



HRM systems and employee affective commitment: The role of employee gender

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The role of employee gender

Abstract

Purpose – Despite decades of studies on high-involvement human resource management (HRM) systems, questions remain of whether high-involvement HRM systems can increase the commitment of **women**. This study contributes to the growing body of research on the cross-level effect of HRM systems and practices on employee affective commitment by considering the moderating role of gender.

Design/Methodology – Integrating social exchange theory with gender role theory, this paper proposes that gender responses to HRM practices can be different. The hypotheses were tested using data from 104 small and medium-sized retail enterprises and 6,320 employees from Spain.

Findings – The findings generally support the study's hypotheses, with women's affective commitment responding more strongly and positively to employees' aggregated perceptions of a shop-level high-involvement HRM system. The findings imply that a high-involvement HRM system can promote the affective commitment of **women**.

Originality/value – This study investigates the impact of both an overall HRM system and function-specific HRM sub-systems (e.g., training, information, participation, and autonomy). By showing that women can be more positively affected by high-involvement HRM systems, this paper suggests that high-involvement HRM systems can be used to encourage involvement and participation of **women**.

Keywords Human resource management system; Human resource practices; Employee affective commitment; Social exchange theory; Gender role theory

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) researchers have recognized employee-level affective commitment as a key linkage between HRM and organizational outcomes (e.g., Chang and Chen, 2011; Kehoe and Wright, 2013). Literature also provides evidence of an association between HRM and employee commitment, without including organizational outcomes (e.g. Cafferkey *et al.*, 2019; de la Torre-Ruiz *et al.*, 2019; Li *et al.*, 2019). This study contributes to the growing body of the literature by considering the role of gender differences in the relationship between employees' aggregated perceptions of shop-level HRM systems and employee affective commitment. Since HRM practices aim to influence an organization's employees, their perceptions of such practices are more important than the mere offering of them (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Despite there being an organizational-level perception of HRM practices within an organization (e.g., employees generally perceiving that their organization adopts advanced HRM practices), employee responses to such perceived HRM practices can still depend on certain demographics, like gender (Smeenk *et al.*, 2006). With studies ignoring or only controlling for gender effects (e.g., Bal *et al.*, 2013; Fiorito *et al.*, 2007), little research has done to theorize, test, and explain the differential impact of perceived HRM practices on employee affective commitment for men and for women.

In addition, this study investigates the impact of *both* an overall HRM system and function-specific HRM sub-systems (e.g., training, information, participation, and autonomy). This study responds to calls for studying the effects of HRM systems and their sub-systems, leading to an examination of the comparative effects of different HRM sub-systems (e.g., Takeuchi *et al.*, 2009). In particular, it is predicted that, in most cases, the strength of the relationship

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4 between perceived HRM sub-systems and employee affective commitment can depend on gender,
5 which is a major social categorization that can be found in almost all societies (Pratto *et al.*, 1997;
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7 Sidanius and Pratto, 1999).
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11 Using hierarchical linear modeling for multilevel analyses, the hypotheses were tested in
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13 104 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Spain, using employee data from 6,320
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15 employees and shop-level data from managers. While most studies on high-involvement HRM
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17 systems have done in large-sized firms in US, researchers have suggested and found that adopting
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19 high-involvement HRM systems can be also beneficial for SMEs (Harney and Nolan, 2014). The
20
21 large sample size allows the authors to maintain methodological rigor by randomly selecting half
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23 of the employees within each shop to provide shop-level aggregated perceptions of HRM
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25 experiences, while utilizing the other half to provide the individual-level **affective** commitment
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34 **Hypotheses development**

