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## Human resource practices and employee wellbeing from a gender perspective: The role of organizational justice

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### KEYWORDS

HR practices,  
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**Abstract Introduction/objective:** HR practices have been widely studied in the literature. However, critical research gaps remain unexplored. Little attention has been paid to the relationship between HR practices and well-being, or the mechanisms that explain the effect of HR on employees' wellbeing, and the role of gender in this relationship. Hence, this study aims to examine the relationship between HR practices and well-being (eudemonic and hedonic) through organizational justice, taking into account gender. **Method:** A convenience sampling technique was used in a correlational design. The sample was composed of 1647 employees from 42 Spanish organizations. Our measures were HR practices, organizational justice, and hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Multi-group structural equation models were computed. **Results:** The results supported our hypothesis, which mainly stated that (1) organizational justice (distributive, procedural and interactional justice) mediated the relationship between HR practices and eudemonic and hedonic well-being; (2) there were differences between men and women in this mediation. **Conclusions:** Human resource practices and organizational justice offer tools to HR managers in order to maintain and improve employees' well-being levels within their organizations.

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### Prácticas de recursos humanos y bienestar de los empleados desde una perspectiva de género: el papel de la justicia organizacional

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Prácticas de RRHH,  
justicia organizacional,  
bienestar, género

**Resumen Introducción/objetivo:** Las prácticas de recursos humanos (RRHH) han sido ampliamente estudiadas en la literatura. Sin embargo, existen importantes carencias de investigación al respecto. Por ejemplo, se ha prestado poca atención a la relación entre las prácticas de RRHH y el bienestar, al mecanismo que explica el efecto de los RRHH en los empleados, y se ha pasado por alto el papel del género en las prácticas de RRHH. Por tanto, este estudio se dirige a examinar la relación entre las prácticas de RRHH y el bienestar (eudemónico y hedónico) por medio de la justicia organizacional, teniendo en cuenta el género. **Método:** Se utilizó un muestreo por conveniencia en un diseño correlacional. La muestra se compuso de 1647

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trabajadores de 42 organizaciones españolas. Los instrumentos utilizados midieron prácticas de RRHH, justicia organizacional, y bienestar hedónico y eudemonico. Se realizaron modelos de ecuaciones estructurales multigrupo. **Resultados:** Los resultados confirmaron nuestras hipótesis, que afirmaban principalmente que (1) la justicia organizacional (justicia distributiva, de procedimiento e interactiva) mediaba la relación entre las prácticas de RRHH y el bienestar eudemonico y hedónico; (2) hay diferencias entre hombres y mujeres en esta mediación. **Conclusiones:** Las prácticas de RRHH y la justicia organizacional ofrecen herramientas a los directores de RRHH sobre cómo actuar para mantener y mejorar los niveles de bienestar de los empleados dentro de sus organizaciones.

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Currently, organizations all over the world have to survive and succeed in a highly dynamic and competitive environment. In this context, employees are considered to be the most important asset given that their effective development and deployment offers a distinctive and non-imitable competitive advantage (Fesharaki & Sehhat, 2018). Thus, a main organizational task is to manage human resources (HR) effectively. To do so several emerging HR practices are available to guarantee and enhance HR functioning (Guest, 2011; Zhang & Agarwal, 2009).

Taking into account the vital role of HR within organizations, HR practices have received significant attention by professionals and researchers (Guest, 2011). According to Guest (2017), after years of research, there is finally a clearer understanding of HR practices, most particularly, the strategic role of external and internal fit. However, several authors, including Guest (2017, 2011) and Peccei (2004), admit that significant research gaps still remain. For example, while the literature has attempted to understand the mechanisms through which HR practices impact performance (e.g., Jiang et al., 2012), this issue remains unclear. In fact, some authors have labelled this the 'black box' problem in the HR practice-performance relationship (Messersmith et al., 2011; Sun et al., 2007). The focus on performance has implied overlooking other very significant and equally important consequences of HR practices; for instance, employee wellbeing (Guest, 2017). Finally, HR practices produce and reproduce outdated ideals based on gender stereotypes. These gendered norms may determine who gets hired, promoted and rewarded in the workplace (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016; Perry, 2010). Mastracci and Arreola (2016) have therefore called for further research into gendered organizations, and, particularly, into gendered HR practices, as an issue that still needs clarification.

