

Article

Worker Involvement and Performance in Italian Social Enterprises: The Role of Motivations, Gender and Workload

Ermanno C. Tortia ^{1,*}, Mónica Gago ², Florence Degavre ³ and Simone Poledrini ⁴¹ Department of Economics and Management, University of Trento, 38122 Trento, Italy² Faculty of Business Studies, Mondragon University, 20560 Oñati, Spain; mgago@mondragon.edu³ Centre de Recherche Travail, Etat et Société, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1348 Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium; florence.degavre@uclouvain.be⁴ Department of Economics, University of Genoa, 16126 Genoa, Italy; poledrini@icloud.com

* Correspondence: ermanno.tortia@unitn.it

Abstract: Over the past two decades, organizational sustainability has been studied from several different perspectives, such as marketing, governance, strategy, and human resource management (HRM). However, sustainability framed in HRM has not yet received enough attention in the literature, especially as it concerns the study of different organizational forms. Building on Enhert and Harry's (2012) sustainable HRM approach, this article studies worker empowerment and how it affects organizational performance in terms of service quality and service innovation. Specifically, it addresses how relational motivations interact with HR-empowering practices (involvement in decisions and task autonomy) as organizational resources in influencing performance, how workload pressure resulting from HR empowerment can improve performance, and the influence of gender on performance, especially with concerns for human capital (tertiary education) and motivations. To this end, a representative sample of workers employed by Italian social enterprises (ES) in the social service sector is used. We propose multilevel SEMs that are based on two sets of equations specifying worker- and organization-level effects on organizational performance. Our main results show that the combination of worker engagement and an appropriate relational context in the organizational environment is most conducive to delivering better and innovative services. In addition, a higher percentage of well-trained and relationally motivated women employees helps achieve this goal.

Keywords: social enterprise; sustainable HRM; worker involvement; relational motivations; workload; service quality; gender



Citation: Tortia, E.C.; Gago, M.; Degavre, F.; Poledrini, S. Worker Involvement and Performance in Italian Social Enterprises: The Role of Motivations, Gender and Workload. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 1022. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14021022>

Academic Editor: Luigi Aldieri

Received: 31 December 2021

Accepted: 13 January 2022

Published: 17 January 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Sustainable human resources have been defined by various authors on the basis of the need to combine economic and financial sustainability with the long-term sustainability of the organization's functioning, especially in relation to the use of resources, including human resources [1]. The triple bottom line approach is recalled to imagine a positive role for the sustainable use of resources in the pursuit of economic, social and environmental objectives [2]. The difference between sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) needs to be highlighted, as the former focuses on satisfying the needs of customers and users while meeting the needs of the community. The latter, on the contrary, starts from the use of resources (i.e., human and environmental; [3]). Sustainability requires that the economic and social value of resources be preserved over time, and that resource depletion is offset by regenerative processes [4]. In the multilevel perspective defended by Docherty et al. [5] and embraced in this paper, sustainability at the system level (organizational or social) can balance the needs and objectives of individuals and stakeholders at different levels simultaneously. In Enhert [6], sustainability corresponds to a model of equal consumption and regeneration of resources. In the case of HRM practices, sustainability promotes the regeneration of human resource capacity in the organization, its short- and

long-term survival, and its continued positive performance [7]. In this line, organizational resources that support the accumulation of human capital, professional growth and psychological wellbeing can compensate for the stress and exhaustion associated with workload and fatigue. The regeneration of human capabilities and motivations, and organizational resilience is likely to follow. To this end, human capital needs to be created and professional growth achieved by reconciling the individual objectives of workers (e.g., job stability, professional growth, economic and psychological wellbeing) with those of organizations (e.g., availability of adequate human resources to achieve efficient production and face competitive pressure).

In this article, sustainability of human resource utilization and performance are analyzed in social enterprises (SEs), which are understood as organizations that have a social goal and run a business to achieve it [8–11]. Sustainability is understood in terms of the balance between the demands coming from the organization (workload) and the resources in terms of worker empowerment (related to involvement in decision-making and task autonomy) that the organization is able to put in place, and interact with the motivational capital of workers [12,13]. A sustainability perspective has been advocated for SEs, as achieving social goals and missions requires the preservation of human and motivational capital, including professional skills [14,15]. This is related to the need for SEs to meet the double bottom line of stakeholder needs at the social level, and to achieve production at the economic level [16–19].

In addition to the above, the analysis is framed in the context of gender studies. That is, it refers to how men and women differentiate. Garcia-Lomas and Gabaldon [20] identify drivers and outcomes of women's involvement in social entrepreneurship, and identify an upward journey from non-economic to economic motivations that leads to the conclusion that genders, in the end, do not differ so much in terms of motivations to set up an SE. Scholars [16,21] mainly focus on women's social entrepreneurship, while the overwhelming presence of women employees in social enterprises and their relational motivations are almost neglected [22], with only a few results concerning social capital and gender differences [23]. Therefore, the present article deals with relational motivations from a gendered perspective and how it interacts with workers' empowerment and workload in influencing SEs' performance.

Section Two presents the research questions, literature review, and working hypotheses. Section Three addresses the specific organizational case of social enterprises, defining the organizational model and characteristics of services provided in the social services sector in Italy. It also discusses the role of gender in social enterprises. Section Four presents the data, materials, and methods of the empirical analysis; Section Five presents the results of the analysis; and Section Six a discussion of the findings. Section Seven concludes with some theoretical and managerial implications and limitations of the study.

2. Empowerment, Motivations, Workload and Organizational Performance: A Job Demands and Resources Perspective

This study seeks to study how empowering organizational HR practices in social enterprises in terms of involvement in decision-making, the mission of the organization, and task autonomy influence organizational performance declines in terms of service quality and innovation. Second, how relational motivations interact with worker empowerment in influencing performance, taking motivations as a determinant of performance and a mediator between empowerment and performance. Third, the analysis controls for the role of workload pressure as a determinant of performance and a mediator between empowerment and performance. This is to test whether managerial practices and governance rules seeking synergy between empowerment and a high work pace in a manner similar to high-performance work systems (HPWS), deliver positive performance effects. Fourth, it deepens the role of gender in influencing performance. Specifically, it enquires the strength of women's relational motivations and how women's higher education can increase the potential of the organization to produce quality services and innovate. Finally, the last

hypothesis concerns the joint effect of involvement and autonomy on performance in search for possible complementarities, again assuming relational motivations and workload one at a time as a mediator.

2.1. Empowerment and Performance

Sustainable HRM can include the analysis of worker empowerment as enabling organizational practice, especially in the service sectors, since it can be stated that the implementation of sustainable practices can improve wellbeing and service quality without depleting motivational and social capital. Job resources such as involvement in decision-making and autonomy have been shown to be positively related to wellbeing and improved motivations, not liable to burnout, which qualifies them as sustainable organizational practices [15].

Employee involvement is found in the theoretical literature in HRM as one of the crucial elements that can influence organizational performance, possibly in conjugation with motivations related to personal and organizational factors, such as organizational commitment [24]. Similarly, the relationship between employee empowerment, including both task autonomy and involvement in decision-making, with service quality and innovation has been extensively studied, especially in some specific sectors, such as the banking sector and the hospitality industry. Following Lashley [25], it is possible to state that empowerment is about an employment strategy that shifts the focus of managerial policies from control over employees to control of the employee over his or her own work environment and commitment to organizational goals. The locus of control shifts from one imposed externally on employees to one that enforces self-control and commitment - a more inherent source of self-control, especially when performance is difficult to standardize and measure, and monetary incentives come to represent costs that have weak effects on productivity [15,25]. Regarding the hybrid form of the social enterprise in China, Zhang et al. [26] link perceived empowerment to employee engagement through improved identification motivations. The results of most empirical studies converge in considering that empowering HRM results in improved service quality, often through the mediating intervention of other individual and organizational dimensions. These positive impacts derive not so much from individual practices but more often from intertwining elements of different but complementary practices [27].

In more general terms, the literature has considered a wide range of HRM practices and HPWS, highlighting their positive effects on individual and organizational performance. Liao et al. [28] study 830 employees and 91 bank branches in the US. They show that the relationship between employee perceptions of HPWSs was positively related to individual service performance and knowledge-intensive service provision through the mediating role of human capital and psychological empowerment. Some authors find a positive relation between HPWS and individual-level service performance, including cross-level interaction with organizational dimensions (collective human capital and aggregated service orientation). Furthermore, the positive role of employee wellbeing, attitudes and motivations, especially intrinsic motivations, has been tested and confirmed as intervening (mediating and moderating) variables (good reviews of the outstanding literature are [29,30]). Finally, also the role of managerial transformational leadership and social support has been evidenced as an interactional condition in the relationship between managers and workers that can complement involvement in fostering worker performance [31].