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37 Social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964) suggests a norm of reciprocity whereby employees
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39 reciprocate offerings from their employers in order to build and maintain valuable interpersonal
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41 relationships. When organizations implement HRM practices that invest in employees and provide
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43 them with benefits such as development opportunities, advancement, and security, employees
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45 reciprocate these offerings with effort, engagement, and positive attitudes toward the organization
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48 (**Jung and Takeuchi, 2019**; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2007).
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52 HRM theories have emphasized the potential value of combining related practices to create
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54 integrated HRM systems. The horizontal integration principle suggests that bundling a set of
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56 complementary practices, such as skill-enhancing, motivation-enhancing, and opportunity-
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4 enhancing HRM practices (Lepak *et al.*, 2006) creates synergies that strengthen the potential
5 impact of any single type of practice in generating beneficial employee outcomes (Subramony,
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7 2009). Also, such integrated HRM systems create consistency in employee experiences, thereby
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9 strengthening the employer's messaging to employees regarding the organization's HRM
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11 approach (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004).
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16 This study examines employer bundling of four HRM practices commonly associated with high-
17 involvement work systems, namely, training, information, participation, and autonomy (Lawler,
18 1986; Shin and Konrad, 2017; Vandenberg *et al.*, 1999). When employers provide training, they
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20 are investing in employee knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), which enhance the value added
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22 by employees, increasing their earnings, development, and advancement opportunities (Ng *et al.*,
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24 2005; Schneider and Flore, 2019). When employers provide information, they increase employee
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26 understanding of the job, how it creates value, and how it fits into workplace operations, which
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28 increases motivation and reduces hindrance stressors (LePine *et al.*, 2005). Participation in
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30 workplace decision-making provides employees with opportunities to leverage their KSAs to add
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32 value, which extends and showcases employee capabilities in ways that may advance their status
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34 and careers (Konrad *et al.*, 2016). Autonomy provides employees with areas of authority to
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36 determine their own activities, which generates increased workplace motivation (Gagné and Deci,
37
38 2005). Together, training, information, participation, and autonomy combine skill and motivation-
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40 building with opportunities for engagement in higher-level decision-making, all of which empower
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42 employees by building efficacy, meaning, and impact in the workplace (Spreitzer, 1995).
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51 Employer efforts to build high-involvement HRM systems vary in effectiveness due to
52 differences in the strength of the link between bundles of formalized practices and employee
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54 workplace experiences (Baird *et al.*, 2018; Sanders and Yang, 2016). Differences across
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4 organizational units in HRM implementation generate variation in employee experiences of HRM
5 within the same organization (Dello Russo *et al.*, 2018). For this reason, employee affective
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7 outcomes are more proximally associated with their workplace experiences than with formalized
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9 practices intended to generate a particular work environment (Jiang *et al.*, 2013). Aggregated
10
11 perceptions of HRM practices among employees in the same shop indicate the strength of the
12
13 experienced employment relationship via the HRM system (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Ostroff and
14
15 Bowen, 2016). Hence, it is hypothesized that employees' aggregated perceptions of shop-level
16
17 high-involvement HRM systems predict employee affective commitment at the employee level:
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23 *Hypothesis 1 (H1): Aggregated perceptions of shop-level high-involvement HRM systems*
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25 *are positively associated with employee affective commitment.*
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30 This paper seeks to extend the SET perspective by integrating it with gender role theory to
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32 predict that women are likely to respond more strongly than men to high-involvement HRM
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34 systems. Gender role theory (Eagly, 1987) offers a theoretical framework explaining how women
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36 and men experience systematically different patterns of rewards and sanctions throughout the
37
38 course of their lives. These gendered systems generate gender differences in attitudes, values, and
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40 behavior that manifest across social settings, including the workplace. For instance, due to
41
42 pressures to fulfill the traditionally masculine role of breadwinner, men more than women pursue
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44 occupations providing high levels of earnings and earnings growth (Ochsenfeld, 2014). Due to
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46 pressures to fulfill the expectations of stereotypical femininity (Fiske *et al.*, 2002), women more
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48 than men value working with people and helping others in the workplace (Konrad *et al.*, 2000).
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53 It is argued here that socialized gender differences in work attitudes, values, and behavior
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55 have discouraged women from committing to organizational life. Thus, when organizations adopt
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4 practices encouraging employees to become involved in workplace initiatives, women can more
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6 positively respond to such practices. Traditionally, men have been tasked with the responsibility
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8 of providing financial support for their families, while women have been assigned the roles of
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10 homemaker and caretaker (Eagly, 1987; Wood and Eagly, 2012). Despite decades of pressure to
11
12 dismantle the restrictions of traditional gender roles (Grunow *et al.*, 2018; Pepin and Cotter, 2018),
13
14 these roles persist in family role enactment because of ongoing pressures on adults to undertake
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16 the duties ascribed to their gender (Endendijk *et al.*, 2018). For instance, men who are fathers work
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18 longer hours (Biggart and O'Brien, 2012) and enjoy a fatherhood wage premium (Prince Cooke
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20 and Fuller, 2018). When children arrive in a family, women shoulder the bulk of childcare hours
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22 (Hofäcker *et al.*, 2013; Yavorsky *et al.*, 2015). In dual-earner couples, women rather than men
23
24 scale back their careers in order to accommodate caretaking needs when children are young
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26 (Becker and Moen, 1999; Young and Schieman, 2018). Nationwide trends in the United States
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28 (Weeden *et al.*, 2016) show that roughly 80% of fathers and 60% of mothers work for pay, and
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30 almost 20% of fathers but fewer than 5% of mothers work long (50+) hours per week. Jobs with
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32 long hours have been shown to have sharply rising hourly wages over time, contributing to rising
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34 gender gaps in wages among parents, motherhood wage penalties, and fatherhood wage premiums
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36 (Weeden *et al.*, 2016). These statistics document the continued impact of traditional gender role
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38 assignments on workplace behavior and outcomes.
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46 Given the pressures on men to serve as breadwinners for the family, women have more of
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48 a tendency to withdraw from a paid work role should the employment relationship become
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50 unrewarding or onerous. Women are less likely than men to be judged as failing to fulfill their
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52 employment responsibilities if they decide to reduce their work hours or withdraw from the labor
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54 force to fulfill their family responsibilities, and instead are judged on their fulfillment of the
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4 motherhood role (Kaufman and Uhlenberg, 2000). Indeed, the norms of 'intensive parenting'
5 pressure the women in dual-earner couples to reduce their paid work hours (Cha, 2010; Grunow
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9 *et al.*, 2018). By comparison, economic stability often determines men's 'marriageability,' and
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11 men who fail to provide financially for their children are likely to face social sanctioning (Bridges
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13 and Boyd, 2016). In sum, feminine gender role tends to pull women away from employment,
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15 leading them to experience less pressure to stay in an unrewarding job. As such, female employees
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17 are likely to show reduced **affective** commitment to employers adopting a low-investment
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19 approach to HRM. Because masculine gender roles tend to tie men to paid employment, such that
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21 they may experience sanctioning if they decide to leave a paid job, this paper argues that men's
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25 **affective** commitment levels are less likely to be affected by a low-investment HRM system.
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28 Gender role dynamics are also likely to figure into men's and women's responses to high-
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30 involvement HRM practices. Due to the pull factors drawing women away from the workplace,
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32 employers must be more explicitly supportive of women in order to build and maintain high levels
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34 of their **affective** commitment. It is also argued that pressures to fulfill stereotypical expectations
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36 of females are likely to make women more responsive to the reciprocity norm inherent in social
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38 exchange (Ayman and Korabik, 2010; Fiske *et al.*, 2002). Starting in childhood and continuing
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40 throughout adulthood, women are expected to tend to relationships within the family and across
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42 societal institutions, including the workplace (Fletcher, 1999). Women may internalize these
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44 expectations as values or may comply with these expectations in order to garner rewards and avoid
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46 sanctioning (Konrad *et al.*, 2000). Regardless of the causal mechanism, it is expected that relational
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48 pressures are more salient to women than to men such that women are more strongly impacted by
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50 and reactive to the reciprocity norm. For these reasons, it is predicted that women's **affective**
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4 commitment is more strongly positively associated with employer provisions of high-involvement
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6 HRM systems.
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9 By comparison, men are subjected to the demands of masculine gender stereotypes, with
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11 the result that they are more responsive to opportunities to enhance personal status (Zhan *et al.*,
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13 2015) and independence (Konrad *et al.*, 2000). For these reasons, gender role theory predicts that
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15 men are thought to be *instrumental/agentive* (i.e., dominant, competitive, and fighting to achieve
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17 their independence and self-interest), whereas women are regarded as *communal* (i.e., friendly,
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19 concerned with others, unselfish, and willing to sacrifice). Due to the lower salience of relational
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21 factors for men, this paper predicts that men's affective commitment is less strongly positively
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23 related to employer provisions of high-involvement HRM systems:
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27 *Hypothesis 2 (H2): Gender moderates the relationship between shared perception of high-*
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29 *involvement HRM systems and employee affective commitment such that employee affective*
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31 *commitment is more strongly positively related to high-involvement HRM systems for*
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33 *women than for men.*
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39 While this study expects HRM practices to operate as systems, it is also anticipated that women
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41 and men will respond differently to individual practices associated with gender roles and
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43 stereotypes. Meta-analytic evidence has shown that women more than men value working with
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45 people and helping others at work (Konrad *et al.*, 2000). As this paper has argued, women's values
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47 make them more likely to reciprocate investments, such as training, due to the salience of relational
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49 pressures for reciprocity. Participation creates social interactions, strengthening workplace
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51 relationships (Gahlawat and Kundu, 2019). Because women are more likely to value workplace
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53 relationships, participation experiences are likely to be more strongly related to women's affective
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4 commitment. Because the feminine gender role tends to pull women away from onerous workplace
5 experiences, the provision of information that reduces hindrance stressors (LePine *et al.*, 2005),
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7 making the job easier and more motivating, is likely to be more important to women's than to
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9 men's affective commitment levels. As such, it is hypothesized:
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13 *Hypothesis 3 (H3): Gender moderates the relationship between employee experiences of*
14 *high-involvement HRM practices and employee affective commitment such that employee*
15 *affective commitment is more strongly positively related for women than men to the*
16 *provision of (a) training, (b) participation, and (c) information.*
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25 While women can exhibit stronger responses to most progressive HRM practices (as
26 predicted in H3), the gender stereotype predicts that men with higher autonomous motivation may
27 strongly respond to autonomy practices. Meta-analytic evidence has shown that men more than
28 women value autonomy at work (Konrad *et al.*, 2000). As such, HRM practices providing
29 autonomy are likely to be particularly important to men's affective commitment, and this study
30 suspects that the link between autonomy and affective commitment may not be stronger among
31 women than among men. Gender role theory suggests differences in motivation between the
32 genders: while women are more likely to hold communally-oriented motivation, men report self-
33 esteem-oriented motivation (Good and Sanchez, 2010). Studies have reported that men have a
34 greater tendency to prefer autonomy, independence, responsibility, and monetary compensation
35 while women are more likely to be motivated by working in a supportive and friendly work
36 environment (Buelens and Van den Broeck, 2007; Gentile *et al.*, 2009; Schwalbe and Staples,
37 1991). Therefore, it is argued here that HRM practices that fit with men's motivation, such as
38 autonomy and performance-based pay, can enhance the affective commitment of men more so
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4 than that of women. As autonomy fits more closely with stereotypical male values, men's
5 responses to autonomy practices can be stronger than women's responses to autonomy practices.
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9 Thus, this study expects autonomy to be more strongly related to employee affective commitment
10 for men than for women:
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13 *Hypothesis 4 (H4): The moderating effect of gender on the relationship between HRM*
14 *practices and employee affective commitment will be stronger for men than for women in*
15 *the case of employee experiences of autonomy.*
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23 In summary, the conceptual model with hypothesized relationships is presented in Figure 1.
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25 [INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]
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29 **Methods**

