vis employees in USA and Europe.
Source: Silent spring Mar 19th 2008 From The Economist

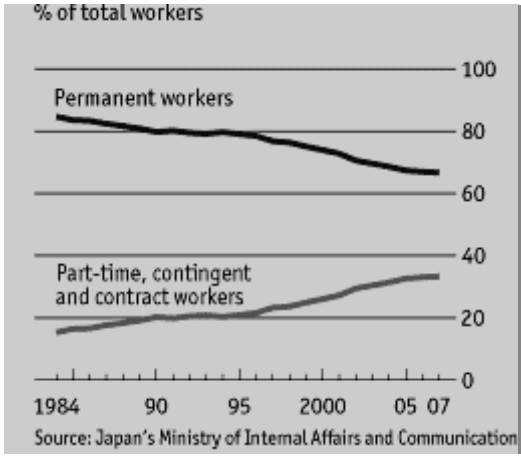


Fig 1(a)

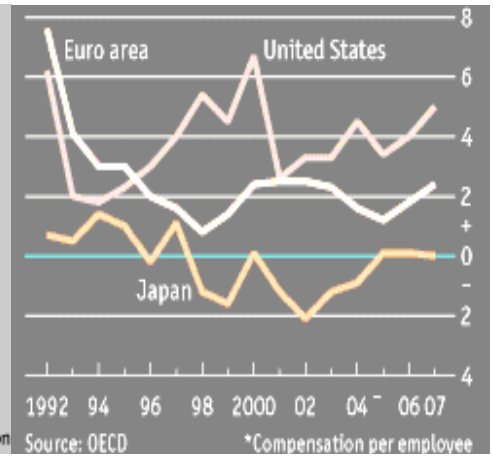


Fig 1(b)

Fig (2) Overtimes of employees in Japanese organizations
Source :RENGO Japan Labor Bulletin

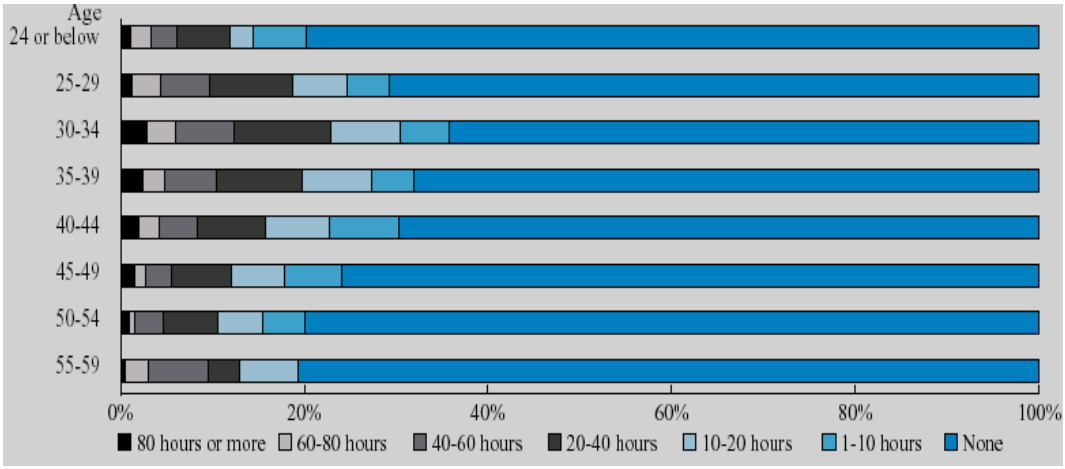
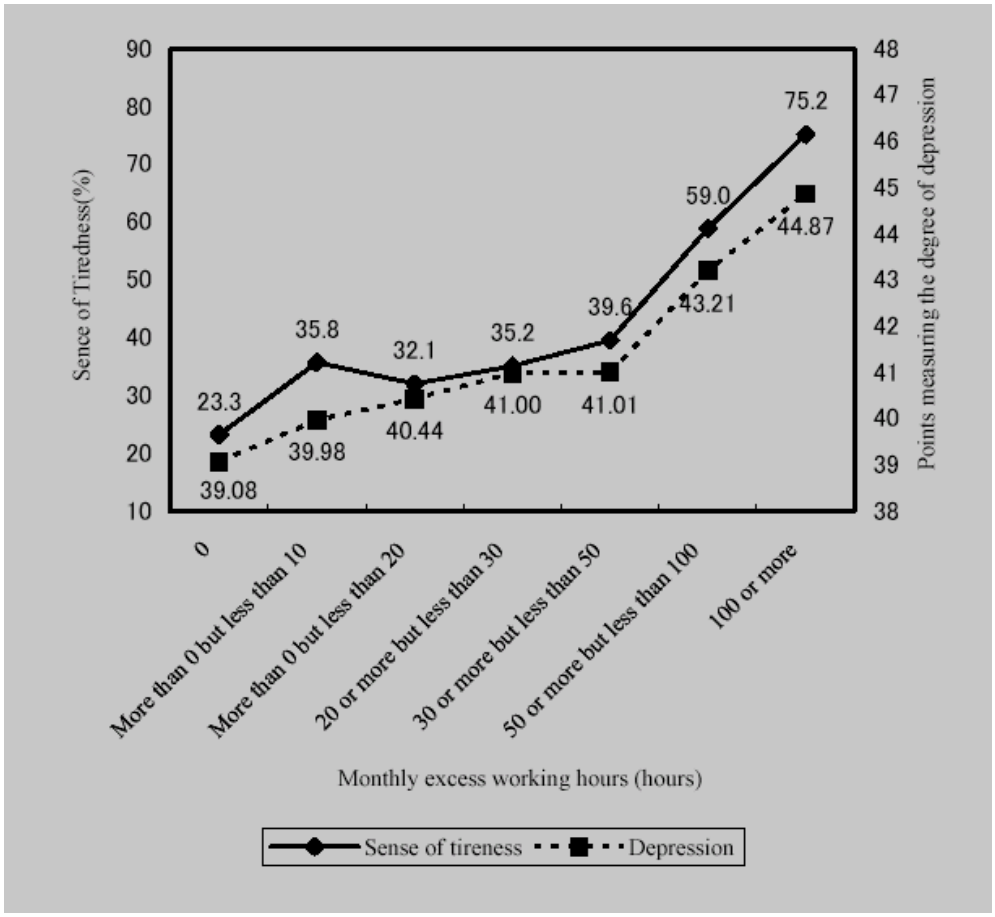


Fig 3: Relationships between Monthly Excess Working Hours, and Sense of Tiredness and Depression



Source: pg 13 Contemporary Working Time in Japan -Legal System and Reality
Kazuya Ogura Current situation of work hours and vacations in Japan,
Japan Labour Review Vol 3 No 3 (2006)

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