Given these premises, we formulate the following working hypotheses about the relationship between empowerment and performance, as contextualized in social enterprises:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Employee empowerment in terms of involvement and autonomy has a positive relationship with organizational performance in terms of service quality and innovation.*

Hypothesis 1a (H1a). *The practice of involving employees in decision-making, the organization's mission, and building interpersonal relationships has a positive relationship with organizational performance.*

Hypothesis 1b (H1b). *Task autonomy in terms of independently organizing production operations and relationships with customers and beneficiaries has a positive relationship with organizational performance.*

2.2. The Role of Motivations

The role of worker motivations in determining service quality and organizational performance has been considered of utmost importance, especially as concerns intrinsic and pro-social motivations. The importance of motivations has long been recognized in psychological research and, more recently, also in strategic HRM studies.

Motivation has been reported in terms of direction, intensity, and duration of effort and represents the degree of energy the worker is willing to use in performing work tasks [32,33]. Social motivations represent the part of human motivation that is directed to benefit not the self alone but the self and other-selves embedded in wider economic and social spaces, communities, and the environment. The relational dimension represents a fundamental piece of social motivation, as it relates to how motivations are expressed and reach out to others, build bridging connections, and produce feedback and wellbeing exchanges [12,13].

HR empowerment practices provide enabling motivational conditions in the organization through the improvement of personal self-determination and self-efficacy [34,35]. Empirical results showed that empowerment in terms of increased autonomy could have positive effects on employees' ability to perform specific tasks [36]. Relatedly, Van Dyne, Graham, and Dienesch [37] evidence the collective effects of motivations on work effort. Motivations, in turn, have been connected with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and service quality [38]. In the banking sector, Dar et al. [39] study HRM practices and perceived organizational performance for 200 employees of Islamic banks operating in Pakistan. The results of hierarchical regression analysis show that post-recruitment HRM practices are positively related to organizational performance through the mediating intervention of employee motivation. Similarly, Campbell et al. [32] find a positive and significant relationship between psychological capital, work attitudes and work performance of employees in the banking sector in Sri Lanka, with attitudes that act as a mediating variable between psychological capital and performance. Finally, Meyer, Ohana and Sting-lhamber [40] provide insights into social exchange relationships in social enterprises. They use survey data of 196 supervisor–employee dyads in French social enterprises to show that employee pro-social motivations moderate the indirect effect of supervisor interpersonal justice on employees' OCB, as mediated by psychological contract breach.

The following working hypothesis is advanced regarding the role of relational motivations in influencing performance:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Workers most strongly motivated by the presence of good workplace relationships contribute more to organizational performance in terms of service quality and innovation than other workers.*

Hypothesis 2a (H2a). *Being motivated by good workplace relationships is a positive mediator between empowerment practices and organizational performance.*

2.3. Workload and the Negative Side of Empowerment (Job Stress and Exhaustion)

While empowerment and HPWS have generally been viewed as organizational processes that can positively affect both wellbeing and performance, other studies have highlighted the stress-generating potential of HPWS. The job demands and resources model (JD-R Model; [41,42]) proved particularly effective in allowing the separation and comparison of the positive and potentially negative effects of HPWS and empowerment. The more general interpretation of the model argues that high job demands induce stress and damage to health (the health impairment process), while high job resources lead to stronger motivations and greater productivity (the motivational process; [43]). In this line, Clarke and Hill [44] use the job demands–resources theory to build a model of public service

motivation (PSM). They study on-the-job pressures faced by care workers and their repercussions on worker wellbeing and service quality. The identification and implementation of appropriate HRM strategies can enhance both employee wellbeing and service quality. In other words, they study the conditions under which workload pressure results in better wellbeing and performance without engendering excessive degrees of stress and burnout, which are instead associated with negative individual and organizational outcomes (especially exhaustion, absenteeism and turnover). Similarly, in Bakker [45], workers driven by PSM can manage high job demands and prevent exhaustion. However, when job demands are exceedingly high, a loss cycle of job demands and exhaustion can step in and reduce motivation because psychological resources are depleted. Topcic, Baum and Kabst [46] matched results from an enterprise survey and an individual survey, using a representative sample of the German population with CAPI interviews in all industrial sectors and welfare services, also including public administration. Out of an initial sample of 3469 individuals, they were able to obtain 197 usable manager–employee dyads. The authors found a positive relationship between challenging job demands (i.e., performance evaluation systems and continuing education) and individual employee stress, while no relation was detected between job resources (HPWSs in terms of flexible working hours and participation in decision-making) and wellbeing. De Reuver, Van de Voorde and Kilroy [47] show that high workload can reduce negative employee outcomes such as absenteeism when opportunity-enhancing HPWSs are introduced, while skill- and motivation-enhancing HPWS do not have the same positive effect.

The following working hypothesis is formulated regarding the role of workload in influencing performance:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Workload pressure in terms of continuous and deep involvement, achieving difficult goals, and managing the unexpected is an organizational factor that positively influences performance in terms of service quality and innovation;*

Hypothesis 3a (H3a). *Workload acts as a positive mediator between empowerment practices and organizational performance.*

In more general terms, an additional and final hypothesis about the joint operation of HRM empowering practices (involvement and autonomy) is introduced:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Involvement and autonomy as empowering HR practices jointly influence organizational performance in terms of service quality and innovation:*

Hypothesis 4a (H4a). *Empowering HR practices improve performance when mediated by the effect of relational motivations;*

Hypothesis 4b (H4b). *Empowering HR practices improve performance when mediated by the effect of workload.*

3. HRM Practices and Organizational Performance in SEs

3.1. The Role of Relational Motivations

The most relevant resources must be protected and regenerated to make HRM practices sustainable and the organization more performing and resilient to external shocks [15]. When services are difficult to standardize and have a strong relational character, as happens in the production of social and welfare services, the work process is difficult to monitor, and the workers' intrinsic and social motivations play a strategic role, as they favor the achievement of better service quality, even in the absence of the production of high economic value-added and use of high-powered monetary incentives [17,48–51]. The difficulty of controlling the quality of relational services requires the presence of motivated suppliers and the replacement of purely instrumental contractual relationships with relationships based on trust [22,52]. In addition, the literature on “high-involvement management” has

identified participation as the primary pathway leading to improved employee wellbeing, which is reported to be positively related to motivation and performance [15,53–55]. After these initial steps, the strategic importance of motivational capital has been linked to specific types of HRM practices, as intrinsic and social motivations can be supported by employee involvement in decision making and autonomy, while hierarchy and extrinsic incentives are able to displace these motivations [55–60].

As concerns the social economy and non-profit sector, literature has discussed and tested in various ways the role of HRM practices and engagement of stakeholders also in SEs. As we are dealing with labor-intensive production processes in which manpower and motivations have a strategic role, paid workers appear prominently among the main stakeholders of the organizations [48]. Consequently, the enhancement of intrinsic and social motivations is expected to support better performance in terms of service quality. Furthermore, the importance of relational capital as one of the main components of social capital has been emphasized in different organizational forms because of its ability to generate tacit knowledge and foster intrinsic motivations [61]. In line with the existing literature in which relational capital is a major component of social capital, this study assumes that relationship-related motivations at work can be considered as a crucial component of social motivations [61] and relational capital [12,13,62].

In the literature on SEs, Poledrini [63] (p. 468) shows that relational capital plays a relevant role, since *“members find sufficient reward in the relationships within the organization [. . .], and these rewards also provide the motivation to achieve the organizational goals”*. Ridley-Duff [64] uses the concept of *“social rationality”* to understand how social entrepreneurial activities and their inclusive systems of governance can protect assets for the community. To achieve their goals, SEs need adequate governance rules and HRM practices capable of converting the motivational capital of their stakeholders into a better quality of service for the benefit of users and the community at large. To Kim and Lim [65], SEs influence local and regional growth by developing relational assets that reinforce institutional capabilities and networks and embody social capital in social innovation processes. Kousmanen [66] evidences that relational legitimacy in dealing with clients, funders, and employees emerges as an important organizational asset of SEs. Vickers and Lyon [67] show through a series of case studies that relational skills and social capital are particularly important in supporting the development of dynamic capabilities and increased contextual knowledge in environmentally motivated SEs. Benevene et al. [62] study intellectual and relational capital in Italian SEs, focusing on managerial perceptions and evaluating how managerial policies favor the creation of organizational knowledge.

Finally, among the few studies testing the empirical relation between HRM practices and organizational performance in the non-commercial (public and non-profit) sectors, Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget, and Varone [68] show that some HRM practices, including job enrichment and professional development, have a positive impact on public service motivation (PSM) and perceived organizational performance in the Swiss public sector. PSM mediates the relation between HRM practices and performance. Zhang et al. [26] study the relation between perceived empowerment and work engagement through enhancing employees' identification motivation in SEs in China. They find positive and robust relations, which envisions a positive role for worker empowerment in influencing organizational outcomes.