30 *Sample and data collection*

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33 This study concentrated on 104 SMEs in the retail sector of the Basque Country (northern Spain).
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36 Women's employment in Spain is largely in SMEs and lower level positions, but gender issues in
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38 Spain still remain as an under-researched area (Ruiz and Lucio, 2010). The study used the data
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40 that were collected from surveys in July 2011. A total of 6,320 employees completed the survey
41
42 voluntarily at the individual level. Employees reported on their gender, tenure, perceptions about
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44 their organization's HRM system, and employee affective commitment towards the organization.
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47 The final sample comprised the following characteristics. With regards to gender, 80% of
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49 respondents were women. Related to tenure, 17% of the staff had been working for the company
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51 for less than five years, 64% between five and 10 years, and the residual 19% had been working
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4 for the company for more than 10 years. The average response rate of the shops was 63%. The
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6 respondents' profiles are summarized in Table 1.
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9 [INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]
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11 The managers were asked to report on organizational-level (shop-level) variables, such as
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13 the company type and the company size, in terms of number of employees. With regards to the
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15 company type, 23% of the shops were cooperative shops. The survey was conducted in the Basque
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17 Country (northern Spain) area, where one of the world largest co-operative group is located.
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19 Within this cooperative context, employees are members, and profit sharing is mandatory for them.
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21 The average size of the shops was 96.27 people. In order to minimize common method bias in
22
23 multilevel analyses, the study adopted a split design by randomly dividing the sample into the
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25 individual level and the shop level (Ostroff *et al.*, 2002). The first half of the responses were used
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27 to measure HRM practices while the other half were used to measure employee affective
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29 commitment.
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36 *Measures*

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38 *HRM system.* The HRM system was measured using four HRM sub-systems: training,
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40 information, participation in decision-making, and autonomy. The study included the variables of
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42 participation in decision-making, information, and training levels based on practices that serve to
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44 enhance the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) dimensions (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2000; Arthur
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46 1994). Training seeks to enhance employee ability, both participation in decision-making and
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48 information are related to employee motivation, and autonomy is related to employee opportunity.
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50 The responses were based on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) to
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52 capture employees' level of perception about the practices being implemented. Research has
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4 demonstrated that employee perceptions about high-involvement HRM systems are stronger
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6 predictors of employee behavior than the rated practices of managers (Elorza *et al.*, 2011).
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10 The *training* dimension alludes to the development of abilities and the talent of employees
11 through the learning process ($\alpha = .92$). A sample item is 'I feel that the company dedicates
12 sufficient resources to foster my professional development.' The *information* dimension refers to
13 the information that workers receive from the organization, such as financial and economic results,
14 profitability, costs, etc. ($\alpha = .77$). In this analysis, the information dimension was made up of three
15 items, including 'I have enough information to do my job properly.' Participation in decision-
16 making was measured using three items ($\alpha = .86$). A sample item is 'I participate in the definition
17 of the annual targets for my department/section.' To measure autonomy three items were used on
18 work methods autonomy from Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) ($\alpha = .93$). A sample item is 'The
19 job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work.' See
20 Appendix A for item details of the variables.
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35 *Employee affective commitment.* Employee affective commitment was measured at the
36 employee-level using four items based on several authors (Cook, 1981; Meyer *et al.*, 1993).
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38 Among components of organizational commitment, we focus on employee affective commitment,
39 which is known as the most prevalent component that deals with emotional attachment to and
40 identification with the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990). In addition, affective commitment
41 is positively related to desirable outcomes, whereas normative commitment and continuance
42 commitment are sometimes negatively associated with desirable outcomes (Boselie, 2010; Meyer
43 *et al.*, 2002). Employee affective commitment is an attitude towards and attachment to the
44 organization ($\alpha = .85$). Respondents were asked to report on a 6-point scale (ranging from 1=
45 'strongly disagree' to 6 'strongly agree').
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4 *Female*. Respondents were asked to report their gender, and the variable was coded as 1 if female
5 and 0 if male.
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9 *Controls*. Control variables were categorized into two different levels: (i) the individual
10 level or level 1, and (ii) the shop level or level 2. Three different levels of tenure were distinguished
11 for each employee (1 = less than 5 years in the organization, 2 = between 5 and 10 years in the
12 organization, and 3 = more than a dichotomous variable). Information on company size and
13 cooperatives was obtained from shop managers. With regards to the shop level, a dichotomous
14 variable indicated whether or not the shop was a cooperative (0 = not cooperative, 1 = cooperative).
15 Distinguishing between cooperative and non-cooperative shops is critical since the way people are
16 managed at each differs significantly. Moreover, company size is one of the most widely used
17 control variables, considering that in large firms the implementation of HRM practices is more
18 likely due to economies of scale (Shin and Konrad, 2017). In this study, firm size was based on
19 the number of employees per firm. Since the effect of gender on the relationship between the HRM
20 system and employee affective commitment was tested, the study further controlled the female
21 ratio in the workplace. The female ratio was calculated by dividing the number of female responses
22 by the number of employee responses in a shop.
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43 **Results**