The above discussion would suggest a need for research in order to address the mechanisms through which HR practices impact, not only performance, but also wellbeing, while taking into account the role of gender in organizations. We examine the role of organizational justice as a potential mediator in the relationship between HR practices and wellbeing, assessing the differences between men and women. According to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), positive perception of HR practices could determine employees' justice perceptions about the treatment that they receive within their organizations, which in turn may affect their well-being.

## Human resource practices and wellbeing

The neglect of well-being has been criticized from a labour and critical management perspective by professionals and academics who argue that HR practices are designed and used as part of a wider strategy to manage culture and ensure that employees are committed and contribute to organizational performance and functioning (e.g., Legge, 2005; Keenoy & Anthony, 1992). This criticism is underpinned by the idea that the development and promotion of more advanced high-performance practices by organizations usually leads to an intensification of work and a more systematic exploitation of employees (Landsbergis et al., 1999; Peccei, 2004). In this respect, it has to be conceded that history teaches us that it is unlikely that organizations would design and apply HR practices aimed at promoting employee wellbeing on ethical grounds alone, a fact which has encouraged multiple employment legislation initiatives.

Some studies show that a management strategy directed at organizational performance may be associated with a decrease in employee wellbeing and even performance levels (e.g., Jalalkamali et al., 2016; Kariithi & Odongo, 2016). A possible explanation is offered by Wright and Nishii (2006) and Khilji and Wang (2006), who suggest that it is vital to take employee perceptions of HR practices into account - of the intentions behind the practices - as this would have a positive impact on employee performance. Employees usually perceive that HR practices shift the balance of advantage towards the employer rather than towards employee outcomes (Guest & Peccei, 2001). Hence, an alternative and more optimistic perspective on HR practices is largely supported by mainstream scholars, as it is argued that the adoption of progressive HR practices related to job design, training and development, employee involvement, information-sharing, pay and rewards, etc., leads to higher levels of discretion and empowerment for employees and ultimately leads to greater employee wellbeing (Peccei, 2004).

However, the fact that organizations must survive in a competitive environment cannot be overlooked. So, even though employee wellbeing is vital, performance is also crucial to ensure an organization's survival and competitiveness; therefore, it is necessary to adjust the interests of both employers and employees. According to Guest (2017), this is possible by adopting a pluralist perspective framed within the context of the employment relationship and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). A positive employment relations climate, that offers the basis for partnership

within organizations, yields mutual benefits for the relevant stakeholders (Guest, 2017; Valizade et al., 2016). In this respect, the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) states that social exchanges are “voluntary actions” that may be initiated by an organization’s treatment of its employees, with the expectation that such treatment will eventually be reciprocated. In fact, “the voluntary actions of individuals are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring from others . . . [with the] exact nature [of the return] never specified in advance but . . . left to the discretion of the one who makes it” (Blau, 1964, pp. 91-92). Hence, employees who perceive evidence in their organization of goodwill and support for (i.e., ‘good’ HR practices) will not only feel motivated and may even feel obliged to reciprocate with behaviours and attitudes that are beneficial for the organization (Aryee et al., 2002), but will also feel satisfied with their exchange relationship with the organization (Guest, 2017). As such, positive social exchanges can result in mutual benefits for both an organization and its workforce (Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005). In this vein, Guest (2017) proposed an HR practices model that defines the core elements of HR practices in terms of recruitment and selection, training and development, mentoring and career support, the provision of engaging work, jobs that ensure autonomy and challenge, information provision and feedback, and skill utilization. Finally, Guest (2017) also suggests that all these HR practices are associated with higher levels of wellbeing and a more positive employment relationship, in turn related to positive performance outcomes at the individual and unit levels. In other words, this set of HR practices offers mutual gains for both employers and employees.