The results of these works are close to ours, and the same elements also play a key role in our analysis. On the other hand, they need further and more careful enquiry, since they do not consider explicit measures of organizational performance, and the relational component of motivations is absent. As said, relational motivations are likely to play a crucial role in the production of relational services in the social welfare sector. In this line, this paper strives to build a novel and more complete framework of how SEs use HRM practices and their motivational capital to achieve social goals. Our research questions and hypotheses are consistent with the basic principles of the job demands and resources model [41]. At the same time, they represent a variant of it, as worker wellbeing (e.g., job

satisfaction) is not included in our model, which investigates the potential of empowerment to generate both work resources (through the motivational process) and work demands (through workload) as contributors to organizational performance.

It is hypothesized that empowerment generates more intense demands from the organization and, at the same time, represents a valuable organizational resource that can improve worker productivity. Job demands result in increased workload, while organizational resources affect the ability to use, protect, and regenerate intrinsic motivation in a relational context. Consistently, the relational component of motivation and workload pressure are introduced as mediators between empowerment and performance.

3.2. Gender, Pro-Social Motivations and Performance

The majority of the employees in the sample of SEs are women. This is a general phenomenon in the social service sector [69,70]. Explanations are diverse: women's (private) "caring experience" and their attempt to have it professionally recognized [70]; motivation to give "a response to a specific request from someone they know well" [70] (p. 63), a kind of transfer of empathy, as in the case of women who became employees of an organization following volunteer work (for that or another organization) associated with their local community, their children, elderly parents or disabled relatives [71]; the convenience of SEs working hours or location in terms of family commitments, this effect being in general particularly strong for women with younger children [71] (p. 338). Yet analysis of the employment structure in SEs shows evidence of horizontal professional segregation [72]. Even if the gender pay gap is narrower in the third sector than in other sectors and is lowest for those in the highest managerial positions, Teasdale et al. [70] found out that the gender gap in managerial and professional positions is still significant, men taking up around half of higher status positions. On another side, evidence from the field shows that SEs bring empowerment and non-material resources to women that allow them to take up a political role and bring into the public sphere previously invisible gender equality issues. SEs then offer a "public proximity space", an intermediary between public and private realms [73–75]. Additionally, while male workers suffer a significant wage loss by working in SEs (rather than in the for-profit sector), the gender wage gap is much smaller [76]. Even if men and women "come into the nonprofit sector for much the same reasons, and demonstrate much the same commitment" [71] (p. 342), there are obvious reasons why women are more numerous to work in SEs.

Some authors underline that women have "stronger pro-social preferences" [70]. Espinoza and Kovářík [77] (p. 1) define pro-sociality "as any voluntary behavior intended to benefit other people". Discussing pro-social behavior and gender, their conclusions support the idea that "social behavior of both genders is malleable, but each responds to different details of the context" [77] (p. 7) as women seem to have larger responsiveness to social frames. From a systematic literature review focused on women's entrepreneurship, Garcia-Lomas and Gabaldon [20] identify drivers and outcomes of women's involvement. As for drivers, they identify an upward journey from non-economic (and pro-social) to economic motivations, which leads to the conclusion that motivations to set up a SE do not show strong gender diversity. Their involvement translates in different management styles and ultimately in the different types of companies they build and the type of performances they value. However, there is no evidence on the influence of entrepreneurial motivation in women on performance in general [77], and no study yet shows how SEs with a majority of women employees perform on service quality and innovation. Education seems to be a critical factor for the success of companies owned by women, while studies [78,79] show that diversity among board members is not necessarily better for performance in general [80,81]. The question remains as to the influence of gender diversity and the level of education among employees on performance.

The possible role of gender in influencing performance and its relationship to relational motivations is specified in the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *Women’s contribution to organizational performance is positive both in terms of motivations and in terms of human capital.*

Hypothesis 5a (H5a). *Being motivated by good workplace relationships is stronger in women than in men employed by Italian SEs.*

Hypothesis 5b (H5b). *The prevalence of women’s tertiary education measured as the percentage of women graduates out of the total number of graduates in the organization positively influences performance.*

3.3. The Empirical Model

A concise representation of the multilevel structural equation model (M-SEM) tested in the second part of the paper is represented in Figure 1. Empowering HR practices can generate both job resources and job demands. In terms of resources, greater involvement and autonomy can have a positive impact on performance both directly as organizational practices and indirectly through a positive interaction (indirect effect) with individual motivations that have a relational character. In terms of job demands, involvement and autonomy can also generate more stringent organizational conditions (e.g. tighter deadlines, additional administrative burden etc . . .) because they usually lead to the introduction of more difficult objectives, increased work pace and greater responsibilities in dealing with unforeseen events due to more decentralized decision-making and operational processes.

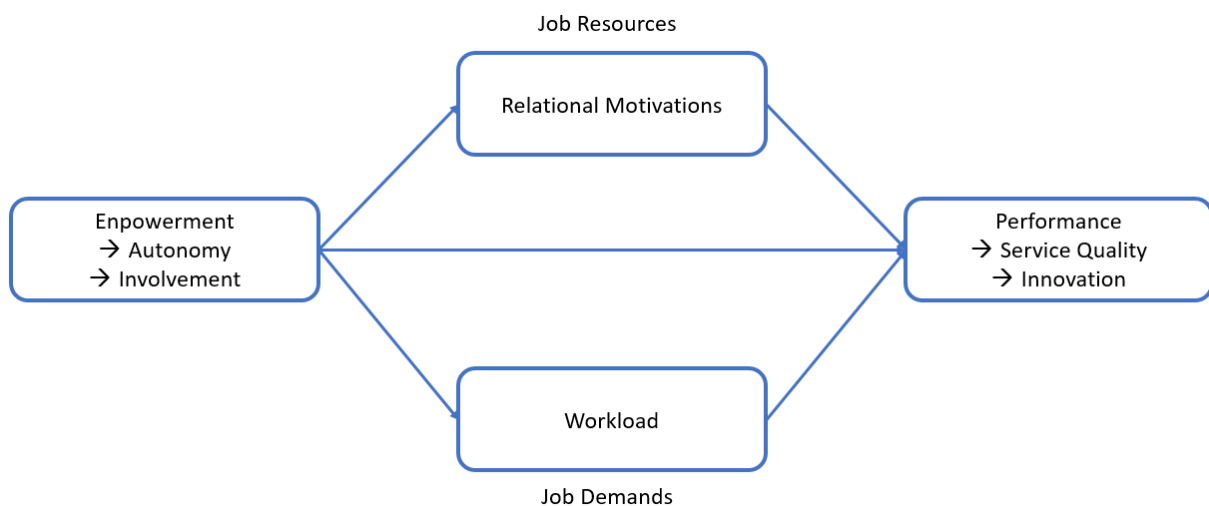


Figure 1. Empowering HR practices and performance in social enterprises. The mediating role of relational motivations and workload pressure.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1. Data

The data concern a nationally representative sample of social cooperatives (as regulated by Law 381/1991), which are the main type of social enterprise in Italy (the other types are non-profit organizations and investor-owned companies that are registered as social enterprises pursuant to the provisions of legislative acts 155/2006 and 106/2016) [82]. The measurement items were extracted from the 2007 SISC (Survey on Italian Social Cooperatives), which includes two different questionnaires concerning paid workers and organizations (two additional questionnaires concerning volunteer workers and managers are not used in this study). The sample includes 4134 waged workers nested in 310 organizations and was extracted from the 2003 census on social cooperatives [83], which counted 6168 active cooperatives (with at least one employee) nationwide. Representativeness at national level is guaranteed by stratification based on the type of cooperative (Type A are social cooperatives delivering social services; Type B are social cooperatives created for the

work integration of disadvantaged workers); geographic representativeness by province (Italy has 20 regions and 107 provinces); the four macro-areas of the country (North-East; North West; Center; South and Islands); and size (number of employees). Eighty-five percent of workers responded on average to 90 percent of the 87 questions (56 single-choice and 31 multiple-choice questions) in the worker questionnaires. The compilation of the questionnaires took place directly during collective meetings of 10-to-20 workers with the assistance of qualified personnel. The answers were collected in anonymous envelopes. The workers involved were employed in 310 organizations, and a single organizational questionnaire for each entity was completed by managers.

From the point of view of socioeconomic characteristics, these are workers in their thirties. The composition of the workforce is strongly skewed in favor of women (74%), and this reflects both the characteristics of the sector, insofar as social services in Italy are largely provided by women, and the characteristics of social cooperatives, including a strong female presence and relatively low wages, compared to the national average for the sector. Workers with permanent employment contracts account for 80% of the total. Education is at the university level in 69% of cases. In 2005 (the year in which the data were collected), hourly wages averaged 6.6 euros, and seniority was about 6 years. The average company size is 33 employees, 78% of cooperatives are type A and 22% are type B. 62% are located in the North, 22% in the Center and 16% in the South and Islands of the country.