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46 Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables are reported in Table 2. Hypotheses
47 were tested with hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) using the HLM program (Raudenbush and
48 Bryk, 2002). Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression can result in inaccurate estimates when
49 individuals are nested within organizational groups (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). The application of HLM
50 allows us to partition variance across the two levels of analysis: variance at the individual level
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4 and variance at the shop level (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002). The hypotheses were tested following
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6 the random coefficient regression procedure in the HLM program. Following Hofmann and
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8 Gavin's (1998) recommendations for multilevel modeling, the study adopted the grand mean
9
10 centering approach in random coefficient regressions. Before testing the hypotheses, a null model
11
12 was conducted to check the variance at the shop level. The result showed significant variance in
13
14 employee affective commitment, suggesting that there is considerable residual variance to be
15
16 explained by the shop level. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was significant (ICC=.14;
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18 Chi-square test $p<.001$), indicating the possibility for a multilevel model.
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22 [INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]
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26 H1 predicted that high-involvement HRM systems are positively associated with employee
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28 affective commitment. As expected, high-involvement HRM systems were positively and
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30 significantly associated with employee affective commitment, supporting H1 (standard
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32 coefficient= .55; $p<.001$) (see Table 3). H2 predicts the moderation effect of gender on the
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34 relationship between high-involvement HRM systems and employee affective commitment. The
35
36 interaction between gender and high-involvement HRM systems was significantly related to
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38 employee affective commitment ($p<.05$) (see Table 4). The effect of HRM system on employee
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40 affective commitment was higher among female employees than among male employees. Thus,
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42 H2 was supported. The relationship between HRM system, gender, and employee affective
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44 commitment is plotted in Figure 2. H3 predicted that gender moderates the relationship between
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46 individual HRM practices ((a) training, (b) participation, and (c) information) and employee
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48 affective commitment, such that the HRM practices–affective commitment link is stronger among
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50 women than among men. The results shown in Tables 5, 6, and 7 indicate that gender moderates
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52 the relationship between training and employee affective commitment ($p<.05$, see Table 5) and the
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4 relationship between participation and employee affective commitment ($p < .05$, see Table 6). The
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6 relationship between information and employee affective commitment was marginally moderated
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8 by gender ($p = .05$, see Table 7). Figures 3, 4, and 5 show that the practices–affective commitment
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10 relationships were stronger for women than for men. Therefore, H3 was supported. Based on
11
12 gender role theory, gender differences in autonomy were expected: communally-motivated women
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14 and self-esteem-oriented men (Good and Sanchez, 2010). The moderation effect of gender on the
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16 relationship between autonomy and employee affective commitment was not significant ($p > .10$,
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18 see Table 8). Therefore, H4 was supported.
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22 [INSERT TABLES 3 to 8 ABOUT HERE]

23 [INSERT FIGURES 2 to 5 ABOUT HERE]

24 25 26 27 **Discussion**

28
29 The findings pertaining to a positive relationship between the perceived HRM system and
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31 employee affective commitment are consistent with past studies (e.g., Elorza *et al.*, 2011; Kehoe
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33 and Wright, 2013). These results support SET and the arguments that employees demonstrate
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35 **affective** commitment in exchange for a high-involvement HRM system from the employer (Blau,
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37 1964; Homans, 1958). Moreover, the pioneering results regarding the moderating effects of gender
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39 support gender role theory and the arguments that, in comparison to men, women's employee
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41 affective commitment levels are higher in the present of high-involvement HRM systems (Eagly,
42
43 1987). These findings support the arguments that women are both more likely than men to
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45 reciprocate employer offerings of supportive HRM and more likely than men to withhold
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47 commitment when the work environment is unsupportive.
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52 This study also considers that HRM practices that are a better fit with men's motivation
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54 can particularly appeal to men, enhancing their affective commitment. However, a moderating
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4 effect of gender on the relationship between autonomy practices and employee affective
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6 commitment was not found. Although it is recognized that men place relatively higher value on
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8 workplace autonomy than women do (Konrad *et al.*, 2000), women's affective commitment can
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10 be also influenced by autonomy practices. Thus, autonomy practices should be equally provided
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12 to women and men.
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16 To the best of the authors' knowledge, only two other studies explicitly hypothesized and
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18 tested the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between high-involvement HRM
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20 systems and employee affective commitment (Andersén and Andersén, 2019; Qiao *et al.*, 2009).
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23 There are notable differences between this study and each of the two studies. For instance, Qiao *et*
24
25 *al.* (2009) collected data from six medium- to large-sized manufacturing firms, whereas the current
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27 data were collected from 104 SMEs. Moreover, their study measured HRM practices by asking
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29 employees to estimate the percentage of employees in the firm covered by each of the 18 practices,
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31 while this study asked employees about their personal experiences with specific HRM practices.
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33 Furthermore, Qiao *et al.* (2009) measured all variables in a single survey at the individual level of
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35 analysis. The national cultural differences may also influence on the role of gender in the
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37 relationship between HRM practices and employee affective commitment (Gerhart and Fang, 2005;
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39 Hofstede, 2001). Last but not least, their measure included a large portion of HRM practices that
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41 fit with men's motivation (e.g., internal promotions, performance-based promotions, skill-based
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43 pay, group-based pay, and employee stock ownership). As this study proposed that gender
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45 responses to HRM practices can depend on each function-specific practice, investigating the issue
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47 by each function-specific practice is desirable in future studies (Mahmood *et al.*, 2019). For
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49 instance, it is expected that HRM practices that fit with men's motivation (e.g., pay per
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51 performance, promotions, and autonomy) might have less stronger effects among women than
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4 HRM practices that fit better with women's motivation (e.g., social relationships, reduced status,
5 distinction, and a friendly work environment).
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10 11 *Theoretical contributions and research implications*