4.2. Empirical Analysis

Given the hypothesis of this study, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to examine the dimensional structure of the theoretical constructs involved in our conceptual model (organizational performance, involvement, task autonomy, relational motivations and workload pressure). The indicator items and descriptive statistics are in Table A1 in the Appendix A.

Organizational performance is measured by four ordinal items on a 1-to-5 Likert scale. The items represent the subjective assessment of managers (in the organizational questionnaire) regarding the improvement of service quality and innovation in service delivery, in organizational processes and in the technology used over a period of three years. One latent factor was extracted using CFA in SPSS. Regarding involvement, one latent dimension is extracted by means of CFA based on three items that measure involvement in decision-making, in the mission of the organization and the development of interpersonal relationships (1-to-5 Likert scale). Autonomy is measured by one CFA latent factor, based on three items relating to the autonomous organization of work tasks, the management of relations with beneficiaries and problem solving (1-to-7 Likert scale). Workers' relational motivations at entry are measured through a single item by asking, on a 1 to 7 Likert scale, how important workplace relationships were to them before they began working at this specific cooperative. That is, workers were asked about the importance of workplace relationships in general, not relationships in a specific organization. This implies that our model takes into account "relational" motivations as a specific component of social motivations not tied to specific social ties in the cooperative. Finally, workload pressure refers to the requirements and intensity of the work. It is measured by a single latent factor extracted through CFA using a series of 7 items in the worker questionnaire on a 1 to 7 Likert scale. They relate to strength of involvement, degree of skill, scope of work performed, responsibilities, difficulty of goals, and decisions regarding unexpected events. Pearson's bivariate correlations between the obtained latent factors and gender variables are shown in Table 1. The correlation coefficients show strong positive relationships between HR practices (involvement and autonomy) and workers' motivations. Workload has a strong positive relationship with involvement and motivations. On the other hand, anticipating the results of the SEM model, performance shows a positive and significant, but not extremely strong, relationship with involvement, workload, relational motivation, and women's tertiary education.

Table 1. Correlation matrix.

Type		PERFORMANCE	INVOLVEMENT	WORKLOAD	AUTONOMY	Relational Motivations	Gender	Percent of Women University Graduates
PERFORMANCE	CFA (4 Likert items)	1	0.081 **	0.103 **	−0.050 **	0.077 **	0.02	0.051 *
INVOLVEMENT	CFA (3 Likert items)		1	0.174 **	0.180 **	0.136 **	−0.045 **	0.014
WORKLOAD	CFA (7 Likert items)			1	0.035 *	0.195 **	0.021	−0.046 **
AUTONOMY	CFA (3 Likert items)				1	0.081 **	0.018	0.007
Relational motivation	1–7 Likert item					1	0.100 **	−0.040 *
Gender	Dummy						1	−0.052 **
Percent of women university graduates	Percent							1

Note: * significant at 10% level; ** significant at 5% level.

The factor loadings derived from the CFA were compiled in Table A1, in the Appendix A, which represents the latent dimensions used in the analysis, the indicators included in each dimension, and the descriptive statistics for each of the indicators (mean and standard deviation). Table A1 also shows factor loadings and several statistics measuring construct reliability (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE). All measures except AVE for workload confirm that the obtained factors are reliable.

A series of multilevel structural equation models are run to test the hypotheses. This methodology is considered the most appropriate when there are observations organized at more than one level, as employees (first level) are nested and matched to different organizations (second level). The mediation M-SEM is based on two sets of equations that specify the worker-level and organization-level effects of empowering HR practices, relational motivations and workload on organizational performance.

At the worker- or within-level, the relationship between involvement and the mediators, relational motivations and workload pressure is analyzed as follows:

$$M_{ij} = A_{ij} + B_{ij}I_{ij} + U_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where M_{ij} is the mediator variable of the i th employee in the j th organization, which depends on his/her perceptions about involvement (I_{ij}).

At the organization or between level, the following regression model is used:

$$M_j = A + B_1I_j + U_j \quad (2)$$

$$P_j = A + B_2M_j + B_3I_j + W_j \quad (3)$$

where M_j represents the mediator, I_j involvement and P_j organizational performance of the j th organization. These expressions suggest that the slopes of the paths in the model vary from organization to organization, and the changes in performance can be explained by involvement and the mediator variable.

Robust maximum likelihood (MLR) is used as estimation method (obtained by using the TYPE = GENERAL TWOLEVEL option in Mplus). MLR estimator is based on maximum likelihood parameter estimates with standard errors that are robust to non-normality. This statistical approach enables us to obtain, test and estimate measurement and/or structural models based on robust statistics with multivariate non-normality and non-independence of observations. At the same time, to evaluate the global fit of these models, the root

mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI) and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) are estimated.

In the final model, both involvement and autonomy are jointly included as predictors of performance to give a broader picture of the total impact of different but possibly complementary practices. In addition, the full model includes relational motivations and workload pressure one at a time as mediators.

5. Results

Table 2 shows the results of estimating the two individual models. In the first column, relational motivations assume the role of mediator between involvement and organizational performance. In the second column, workload assumes the role of mediator. In both cases, gender variables are included to assess their effect on performance.

Table 2. Effect of worker involvement on organizational performance. Relational motivations and workload pressure as mediators.

Model 1a: Dependent Variable: PERFORMANCE Mediator: Relational MOTIVATION		Model 1b: Dependent Variable: PERFORMANCE Mediator: WORKLOAD	
Employee level			
Involvement → Motivation	0.404 ***	Involvement → Workload	0.402 ***
Gender (man/women) → Motivation	0.312 ***	Gender (man/women) → Workload	0.007
Organizational level			
Involvement → Motivation	0.557 ***	Involvement → Workload	0.325 **
Motivation → Performance	0.191 **	Workload → Performance	0.397 ***
Involvement → Performance (Direct)	0.275	Involvement → Performance (Direct)	0.240
Indirect	0.106	Indirect	0.129 *
Total	0.382 **	Total	0.370 **
Percent of women university graduates → Performance	0.008 ***	Percent of women university graduates → Performance	0.009 ***
Goodness-of-fit			
RMSA: 0.022 CFI: 0.986 TLI: 0.978 SRMR Within: 0.025 SRMR Between: 0.048 AIC = 40,033.654; BIC = 40,252.229		RMSA= 0.023 CFI = 0.980 TLI = 0.972 SRMR Within: 0.027 SRMR Between: 0.052 AIC = 63,233.866; BIC = 63,525.299	

Note: * significant at 10% level; ** significant at 5% level; *** significant at 1% level. All the tests imply that the model is adequate: RMSA < 0.06 (Good-fit; <0.05); CFI > 0.95; TLI > 0.95; SRMR < 0.08.

At the organizational level, the direct effect of involvement on performance is not significant in both models when motivations act as a mediator (Model 1a: $\beta = 0.275$, $p > 0.10$) and when workload acts as a mediator (Model 1b: $\beta = 0.240$, $p > 0.10$). However, the total effect of involvement on performance (including the indirect effect that flows through the mediator) is positive and significant in both models (Model 1a: $\beta = 0.382$, $p < 0.05$; Model 1b: $\beta = 0.370$, $p < 0.05$). That is, the significant effect of involvement on performance occurs through the partial mediation of both motivation and workload.

The relation between involvement on the one hand, and motivation and workload on the other is positive and highly significant, in both the individual-level models (Model 1a: $\beta = 0.404$, $p < 0.001$; Model 1b: $\beta = 0.402$, $p < 0.001$) and organizational-level models (Model 1a: $\beta = 0.557$, $p < 0.001$; Model 1b: $\beta = 0.325$, $p < 0.05$). This shows a positive synergy between empowering HR practices and the presence of an important motivational capital. On the other hand, involvement is confirmed to increase workload pressure.

Except in the case of workload acting as a mediator in the individual-level regressions, the gender variables are positive and significant. In the first model, where motivation plays the role of mediator, gender has a double effect. “Women appear to be more motivated by

relationships at work than men (Model 1a: $\beta = 0.312, p < 0.001$). This is evidenced both by the results of the SEM model in Table 2 and by additional tests performed by the authors: the equal variance test shows that gender variances for relational motivation are not equal at 5% significance. In addition, the t-test assuming unequal variances shows that motivation means for men and women differ (t-test value = $-6.185; p\text{-value} = 0.000$). Furthermore, the higher the ratio of women with a university degree to the total number of graduates, the better the organization's performance (Model 1a: $\beta = 0.008, p > 0.10$). The model in which workload acts as a mediator confirms the positive impact of women's tertiary education on performance.