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13 This study makes several theoretical contributions. It provides direct support to SET through
14 testing an exchange relationship between employer and employees (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958).
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16 The findings suggest that employees reciprocate high-involvement HRM systems with employee
17 affective commitment (e.g. Elorza *et al.*, 2011; Kehoe and Wright, 2013). Moreover, this study
18 theorizes the significance of horizontal integration of training, information, participation, and
19 autonomy practices in determining employee affective commitment (Shin and Konrad, 2017). It
20 presents theoretical arguments for the benefits each set of function-specific practices provide to
21 employees: KSAs in the case of training practices (Ng *et al.*, 2005), reduced stress in the case of
22 information practices (e.g., LePine *et al.*, 2005), employee capabilities in the case of participation
23 practices (Konrad *et al.*, 2016), and motivation in the case of autonomy practices (Gagné and Deci,
24 2005). It then theorizes an integration of these practices into a system that fetches high employee
25 affective commitment, through the above-mentioned support of employee empowerment
26 (Spreitzer, 1995). Future research could add value with a more refined test of SET that also
27 measures these benefits as processes of the exchange between the employer and employees. Also,
28 researchers may explicitly test the roles of different work values and motivation between men and
29 women in the relationship between HRM practices and employee affective commitment.
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50 This study responds to research calls, advancing the employee affective commitment field
51 and setting directions for future research. Employees are the ultimate recipients of HRM practices
52 and thus their perceptions of HRM practices and the subsequent effects of those perceptions on
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4 work processes and outcomes are important (Farndale *et al.*, 2010). This research responded to
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6 calls for conducting additional employee-level research (Kooij *et al.*, 2010). It went a step further
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8 by predicting and testing the effects of both an HRM system and function-specific HRM practices
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10 on employee affective commitment. Past research has examined either an HRM system (one
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12 overall bundle across different functions; e.g., Boon and Kalshoven, 2014; Kehoe and Wright,
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14 2013; Qiao *et al.*, 2009; Taylor *et al.*, 2008) or function-specific practices (sub-systems such as
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16 selection, training, and work design; e.g., Bal *et al.*, 2013; Kooij *et al.*, 2010; Rode *et al.*, 2016;
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18 Smeenk *et al.*, 2006). Research in this direction can benefit from proposing and testing
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20 comparative effects of various sub-systems. Moreover, this research provides insights into the
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22 HRM practices–employee processes relationship black box (Elorza *et al.*, 2011; Wright and
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24 Gardner, 2003). Future research can not only advance the field by testing the effects on additional
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26 employee processes, but also extend this relationship by including various employee-level
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28 outcomes, treating employee affective commitment and other processes as mediators (e.g., Chang
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30 and Chen, 2011, p. 19, p. 22, p. 30; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2007).
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36 This study presents employee gender as a moderator of the HRM practices–affective
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38 commitment relationship, derived from the integration of SET (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958) and
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40 gender role theory (Eagly, 1987). Findings suggest that women can be more responsive than men,
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42 in terms of affective commitment, to employer choices of high-involvement HRM systems. The
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44 differential impact found for men and women suggests the value of testing additional demographic
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46 moderators on the HRM–affective commitment relationship. Research in this direction can also
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48 benefit from testing these moderating effects at both stage 1 (HRM practices–employee processes)
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50 and stage 2 (employee processes–outcomes) of the mediation models. A test of an integrated
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4 multilevel model capturing effects at both the employee level and the organizational level will
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6 provide significant insights (Ehnert, 2009; Martín-Alcázar *et al.*, 2005; Paauwe, 2004).
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10 11 *Practical implication*

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13 The findings of this study present several practical implications. First, they provide additional
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15 evidence for the positive impact of high-involvement HRM systems on employee affective
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17 commitment (e.g., Elorza *et al.*, 2011; Kehoe and Wright, 2013). Strong evidence based on a body
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19 of literature can help human resource managers obtain **affective** commitment from top
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21 management to offer high-involvement human resource systems (Pak and Chung, 2013). Although
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23 the evidence from studies focusing on the distal financial effects of HRM systems is robust (Jiang
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25 *et al.*, 2012), a lack of research evidence of *how* HRM systems improve financial performance
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27 may weaken the business case (Jiang *et al.*, 2013; Wright and Gardner, 2003). Second, the findings
28
29 suggest that organizations should focus on offering a horizontally integrated set of HRM systems
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31 comprising training, participation, information, and autonomy practices. The synergies generated
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33 by these practices across function areas produce high levels of employee affective commitment as
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35 an exchange (Martín-Alcázar *et al.*, 2005). Over time, human resource managers should continue
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37 to work on improvements and refinements of these practices and their cross-function
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39 complementarities (Chadwick, 2010; Koster, 2011).
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46 Third, managers should also engage with micro-managing perceptions of high-
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48 involvement HRM practices. The findings provide novel insights that female employees show
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50 higher levels of **affective** commitment exchanged for perceived HRM systems and three function-
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52 specific practices: training, participation, and information. Thus, gender-focused HRM can help
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54 managers fully capitalize on the benefits of HRM systems and practices (Ali, 2016). Working with
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4 line managers (Sikora and Ferris, 2014), human resource managers should highlight the
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6 significance of high-involvement practices to male employees to achieve greater levels of affective
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8 commitment. For female employees, organizations should ensure the continuation of HRM
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10 systems and practices.
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15 16 *Limitations*

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19 Despite the many strengths of this study there are also some limitations. First, employee-level data
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21 on variables used for testing hypotheses were obtained from the same source. Common method
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23 bias was minimized by separating the sample into two groups (firm level and individual level).
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25 While a split design cannot eliminate common method bias, it helps in reducing such bias in
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27 multilevel modeling (Ostroff *et al.*, 2002). As common method bias is likely to reduce the power
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29 to detect interaction effects (Erdogan and Bauer, 2009; Evans, 1985), thus obtaining multilevel
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31 data from separate sources is desirable in future studies.
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36 Second, the dataset included four HRM sub-systems (i.e., training, participation,
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38 information, and autonomy), but did not include compensation related HRM practices. Gender
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40 differences in responding to performance-based pay are considered to be an interesting future
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42 research area. Also interesting can be a study on the three way interaction between gender, high-
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44 involvement HRM, and family-friendly HRM practices (e.g., child care benefits, on-site day care
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46 center, and flexible working hours).
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50 Third, this study provides only an indirect test of gender role theory used to derive
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52 moderating hypotheses (Eagly, 1987). A direct test would require measuring the different value
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54 male and female employees place on the HRM system and function-specific practices;
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4 subsequently, it may be necessary to examine how gender differences in work values influence
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6 employee affective commitment.
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9 **Fourth**, among components of organizational commitment, our study focus on employee
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11 affective commitment, which is the most prevalent component of organizational commitment
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13 (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Future studies can further investigate how gender can influence on the
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15 associations between HRM practices and other components of organizational commitment (e.g.,
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17 normative commitment and continuance commitment).
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20 **Fifth**, this study was conducted on SMEs in Spain. While Ruiz and Lucio (2010) reported
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22 that HRM in Spanish firms is being globalized (or assimilated the American HRM model), they
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24 pointed out that distinctive socio-economic contexts in Spain should be noted as well. Thus,
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26 findings need to be generalized in other industries and cultural backgrounds. Particularly, since the
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28 data were obtained from low-paid and mostly female retail workers, future studies may investigate
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30 the role of gender in the HRM–employee affective commitment relationship in male-dominated
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32 professions.
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39 **Conclusion**

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41 This study investigates the moderation effect of gender on the relationship between high-
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43 involvement HRM systems and employee affective commitment. By showing that women can be
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45 more positively affected by high-involvement HRM systems, this paper proposed that high-
46
47 involvement HRM systems can be used to encourage involvement and participation of **women**.
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49 The authors hope to see whether and how high-involvement HRM systems can influence the
50
51 **affective** commitment of other minority groups in future studies.
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41 1319-1331.