Table A2 in the Appendix A shows the results for models in which task autonomy, not involvement, is the relevant dimension of worker empowerment. As in the previous models, relational motivation (Model 2a) and workload pressure (Model 2b) act as mediators. In both cases, autonomy is not significant to explain organizational performance, neither in terms of direct nor indirect effect. Only the direct effects of task autonomy on motivation and workload (both at the employee level and organization level) and the effects of motivation and workload on performance (at the organization level) are positive and significant.

Following, in Table 3, the complete model is presented, where both empowerment variables, involvement and task autonomy, are jointly included as explanatory variables. Relational motivations and workload pressure act as mediators as in the previous models. When both empowerment variables are considered, only involvement appears to explain performance with both relational motivation (Model 3a: $\beta = -0.144, p > 0.10$; Model 3b: $\beta = -0.120, p > 0.10$) and workload pressure as mediator (Model 3a: $\beta = 0.190, p < 0.10$), while task autonomy is again not significant. Both mediators, motivation and workload are positive and significant in explaining performance (Model 3a: $\beta = 0.174, p < 0.10$ for motivation and Model 3b: $\beta = 0.282, p < 0.001$ for workload pressure).

Table 3. Full model. Worker involvement and autonomy jointly influence organizational performance. Relational motivations and workload pressure as mediators.

Model 3a		Model 3b	
Dependent Variable: PERFORMANCE	Beta	Dependent Variable: PERFORMANCE	Beta
Mediator: MOTIVATION		Mediator: WORKLOAD	
Employee level			
Involvement → Motivation	0.125 ***	Involvement → Workload	0.260 ***
Autonomy → Motivation	0.082 ***	Autonomy → Workload	0.119 ***
Gender (man/women) → Motivation	0.100 ***	Gender (man/women) → Workload	-0.001
Organizational level			
Involvement → Motivation	0.332 ***	Involvement → Workload	0.279 **
Autonomy → Motivation	-0.166	Autonomy → Workload	-0.209 *
Motivation → Performance	0.174 *	Workload → Performance	0.282 ***
Involvement → Performance	0.190 *	Involvement → Performance	0.166
Autonomy → Performance	-0.144	Autonomy → Performance	-0.120
Percent of women university graduates → Performance	0.070 ***	Percent of women university graduates → Performance	0.075 ***
Goodness-of-fit			
RMSA = 0.028		RMSA = 0.024	
CFI = 0.968		CFI = 0.971	
TLI = 0.955		TLI = 0.961	
SRMR Within = 0.030		SRMR Within = 0.029	
SRMR Between = 0.077		SRMR Between = 0.070	
AIC: 77,473.550; BIC: 77,813.556		AIC: 10,0662.227; BIC: 10,1075.026	

Note: STDYX Standardization results in Mplus are presented. * significant at 10% level; ** significant at 5% level; *** significant at 1% level. All the tests imply that the model is adequate: RMSA < 0.06 (Good-fit; <0.05); CFI > 0.95; TLI > 0.95; SRMR < 0.08.

Again, except for the case of workload pressure acting as a mediator in the individual-level regression, all gender variables are positive and significant. Finally, the highest fit in

terms of AIC and BIC indices is achieved in the model that considers involvement as the only relevant empowering HRM dimension and combines it with individual attitude to work (relational motivation) in explaining performance.

6. Discussion of Results and Hypotheses

A number of theoretical and empirical works in the HR literature consider that the combination of different HR practices can lead to better organizational performance through individual or organizational synergies, possibly thanks to the development of dedicated organizational routines that combine different practices. Similarly, in many cases, variables that mediate and reinforce, or even replace, the effect of HR practices on performance are considered. These variables are often related to the necessary empowerment that must occur in employees to achieve desired organizational outcomes. This article focused on HR empowerment practices that also have the potential to make the organization economically and socially sustainable, as they help to utilize and preserve human and motivational capital by developing appropriate organizational resources and matching them with work demands to improve service quality and innovation [84]. Involvement in decision-making and the organization's mission, and the quality of interpersonal relationships appear to be critical.

Although the literature generally discusses the positive effects of HR practices on wellbeing and performance through, among other things, the effects these practices have on the wellbeing and motivation of workers, there are also potential drawbacks related to increased stress and burnout, and the negative health effects that can be channeled by workload. In this paper, the introduction of both variables (motivation and workload) as mediators between empowerment and service quality allowed us to analyze what the predominant effect is in the case of Italian SEs. The thesis of this work was that, beyond involvement, relational motivations might be particularly important in the development of services that have a strong relational and personal character, such as social services [48]. On the other hand, the increase in work demands associated with empowerment may generate positive effects on performance when demands do not exceed a critical threshold that would generate excessive stress and burnout. Finally, the introduction of some basic gender-related variables allowed us to obtain some initial but important results on the specific role of women and their human capital in an industry whose workforce is mainly female.

Regarding our hypotheses, Hypothesis 1 was partially confirmed by the multilevel SEM results since involvement is complemented by the presence of adequate motivational capital and job demands in positively influencing performance (HP1a). On the contrary, the hypothesized positive effect of autonomy on service quality, as established by Conger and Kanungo [36], does not occur in our case. Instead, autonomy has a negative but not significant impact. This result may be due to some sort of organizational mismatch, which is not adequately addressed by governance rules and routines. More autonomous work does not translate into improved quality and creativity, likely due to the presence of important degrees of separation and lack of coordination between worker activity and the managerial structure, perhaps also due to poor monitoring practices. Better managerial tools and the use of more advanced digital devices may help overcome these coordination failures. Hypothesis 1b is not supported by our results.

Handy and Katz [49] have prominently established (see also [17,50,51,85]) that firms with social and caring goals appear to emphasize the importance of intrinsic and social motivations. Similarly, in Zhang et al. [26], empowerment through improved motivations achieves greater employee work engagement, a determinant of service quality. In our case, relational motivations are found to play a mediating role that is strategic in achieving better organizational outcomes (as in [29,30,38,39]). Hypotheses 2 and 2a regarding the direct positive effect of motivations and their mediating role in influencing performance were both confirmed by our results.

Workload, a variable closely related to work demands, has a positive and significant direct and indirect effect on organizational performance, thus supporting the idea that demands enhance coordination and the ability to pursue organizational goals, all the more

so when combined with involvement practices. At the same time, they do not appear to generate significant degrees of stress and burnout when they are adequately governed within organizational boundaries, including through engagement procedures [45]. They allow workers to feel sufficiently motivated and capable of adding economic and social value to their work. Hypotheses 3 and 3a regarding the direct and mediating role of workload are both confirmed [44].

When analyzing the joint effect of HR empowerment practices (involvement and autonomy taken together), Hypothesis 4 is only partially supported, and a positive complementarity between involvement and autonomy is not detected. A positive impact is detected only in the case of involvement, while in the case of autonomy the impact is negative but not significant. Furthermore, the positive impact of involvement is statistically significant only when motivation is included as a mediator (HP 4a) but becomes non-significant when workload is the mediator (HP 4b). Overall, our results and test statistics show that combining worker involvement with an appropriate relational context in which workers are particularly motivated by high quality and positive work relationships is the organizational environment most conducive to service improvement and innovation. These findings help confirm that the development of relational services, such as social services, requires an appropriate organizational context based on the involvement and presence of workers who seek a positive relational context.

Finally, in a sector that produces social and welfare services with a strong relational character, the analysis of gender effects becomes crucial for two main reasons: (1) employment in the social services sector is characterized by a prevalence of women (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of workers employed in SCs in Italy are women); (2) women are generally more motivated than men, especially in intrinsic, social and relational terms (which confirms Hypothesis 5a). In our case, women have a stronger perception than men of those motivational elements that best contribute to improved performance. In addition, not the mere presence of female employees but of educated women seems to be the key to achieving service quality and innovation. Education is a crucial individual and organizational dimension, especially in the case of women, because of its ability to add the intellectual tools and skills needed to improve existing services, create and develop new ones. Hypothesis 5b is supported by our results.

7. Conclusions, Implications and Limitations

This study sought to establish a clearer connection between empowering HR practices and organizational performance in social enterprises, including considering the role of worker motivations and workload pressure within a job demands and resources framework. The results show that worker involvement can pay off in terms of improved service quality and innovation when worker motivations and active contribution to the design and implementation of organizational routines are important. This finding is likely particularly important in relation to the non-standardized and relational nature of the services provided [48]. Close coordination, interaction, and delivery practices are likely to be more important than workers' autonomous contribution in improving the service quality. Theoretical implications underscore the importance of designing HR practices that account for empowering workers, protecting and enhancing their motivational capital in order to meet customer needs in innovative ways [15]. HR empowerment plays a crucial role in achieving coordination and innovation and can lead workers to accept a greater workload and work pace when it promotes better need satisfaction. Practical implications for managers of SEs and other socially-oriented organizations include the need to hire workers who bring with them appropriate motivational capital, which needs to be aligned with the goals of the organization and the characteristics of its service supply. Relational capital should be preserved and cultivated as it is important for developing new services. In this area, appropriate HR practices must be geared toward preserving workers' willingness to accept (and compensate for) the additional workload associated with innovation and actively participate in the design and development of services [86]. The social implications relate primarily to social sustainability, since the implementation of production processes that enhance social

welfare are in the vast majority of cases labor-intensive processes, requiring the availability of motivated human resources, the renewal and preservation of their motivation, and the active contribution of workers to service design and delivery. HR practices represent crucial organizational routines that aim to engage workers and use their motivational capital to improve services and achieve need satisfaction. Social sustainability is pursued through the creation of organizations that produce and replicate dedicated HR practices to increase the production of social welfare. Future research directions include the in-depth study, especially through fieldwork, case studies, and surveys, of engagement processes and relational motivations in the production of welfare services. Because human resources and worker motivations represent the most strategic asset for achieving effective and innovative service delivery, engagement, coordination, and the accumulation of relational capital within organizations must be central to the design and development of HR practices [50,51]. In this effort, the nascent literature on relational capital and relational motivations should make key contributions and gain crucial insights from ongoing empirical research. In addition, gender issues have not been adequately researched to date and will need more in-depth investigation given the dominant presence of women in the production of welfare services. As a result, a deeper analysis of female and male motivations, as well as the role of diversity, human capital and interpersonal skills, can support the development of dedicated HR practices and specific organizational routines and.

Among the limitations of the study, the cross-sectional nature of the data should be mentioned. The national size and cost of the survey made replication in subsequent periods impossible. However, the large size of the questionnaires and their breadth allowed for the collection of a large amount of information in a large number of questions, including many different topics. This increased the potential for controlling for intervening and confounding factors, reducing the risk of endogeneity. In addition, the subjective and single-rater nature of most survey questions may have inflated the risk of spurious correlation between measurement items or common method bias (CMB). To reduce the CMB problem, this study uses more than one questionnaire answered by different people at different times, including both workers' self-reports (of their motivations and perceptions of HR practices in the worker questionnaire) and managerial assessment of performance (in the organization questionnaire). This substantially reduces the risk of CMB in the study's primary results, which relate to the determinants of organizational performance [30,87,88]. Finally, the data are aged and refer to a different socioeconomic context in the development of Italian welfare. It was a time when the Italian economy was growing, and the severe economic and financial crises that hit the country in the last 15 years had not yet materialized. While fully acknowledging this limitation, we point out that most of the questions in the 2007 ICSI survey refer to subjective dimensions of employees (e.g., motivations) and perceptions of organizational conditions (e.g., HR practices) that are not likely to vary drastically over time as a result of changes in the broad socioeconomic conditions of a country. Moreover, very recent reports clearly show that the economic size (in terms of turnover and number of employees) of the social services sector in Italy has been growing since the date of the survey, mainly due to the evolution of social needs in the country, the increasing outsourcing and contracting out of social and welfare services by local public authorities, and the aging of the Italian population [89].

Author Contributions: Conceptualization: E.C.T. and F.D.; methodology: M.G. and E.C.T.; software: M.G. and E.C.T.; validation: E.C.T. and M.G.; formal analysis: M.G. and E.C.T.; investigation: E.C.T., M.G., and F.D.; resources: E.C.T.; data curation: E.C.T., and M.G.; writing—original draft preparation: E.C.T., M.G., F.D., and S.P.; writing—review and editing: E.C.T., M.G., F.D., and S.P.; visualization: E.C.T., M.G., F.D., and S.P.; supervision: E.C.T., M.G., F.D., and S.P.; project administration: E.C.T.; funding acquisition: E.C.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: The 2007 ICSI Survey was funded by the Italian Ministry for Scientific Research and by the CaRiPlo Foundation, Cassa di Risparmio delle Province Lombarde. No funds were received by the authors to cover any APC.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Euricse (European Institute for Research on Cooperative and Social Enterprises, Trento, IT), as owner 2007 ICSI (Indagine sulle Cooperative Sociali Italiane) survey data, certifies that, while at the time the survey was conducted, Italian law did not provide for the approval of an ethics committee, the ICSI 2007 questionnaires were thoroughly reviewed and approved by a panel of Italian academics enrolled in different Italian universities who also examined all ethical issues that might arise from the implementation of the survey.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. Euricse certifies that all organizations and individuals surveyed agreed to participate voluntarily and that all questionnaires were anonymized.

Data Availability Statement: All data from the 2007 ICSI (Survey on Social Cooperatives in Italy) Survey are available upon request from the authors.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Variables included in the analysis and Confirmatory analysis results.

Variable	Type	Mean	Standard Deviation	Factor Loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE	Cronbach's Alfa
Individual variables (HR practices and motivations)							
MOTIVATION	I thought relationships into the workplace were very important	Likert 1 to 7	5.67	1.386			Individual item
INVOLVEMENT	Develop an interpersonal relationship		3.27	1.079	0.709		
	Involving you the mission of the cooperative	Likert 1 to 5	3.13	1.243	0.893	0.868	0.689
	Involving you in decision-making processes in the Cooperative.		2.88	1.267	0.876		
WORKLOAD	Your assignments usually require continuous and deep involvement.		5.98	1.260	0.625		
	Your assignments usually require a high degree of skills.		4.72	1.686	0.716		
	Your assignments usually require a temporary involvement in different activities.		4.92	1.904	0.656		
	Your assignments usually require a high degree of responsibility for beneficiaries and their families.	Likert 1 to 7	5.17	2.035	0.707	0.866	0.480
	Your assignments usually require reaching difficult objectives.		4.32	1.848	0.769		
	Your assignments usually require careful management of workloads.		4.62	1.801	0.661		
	Your assignments usually require often making unforeseen decisions in managing relations with beneficiaries and their families.		4.06	2.084	0.707		
TASK AUTONOMY	I can choose how to organize my work independently		4.70	7.961	0.829		
	I can choose how to manage my relationships with beneficiaries independently	Likert 1 to 7	4.88	1.991	0.834	0.866	0.683
	I am given the opportunity to solve my working problems by myself		4.26	1.956	0.816		
Organizational variables							
PERFORMANCE	Quality of services provided		4.31	0.747	0.721		
	Innovations in the services produced	Likert 1 to 5	4.23	0.734	0.801	0.853	0.592
	Technological innovations		3.98	0.803	0.779		0.769
	Organizational innovations		3.78	0.804	0.775		
Gender variables							
	Percent women in the organization	Percent	0.742	0.438			
	Percent women graduates over total graduates	Percent	0.600	0.388			

Table A2. Effect of task autonomy on organizational performance. Relational motivations and workload pressure as mediators.

Model 2a Dependent Variable: PERFORMANCE Mediator: Relational MOTIVATION		Model 2b Dependent Variable: PERFORMANCE Mediator: WORKLOAD	
Workers level			
Task Autonomy → Motivation	0.106 ***	Task Autonomy → Workload	0.086 ***
Gender (man/women) → Motivation	0.279 ***	Gender (man/women) → Workload	−0.019
Organizational level			
Task Autonomy → Motivation	−0.109	Task Autonomy → Workload	−0.119
Motivation → Performance	0.232 **	Workload → Performance	0.420 ***
Task Autonomy → Performance (Direct)	−0.106	Task Autonomy → Performance (Direct)	−0.080
Indirect	−0.025	Indirect	−0.050
Total	−0.131	Total	−0.131
Percent of women graduates → Performance	0.009 ***	Percent of women graduates → Performance	0.009 ***
Goodness-of-fit			
RMSA: 0.024		RMSA= 0.037	
CFI: 0.977		CFI = 0.918	
TLI: 0.965		TLI = 0.893	
SRMR Within: 0.019		SRMR Within: 0.050	
SRMR Between: 0.061		SRMR Between: 0.149	
AIC = 50,406.466; BIC = 50,625.041		AIC =84,737.406; BIC = 85,047.054	

Note: ** significant at 5% level; *** significant at 1% level. Not all the test in the case of workload as mediator implies that the model is adequate RMSA < 0.06 (Good-fit; <0.05); CFI > 0.95; TLI > 0.95; SRMR < 0.08 for adequate models.