42 43 44 45 46 47 48 **Appendix A: HRM practices items**

| 49 50 HRM Practice | Items |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 51 52 Training 53 (3 items) | I feel that the company dedicates sufficient resources to foster my professional development. |
| | I feel that the company provides me with enough training to perform my job. |

| | |
|--|--|
| | I think that the company values and promotes my training. |
| Participation in decision-making (3 items) | I participate in the definition of the annual targets for my department/section. |
| | I participate in the definition, control, and monitoring of the business plan on an annual basis. |
| | I have the chance to participate in important decisions about the future of my department/section. |
| Autonomy (3 items) | My job allows me a chance to use my personal initiative or judgement in carrying out the work. |
| | The job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own. |
| | The job provides me with significant autonomy in making decisions. |
| Information (3 items) | I have frequently updated information about the performance of my department/section (sales, results, project status, etc.). |
| | I have enough information to do my job properly. |
| | I am informed about our company's plans for the future (challenges, targets, investments, etc.). |

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Table 1.
Respondents' Profiles

| Categories | Percentage |
|------------------------|------------|
| Gender | |
| Male | 20% |
| Female | 80% |
| Tenure | |
| Less than 5 years | 64% |
| Between 5 and 10 years | 19% |
| More than 10 years | 19% |

Table 2.

Mean, standard deviation, correlation

| | MEAN | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| Individual level ^a | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Female | .80 | .40 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tenure | 2.01 | .59 | -.023 | | | | | | | | | |
| Commitment | 4.27 | 1.07 | -.023 | -.034 | | | | | | | | |
| Shop level ^b | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Shop size | 96.27 | 55.63 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Training | 3.85 | .47 | | | | -.19* | | | | | | |
| Participation | 4.04 | .43 | | | | -.26** | .78** | | | | | |
| Information | 4.46 | .37 | | | | -.15 | .77** | .81** | | | | |
| Autonomy | 4.13 | .44 | | | | -.18 | .62** | .80** | .75** | | | |
| HRM system | 4.12 | .38 | | | | -.22* | .89** | .94** | .91** | .88** | | |
| Cooperative | .24 | .43 | | | | .49** | -.41** | -.41** | -.32** | -.25* | -.39** | |
| Female ratio | .81 | .12 | | | | -.04 | -.16 | -.18 | -.16 | -.19* | -.19 | .32** |

Notes. ^a n=2998. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$ ^b n=104. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 3.

Effects of HRM system on employee affective commitment (H1)

| Independent variables | Estimate | SE | t-value | p-value |
|---------------------------|----------|-----|---------|---------|
| For INTRCPT1, B0 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{00} | 4.30 | .04 | 114.59 | .00 |
| Shop size, g_{01} | -.00 | .00 | -.95 | .34 |
| Cooperative, g_{02} | -.03 | .09 | -.33 | .74 |
| Female ratio, g_{03} | -.08 | .39 | -.20 | .84 |
| HRM system, g_{04} (H1) | .55 | .12 | 4.53 | .00 |
| For Female slope, B1 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{10} | -.04 | .05 | -.74 | .46 |
| For Tenure slope, B2 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{20} | -.00 | .04 | -.06 | .96 |

Table 4.

Moderation effect of gender in the relationship between HRM system and employee affective commitment (H2)

| Independent variables | Estimate | SE | t-value | p-value |
|---------------------------|----------|-----|---------|---------|
| For INTRCPT1, B0 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{00} | 4.30 | .04 | 113.90 | .00 |
| Shop size, g_{01} | -.00 | .00 | -.92 | .36 |
| Cooperative, g_{02} | -.03 | .09 | -.38 | .70 |
| Female ratio, g_{03} | -.08 | .39 | -.20 | .85 |
| HRM system, g_{04} | .52 | .12 | 4.19 | .00 |
| For Female slope, B1 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{10} | -.04 | .05 | -.83 | .41 |
| HRM system, g_{11} (H2) | .33 | .15 | 2.20 | .03 |
| For Tenure slope, B2 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{20} | -.00 | .04 | -.04 | .97 |

Table 5.

Moderation effect of gender in the relationship between training and employee affective commitment (H3a)

| Independent variables | Estimate | SE | t-value | p-value |
|--------------------------|----------|-----|---------|---------|
| For INTRCPT1, B0 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{00} | 4.30 | .04 | 111.24 | .00 |
| Shop size, g_{01} | -.00 | .00 | -1.25 | .21 |
| Cooperative, g_{02} | -.02 | .10 | -.15 | .88 |
| Female ratio, g_{03} | -.16 | .41 | -.38 | .70 |
| Training, g_{04} | .37 | .10 | 3.71 | .00 |
| For Female slope, B1 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{10} | -.05 | .05 | -.88 | .38 |
| Training, g_{11} (H3a) | .29 | .13 | 2.26 | .03 |
| For Tenure slope, B2 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{20} | -.00 | .04 | -.04 | .97 |

Table 6.

Moderation effect of gender in the relationship between participation and employee affective commitment (H3b)

| Independent variables | Estimate | SE | t-value | p-value |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----|---------|---------|
| For INTRCPT1, B0 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{00} | 4.30 | .04 | 111.25 | .00 |
| Shop size, g_{01} | -.00 | .00 | -.75 | .45 |
| Cooperative, g_{02} | -.02 | .10 | -.22 | .83 |
| Female ratio, g_{03} | -.10 | .40 | -.25 | .81 |
| Participation, g_{04} | .46 | .13 | 3.62 | .00 |
| For Female slope, B1 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{10} | -.04 | .05 | -.85 | .40 |
| Participation, g_{11} (H3b) | .36 | .14 | 2.53 | .01 |
| For Tenure slope, B2 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{20} | -.00 | .04 | -.06 | .95 |

Table 7.

Moderation effect of gender in the relationship between information sharing and employee affective commitment (H3c)

| Independent variables | Estimate | SE | t-value | p-value |
|----------------------------|----------|-----|---------|---------|
| For INTRCPT1, B0 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{00} | 4.30 | .04 | 108.55 | .00 |
| Shop size, g_{01} | -.00 | .00 | -1.21 | .23 |
| Cooperative, g_{02} | -.08 | .10 | -.87 | .39 |
| Female ratio, g_{03} | -.14 | .39 | -.35 | .73 |
| Information, g_{04} | .38 | .12 | 3.33 | .00 |
| For Female slope, B1 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{10} | -.04 | .05 | -.80 | .43 |
| Information, g_{11} (H4) | .30 | .30 | 1.96 | .05 |
| For Tenure slope, B2 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{20} | -.00 | .04 | -.05 | .97 |

Table 8.