References

- Macke, J.; Genari, D. Systematic literature review on sustainable human resource management. *J. Clean. Prod.* **2019**, *208*, 806–815. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Jabbour, C.J.C.; Santos, F.C.A. The central role of human resource management in the search for sustainable organizations. *Int. J. HRM* **2008**, *19*, 2133–2154. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Garavan, T.N.; McGuire, D. Human resource development and society: Human resource development's role in embedding corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and ethics in organizations. *Adv. Dev. Hum. Resour.* **2010**, *12*, 487–507. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ehnert, I.; Harry, W. Recent developments and future prospects on sustainable Human Resource Management: Introduction to the Special Issue. *Manag. Rev.* **2012**, *23*, 221–238. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Docherty, P.; Forslin, J.; Shani, A.B. *Creating Sustainable Work Systems: Developing Social Sustainability*; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2002.
- Ehnert, I. *Sustainable Human Resource Management: A Conceptual and Explanatory Analysis from a Paradox Perspective*; Springer: Heidelberg, Germany, 2009.
- Anlesinya, A.; Susomrith, P. Sustainable human resource management: A systematic review of a developing field. *J. Glob. Responsib.* **2020**, *11*, 295–324. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Hillman, J.; Axon, S.; Morrissey, J. Social enterprise as a potential niche innovation breakout for low carbon transition. *Energy Policy* **2018**, *117*, 445–456. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Borzaga, C.; Defourny, J. Conclusions. Social enterprises in Europe: A diversity of initiatives and prospects. In *The Emergence of Social Enterprise*; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2001.
- Searing, E.A.M.; Poledrini, S.; Young, D.R.; Nyssens, M. The hybrid nature of social enterprises how does it affect their revenue sources? *Social Enterp. J. Vol.* **2021**. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Göler von Ravensburg, N.; Lang, R.; Poledrini, S.; Starnawska, M. How context shapes the character of cooperative social enterprises: Insights from various countries. In *Social Enterprise in Western Europe: Theory, Models and Practice*; Defourny, J., Nyssens, M., Eds.; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2021.
- Grant, A.M. Relational Job Design and the Motivation to Make a Prosocial Difference. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* **2007**, *32*, 393–417. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Methot, J.R.; Rosado-Solomon, E.H.; Allen, D.G. The network architecture of human capital: A relational identity perspective. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* **2018**, *43*, 723–748. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Royce, M. Using human resource management tools to support social enterprise: Emerging themes from the sector. *Soc. Enterp. J.* **2007**, *3*, 10–19. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

15. Tortia, E.C.; Sacchetti, S.; Valentinov, V. The ‘protective function’ of social enterprises: Understanding the renewal of multiple sets of motivations. *Rev. Soc. Econ.* **2020**, *78*, 1–31. [[CrossRef](#)]
16. Borzaga, C.; Solari, L. Management challenges for social enterprises. In *The Emergence of Social Enterprise*; Borzaga, C., Defourny, J., Eds.; Routledge: London, UK, 2004; pp. 333–349.
17. Tortia, E.C.; Valentinov, V. Internal Organization and Governance. In *Handbook of Research on Nonprofit Economics and Management*, 2nd ed.; Seaman, B.A., Young, D., Eds.; Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK, 2018; pp. 285–299.
18. Sacchetti, S.; Borzaga, C. The Foundations of the “Public Organisation”: Governance failure and the problem of external effects. *J. Manag. Gov.* **2020**, *2021*, 731–758. [[CrossRef](#)]
19. Poledrini, S.; Tortia, E.C. Social Enterprises: Evolution of the Organizational Model and Application to the Italian Case. *Entrep. Res. J.* **2020**, *10*, 20190315. [[CrossRef](#)]
20. Garcia-Lomas, I.; Gabaldon, P. Gender—From Variable to Lens in Social Enterprises: A Literature Review and Research Agenda for Women’s Involvement in Social Ventures. *J. Soc. Entrep.* **2020**, 1–25. [[CrossRef](#)]
21. Kummitha, R.K.R. *Social Entrepreneurship: Working Towards Greater Inclusiveness*; Russel Sage: New Delhi, India, 2016.
22. Borzaga, C.; Depedri, S. Interpersonal relations and job satisfaction: Some empirical results in social and community care services. In *Economics and Social Interaction: Accounting for Interpersonal Relations*; Gui, B., Sugden, R., Eds., Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2005; pp. 132–153.
23. Terjersen, S. Senior women managers’ transition to entrepreneurship. *Career Dev. Int.* **2005**, *10*, 246–262. [[CrossRef](#)]
24. Phipps, S.T.A.; Prieto, L.C.; Ndinguri, E.N. Understanding the impact of employee involvement on organizational productivity: The moderating role of organizational commitment. *J. Org. Cult. Commun. Confl.* **2013**, *17*, 107–120.
25. Lashley, C. Towards an understanding of employee empowerment in hospitality services. *Int. J. Contemp. Hosp. Manag.* **1995**, *7*, 27–32. [[CrossRef](#)]
26. Zhang, L.; Zhang, Y.; Dallas, M.; Xu, S.; Hu, J. How perceived empowerment HR practices influence work engagement in social enterprises; a moderated mediation model. *Int. J. HRM* **2018**, *29*, 2971–2999. [[CrossRef](#)]
27. Geralis, M.; Terziovski, M. A quantitative analysis of the relationship between empowerment practices and service quality outcomes. *Total Qual. Manag. Bus.* **2003**, *14*, 45–62. [[CrossRef](#)]
28. Liao, H.; Toya, K.; Lepak, D.P.; Hong, Y. Do they see eye to eye? Management and employee perspectives of high-performance work systems and influence processes on service quality. *J. Appl. Psychol.* **2009**, *94*, 371–391. [[CrossRef](#)]
29. Redman, T.; Mathews, B.P. Service quality and human resource management. A review and research agenda. *Pers. Rev.* **1998**, *27*, 57–77. [[CrossRef](#)]
30. Jiang, K.; Lepak, D.P.; Hu, J.; Baer, J.C. How Does Human Resource Management Influence Organizational Outcomes? A Meta-analytic Investigation of Mediating Mechanisms. *Acad. Manag. J.* **2012**, *55*, 1264–1294. [[CrossRef](#)]
31. López-Cabarcos, M.Á.; Vázquez-Rodríguez, P.; Quiñoá-Piñeiro, L.M. An approach to employees’ job performance through work environmental variables and leadership behaviours. *J. Bus. Res.* **2021**, *140*, 361–369. [[CrossRef](#)]
32. Campbell, J.P.; McCloy, R.A.; Oppler, S.H.; Sager, C.E. A Theory of performance. In *Personnel Selection in Organizations*; Schmitt, N., Borman, W.C., Eds.; Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, USA, 1993; pp. 35–70.
33. Campbell, J.P.; Wiernik, B.M. The modeling and assessment of work performance. *Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav.* **2015**, *2*, 47–74. [[CrossRef](#)]
34. Deci, E.L. *Intrinsic Motivation*; Plenum: New York, NY, USA, 1975.
35. Bandura, A. *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social-Cognitive View*; Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ, USA, 1986.
36. Conger, J.; Kanungo, R. The empowerment process: Integrating theory and practice. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* **1988**, *13*, 471–482. [[CrossRef](#)]
37. Van Dyne, L.; Graham, J.W.; Dienesch, R.M. Organizational citizenship behavior: Construct redefinition, measurement, and validation. *Acad. Manag. J.* **1994**, *37*, 765–802.
38. Bell, S.J.; Menguc, B. The employee-organization relationship, organizational citizenship behaviors, and superior service quality. *J. Retail.* **2002**, *78*, 131–146. [[CrossRef](#)]
39. Dar, A.T.; Bashir, M.; Ghazanfar, F.; Abrar, M. Mediating Role of Employee Motivation in Relationship to Post-Selection. HRM Practices and Organizational Performance. *Int. Rev. Manag. Mark.* **2014**, *4*, 224–238.
40. Meyer, M.; Ohana, M.; Stinglhamber, F. The impact of supervisor interpersonal justice on supervisor-directed citizenship behaviors in social enterprises: A moderated mediation model. *Int. J. HRM* **2017**, *29*, 2927–2948. [[CrossRef](#)]
41. Bakker, A.B.; Demerouti, E. The job demands-resources model: State of the art. *J. Manag. Psychol.* **2007**, *22*, 309–328. [[CrossRef](#)]
42. Demerouti, E.; Bakker, A.B.; Nachreiner, F.; Schaufeli, W.B. The Job Demands–Resources Model of burnout. *J. Appl. Psychol.* **2001**, *86*, 499–512. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
43. Schaufeli, W.B.; Taris, T.W. A critical review of the Job Demands-Resources Model: Implications for improving work and health. In *Bridging Occupational, Organizational and Public Health*; Bauer, G.F., Hämmig, O., Eds.; Springer Science: Dordrecht, NL, USA, 2014; pp. 43–68.
44. Clarke, M.A.; Hill, S.R. Promoting employee wellbeing and quality service outcomes: The role of HRM practices. *J. Manag. Organ* **2012**, *18*, 702–713. [[CrossRef](#)]
45. Bakker, A.B. A Job Demands–Resources approach to public service motivation. *Public Admin Rev.* **2015**, *75*, 723–732. [[CrossRef](#)]

46. Topcic, M.; Baum, M.; Kabst, R. Are high-performance work practices related to individually perceived stress? A job demands-resources perspective. *Int. J. HRM* **2015**, *27*, 1–22. [CrossRef]
47. de Reuver, R.; Van de Voorde, K.; Kilroy, S. When do bundles of high-performance work systems reduce employee absenteeism? The moderating role of workload. *Int. J. HRM* **2021**, *32*, 2889–2909. [CrossRef]
48. Blandi, V. Customer Uncertainty: A Source of Organizational Inefficiency in the Light of the Modularity Theory of the Firm. Ph.D. Thesis, Trento Doctoral School of Social Sciences, Toronto, ON, Canada, 2018. Available online: <http://eprints-phd.biblio.unitn.it/3056/> (accessed on 26 December 2021.).
49. Handy, F.; Katz, E. The wage differential between nonprofit institutions and corporations: Getting more by paying less? *J. Comp. Econ.* **1998**, *26*, 246–261. [CrossRef]
50. Valentinov, V. The Property Rights Approach to Nonprofit Organization: The Role of Intrinsic Motivation. *Public Organiz. Rev.* **2007**, *7*, 41–55. [CrossRef]
51. Valentinov, V. Toward an Incentive Alignment Theory of Nonprofit Organization. *Evol. Inst. Econ. Rev.* **2008**, *5*, 189–196. [CrossRef]
52. Ortmann, A.; Schlesinger, M. Trust, reputé and the role of non-profit enterprise. *Voluntas* **1997**, *8*, 97–119. [CrossRef]
53. Maslow, A.H. *Maslow on Management*, 1st ed.; John Wiley & Sons: New York, NY, USA, 1998.
54. McGregor, D. *The Human Side of Enterprise*; McGraw-Hill Book Co.: New York, NY, USA, 1960.
55. Lawler, E.E., III. *High-Involvement Management. Participative Strategies for Improving Organizational Performance*; Jossey-Bass Inc.: San Francisco, CA, USA, 1986.
56. Frey, B.S. *Not Just for the Money: An Economic Theory of Personal Motivation*; Elgar: Cheltenham, UK, 1997.
57. Vandenberg, R.J.; Richardson, H.A.; Eastman, L.J. The impact of high involvement work processes on organizational effectiveness: A second-order latent variable approach. *Group Organ. Manag.* **1999**, *3*, 300–339. [CrossRef]
58. Boxall, P.; Hutchison, A.; Wassenaar, B. How do high involvement work processes influence employee outcomes? An examination of the mediating roles of skill utilisation and intrinsic motivation. *Int. J. Hum. Resour. Manag.* **2015**, *26*, 1737–1752. [CrossRef]
59. Cassar, L.; Meier, S. Nonmonetary incentives and the implications of work as a source of meaning. *J. Econ. Perspect.* **2018**, *32*, 215–238. [CrossRef]
60. Bland, J.T.; Williams, A.M.; Albertson, N. Job-Fit and High-Performance versus High-Empowerment HR: Moderators of the PSM—Organizational Commitment Relationship. *Public Manag. Rev.* **2021**, 1–26. [CrossRef]
61. Osterloh, M.; Frey, B.S. Motivation, Knowledge Transfer, and Organizational Forms. *Organ. Sci.* **2000**, 538–550. [CrossRef]
62. Benevene, P.; Kong, E.; Barbieri, B.; Cortini, M. Representation of intellectual capital’s components amongst Italian social enterprises. *J. Intellect. Cap.* **2017**, *18*, 564–587.1. [CrossRef]
63. Poledrini, S. Unconditional reciprocity and the case of Italian social cooperatives. *Nonprofit Volunt. Sector Q.* **2015**, *44*, 457–473. [CrossRef]
64. Ridley-Duff, R. Social enterprise as a socially rational business. *Int. J. Entrep. Behav. Res.* **2008**, *14*, 291–312. [CrossRef]
65. Kim, D.; Lim, U. Social Enterprise as a Catalyst for Sustainable Local and Regional Development. *Sustainability* **2017**, *9*, 1427. [CrossRef]
66. Kuosmanen, J. Care provision, empowerment, and market forces: The art of establishing legitimacy for Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs). *Voluntas* **2014**, *25*, 248–269. [CrossRef]
67. Vickers, I.; Lyon, F. The role of values, capabilities and relational learning in shaping strategies and addressing the tensions and challenges encountered within each category is highlighted. *Int. Small Bus. J.* **2014**, *32*, 449–470. [CrossRef]
68. Giauque, D.; Anderfuhren-Biget, S.; Varone, F. HRM Practices, Intrinsic Motivators, and Organizational Performance in the Public Sector. *Public Pers. Manag.* **2013**, *42*, 123–150. [CrossRef]
69. Del Gesso, C.; Romagnoli, L. Exploring women’s representation at the top of leading social enterprises. *Int. J. Acad. Res. Bus. Soc. Sci.* **2020**, *10*, 453–469.
70. Teasdale, S.; McKay, S.; Phillimore, J.; Teasdale, N. Exploring gender and social entrepreneurship: Women’s leadership, employment and participation in the third sector and social enterprises. *Volunt. Sect. Rev.* **2011**, *2*, 57–76. [CrossRef]
71. Onyx, J.; Maclean, M. Careers in the third sector. *Nonprofit Manag. Lead.* **1996**, *6*, 331–345. [CrossRef]
72. Crompton, R. *Employment and the Family: The Reconfiguration of Work and Family Life in Contemporary Societies*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2006.
73. Guerin, I. *Femmes et Economie Solidaire*; La Découverte: Paris, France, 2003.
74. Laville, J.L. *L’économie Solidaire. Une Perspective Internationale*; Hachette Littératures: Paris, France, 2006; pp. 245–276.
75. Roulleau-Berger, L. L’expérience de la précarité juvénile dans les espaces intermédiaires. *Form. Empl.* **1997**, *57*, 3–13. [CrossRef]
76. Preston, A.E. Women in the white-collar nonprofit sector: The best option or the only option? *Rev. Econ.Stat.* **1990**, *72*, 560–568. [CrossRef]
77. Espinosa, M.P.; Kovářík, J. Prosocial behavior and gender. *Front. Behav. Neurosci.* **2015**, *9*, 1–9. [CrossRef]
78. Chirwa, E.W. Effects of gender on the performance of micro and small enterprises in Malawi. *Dev. S. Afr.* **2008**, *25*, 347–362. [CrossRef]
79. Radipere, S.; Dhliwayo, S. The role of gender and education on small business performance in the South African small enterprise sector. *Mediterr. J. Soc. Sci.* **2014**, *5*, 104–110.

80. Hedija, V.; Němec, D. Gender diversity in leadership and firm performance: Evidence from the Czech Republic. *J. Bus. Econ. Manag.* **2021**, *22*, 156–180. [[CrossRef](#)]
81. Nathan, T.M. Gender diversity and economic performance of firms: Evidences from emerging market. *J. Econ. Develop. Manag. IT Financ. Mark.* **2013**, *5*, 100–110.
82. Poledrini, S.; Borzaga, C. Social Enterprise in Italy: A plurality of Business and Organisational Models. In *Social Enterprise in Western Europe: Theory, Models and Practice*; Defourny, J., Nyssens, M., Eds.; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2021; pp. 131–148.
83. ISTAT Istituzioni Nonprofit in Italia. *I Risultati Della Rivelazione Censuaria. Anno 2003*; ISTAT: Rome, Italy, 2004.
84. Tortia, E.C.; Degavre, F.; Poledrini, S. Why are social enterprises good candidates for social innovation? Looking for personal and institutional drivers of innovation. *Ann. Public Coop. Econ.* **2020**, *91*, 459–477. [[CrossRef](#)]
85. Valentinov, V. The Economics of Nonprofit Organization: In Search of an Integrative Theory. *J. Econ. Issues* **2008**, *42*, 745–761. [[CrossRef](#)]
86. Casini, A.; Bensliman, R.; Callorda Fossati, E.; Degavre, F.; Mahieu, C. Is social innovation fostering satisfaction and well-being at work? Insights from employment in social enterprises providing long-term eldercare services. *Voluntas* **2018**, *29*, 1244–1260. [[CrossRef](#)]
87. Conway, J.; Lance, C. What reviewers should expect from authors regarding Common Method Bias in organizational research. *J. Bus. Psychol.* **2010**, *25*, 325–334. [[CrossRef](#)]
88. Podsakoff, P.M.; MacKenzie, S.B.; Podsakoff, N.P. Sources of method bias in social science research and recommendations on how to control it. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.* **2012**, *63*, 539–569. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
89. ISTAT-EURICSE. *L'Economia Sociale in Italia. Dimensioni, Caratteristiche e Settori Chiave*; EURICSE, European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises: Trento, Italy, 2021. Available online: <https://www.euricse.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Leconomia-sociale-in-Italia-1.pdf>, (accessed on 30 December 2021).