Moderation effect of gender in the relationship between autonomy and employee affective commitment (H4)

| Independent variables | Estimate | SE | t-value | p-value |
|-------------------------|----------|-----|---------|---------|
| For INTRCPT1, B0 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{00} | 4.30 | .04 | 112.10 | .00 |
| Shop size, g_{01} | -.00 | .00 | -.70 | .49 |
| Cooperative, g_{02} | -.13 | .09 | -1.43 | .16 |
| Female ratio, g_{03} | -.01 | .41 | -.04 | .97 |
| Autonomy, g_{04} | .42 | .11 | 3.99 | .00 |
| For Female slope, B1 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{10} | -.04 | .05 | -.73 | .47 |
| Autonomy, g_{11} (H4) | .14 | .13 | 1.10 | .27 |
| For Tenure slope, B2 | | | | |
| Intercept, g_{20} | -.00 | .04 | -.18 | .86 |

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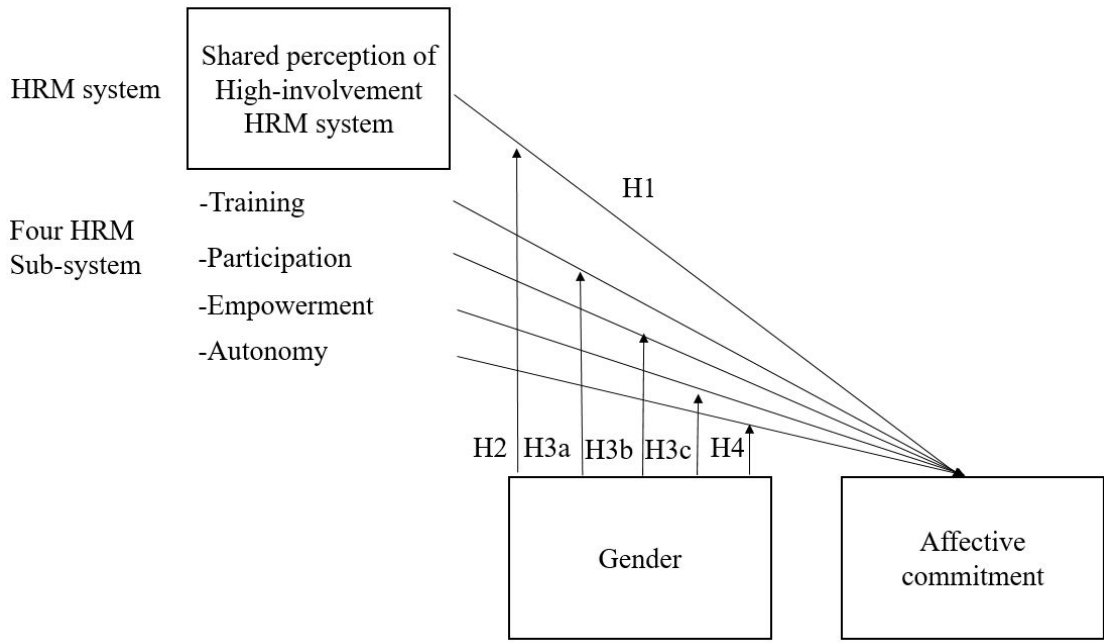


Figure 1.
Conceptual model with hypothesized relationships.

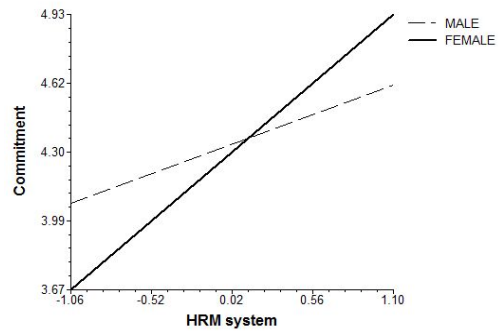


Figure 2.

HRM system and employee affective commitment relationships for male and female employees.

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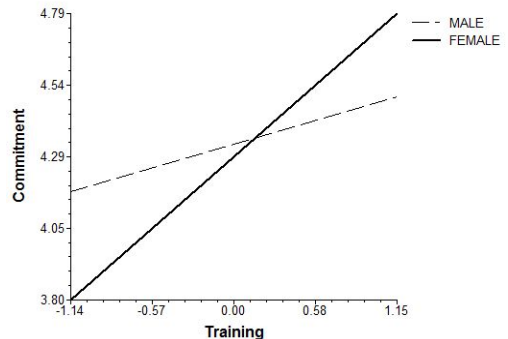


Figure 3.
Training and employee affective commitment relationships for male and female employees.

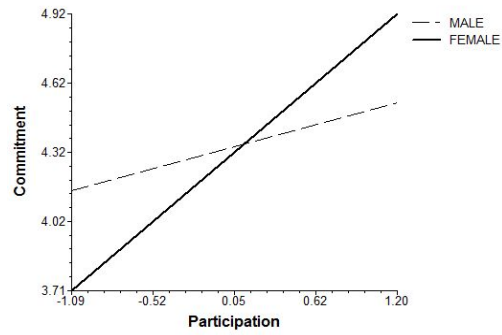


Figure 4.

Participation and employee affective commitment relationships for male and female employees.

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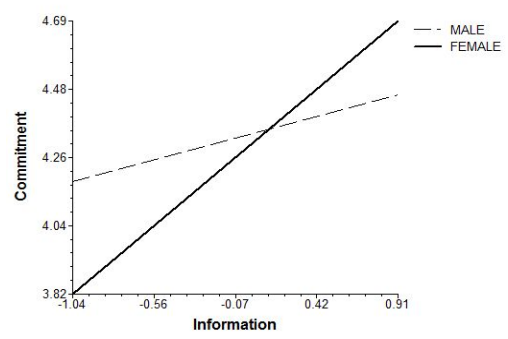


Figure 5. Information and employee affective commitment relationships for male and female employees.

Responses to Reviewers

Manuscript # GM-04-2019-0053

HRM systems and employee affective commitment: The role of employee gender

We thank reviewers for thoughtful feedback on our paper. In this “Responses to Reviewers” document, we have reproduced reviewers’ comments that required an action, followed by our responses. We have also revised the manuscript accordingly and have highlighted the changes made and new references included. We trust we have addressed all feedback in this document and in the revised manuscript.

Reviewer 1

Comment 1. The literature review is good and well-structured. However, some more recent literature needs to be added in the literature review to reflect the contemporary character of the present work.

Response.

Thank you for pointing out this issue. We have conducted new literature searches and have added additional citations and/or text on the following pages: 2, 3, 4, 8, and 16. The changes have been highlighted, including the **eight** new references added in the references list.

Andersén, J. and Andersén, A. (2019), "Are high-performance work systems (HPWS) appreciated by everyone? The role of management position and gender on the relationship between HPWS and affective commitment", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 41 No. 5, pp. 1046-1064.

Cafferkey, K., Heffernan, M., Harney, B., Dundon, T. and Townsend, K. (2019), "Perceptions of HRM system strength and affective commitment: the role of human relations and internal process climate", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 30 No. 21, pp. 3026-3048.

de la Torre-Ruiz, J. M., Vidal-Salazar, M. D. and Cordon-Pozo, E. (2019), "Employees are satisfied with their benefits, but so what? The consequences of benefit satisfaction on employees' organizational commitment and turnover intentions", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 30 No. 13, pp. 2097-2120.

Gahlawat, N. and Kundu, S. C. (2019), "Participatory HRM and firm performance: Unlocking the box through organizational climate and employee outcomes", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 41 No. 5, pp. 1098-1119.

Jung, Y. and Takeuchi, N. (2019), "Testing mediation effects of social and economic exchange in linking organizational training investment to employee outcomes", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 48 No. 2, pp. 306-323.

Li, S., Rees, C. J. and Branine, M. (2019), "Employees' perceptions of human resource management practices and employee outcomes: Empirical evidence from small and medium-sized enterprises in China", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 41 No. 6, pp. 1419-1433.

Mahmood, A., Akhtar, M. N., Talat, U., Shuai, C. and Hyatt, J. C. (2019). "Specific HR practices and employee commitment: The mediating role of job satisfaction", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 420-435.

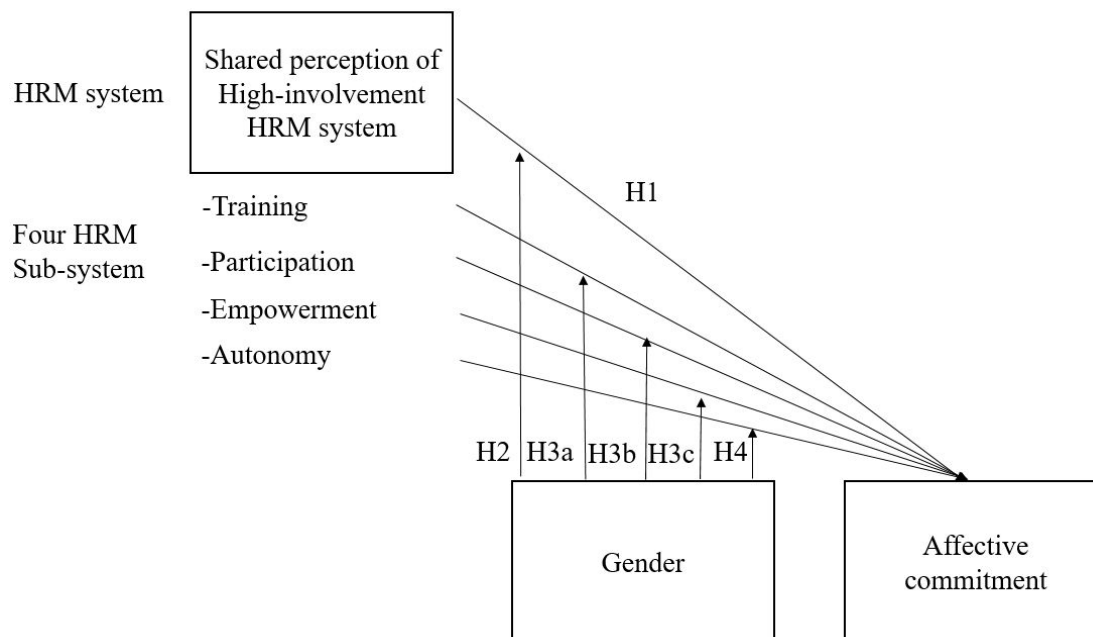
Schneider, M. R. and Flore, J. (2019), "Training and commitment in a German manufacturing company during the post-2008 crisis: a case of internal flexibility", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 30, No. 10, pp. 1666-1682.

Comment 2. *The methodology, hypothesis development, and the basic structure of the relationship is well-constructed. However, there are two issues that need to be sorted out:*

1) *Presentation of a conceptual model depicting the hypothesized relations would add value to the contribution.*

Response.

Following your suggestion, we added a conceptual model with hypothesized relationships (Figure 1).



2) *The paper should not digress from its primary conceptual foundation. A case in point is the Purpose of the paper as mentioned in the Abstract that runs contrary to the Design/Methodology Section. The Purpose Section mentions 'socially disadvantaged demographic groups'. Which are these groups? Is gender the only defining characteristics of these groups? The entire body of the paper, thereafter, has no mention of socially disadvantages demographic groups - either in terms of their definition nor their characteristics. This Section should be re-written, and this anomaly should be rectified.*

Response.

Thank you for the opportunity to correct the digression. We re-wrote the Abstract. Instead of mentioning "socially disadvantaged demographic groups like women", we refer to "women" in order to maintain our focus on the gender issue.

Comment 3. *The results are clearly drawn out and well-explained, and their relationships with the hypothesis are elaborately drawn out. However, a Table on respondents' profile may be inserted with the data currently available with the Author(s).*

Response.

Again, we appreciate your comments. We added a Table of Respondents' Profile as below:

Table 1.
Respondents' Profiles

| Categories | Percentage |
|------------------------|------------|
| Gender | |
| Male | 20% |
| Female | 80% |
| Tenure | |
| Less than 5 years | 64% |
| Between 5 and 10 years | 19% |
| More than 10 years | 19% |

Reviewer 2

Comment 1. Please define what organisational commitment is early in the paper. It is a multidimensional construct (Meyer, Allen and Smith 1993). In the literature review, you can explain to the reader why you choose to dwell on effective commitment, rather than the other dimensions of commitment.

The paper demonstrates an adequate understanding of the field of organizational commitment and gender. An adequate array of sources is cited. However, there is need to show that organisational commitment is multidimensional., although the authors only consider effective commitment (Meyer, Allen and Smith 1993). The reasons for this choice should be given. This paper ably demonstrates the need to understand how to further effective commitment in organisations in the different genders.

Response.

Thank you for your suggestions for improving our manuscript. Among components of organizational commitment, we focus on employee affective commitment. Affective commitment has known as the most prevalent component that deals with emotional attachment to and identification with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990), affective commitment is positively related to desirable outcomes whereas normative commitment and continuance commitment are sometimes negatively associated with desirable outcomes (Boselie, 2010; Meyer *et al.*, 2002). For these reasons, the link between HRM practices and affective commitment has been widely investigated by HRM researchers. In the revised manuscript, we consistently used the term "affective commitment" instead of using organizational commitment. In the limitation section, we discuss that our findings need to be further investigated with other components of organizational commitment (e.g., normative and continuance commitment).

Allen, N.J. and Meyer, J.P. (1990), "The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organization", *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, Vol. 63 No. 1, pp.1-18.

Boselie, P. (2010), "High performance work practices in the health care sector: a Dutch case study", *International Journal of Manpower*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp.42-58.

Meyer, J.P., Stanley, D.J., Herscovitch, L. and Topolnytsky, L. (2002), "Affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization: A meta-analysis of antecedents, correlates, and consequences", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 61 No. 1, pp. 20-52.

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We truly appreciate your valuable comments. We did our best to present a revised manuscript with a finished polish and look forward to receiving your final confirmation of acceptance but we are also fully committed to make any further adjustments if you still see need for it.

Sincerely,

Duckjung Shin
Alaine G. Ochoantesana
Muhammad Ali
Alison M. Konrad
Damian Madinabeitia