Following Guest’s (2017) HR practices model and Blau’s (1964) social exchange theory, we examine the relationship between HR practices and employee wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing (SWB) refers to people’s cognitive and emotional evaluations about their lives, in terms of general satisfaction, mood, completeness and satisfaction with specific domains, such as marriage and work (Diener et al., 2003). In practical terms, SWB refers to people’s “evaluations of their lives” (Diener, 2000, p. 34). We understand the concept of wellbeing in terms of its double dimensionality, i.e. hedonic and eudemonic. Hedonic wellbeing has predominated in the literature in the last two decades (Culbertson et al., 2010). One of its most accepted definitions is in terms of the achievement of pleasure and the avoidance of pain (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Eudemonic wellbeing is defined as “an ideal in the sense of excellence, and perfection toward which one strives, [which] gives meaning and direction to one’s life” (p. 1070). It is therefore based on the framework of positive functioning (Peiró et al., 2014). As Peterson et al. (2005, p. 26) pointed out, “uniting eudemonic emphases is the premise that people should develop what is best within themselves and then use these skills and talents in the service of greater goods - including, in particular, the welfare of other people or humankind writ large.”

Accordingly, we propose that organizations with ‘good’ HR practices will transmit to their employees that the organization values their contributions and is concerned for their wellbeing. Thus, employees perceive a reciprocated relationship with their organizations and feel comfortable in this exchange relationship. In sum, when HR practices

care for employees in the different dimensions, then employee wellbeing is likely to improve. Our first hypothesis is therefore:

H1. HR practices are positively related to employee hedonic wellbeing (H1a) and eudemonic wellbeing (H1b).

### Organizational justice: A mediating role

Organizational justice is broadly defined as “the rules and social norms governing how outcomes (e.g., rewards and punishments) should be distributed, the procedures used for making such distribution decisions (as well as other types of decisions), and how people are treated interpersonally” (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, p. 13). Hence, it is composed of the following constructs: distributive justice, which emphasizes a proportional distribution of resources according to investments in an exchange relationship (Adams, 1965); procedural justice, defined as “perceived fairness of the process by which outcomes were arrived at” (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001, p. 280); and interactional justice, which reflects the “quality of the interpersonal treatment received by an individual” (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, p. 13).

HR practices have a significant impact on organizational justice because the way that an employer behaves toward employees affects employee perceptions of justice (Fesharaki & Sehat, 2018). According to the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), if organizations do not care for their employees - for instance, through their HR practices - these employees are likely to perceive that there is no reciprocity in the exchange relationship and will perceive this as unfair. Empirical evidence supports this relationship. For example, Pindick et al. (2017) suggested that job applicants perceive employment processes to be unfair if recruitment and selection are biased. Fesharaki and Sehat (2018) showed how different HR practices (recruitment, selection, training, development, remuneration, compensation, and performance appraisal) were positively associated with organizational justice. Similarly, Wilton (2016) pointed to a positive relationship between training and development, appropriate remuneration, and organizational justice. Finally, Lee and Chui (2019) found a significant and positive relationship between compensation and benefits, work processes, training and development, and interactional justice.

In addition, drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) as an overarching framework, we suggest that organizational justice is a measure of reciprocity in the social exchange relationship between organizations and employees (Robinson, 1996). Employees are likely to assess their investments compared to their outcomes from the organization, as well as the quality and nature of their relationship with the organization (Festinger, 1954; Piccoli & De Witte, 2015). In this respect, an incipient literature on the relationship between HR practices and organizational justice suggests that organizational justice can also mediate the effect of HR practices on employee outcomes (e.g., Lee & Chui, 2019; Zhang & Agarwal, 2009).

More specifically, Lee and Chui (2019, p. 130) contend that for HR practices to effectively contribute to organizational efficiency, management practices must be seen to be fair and to support work-related wellbeing. They argue that

perceptions of fairness reflect the employees' interpretation of the treatment by the management. In their empirical study in a healthcare organization, they found that interactional justice positively mediates the relationship between HR practices (compensation, work processes, and training and development) and perceived organizational support. They contend that fair treatment and clear communication by the administration of HR determines employees' perceived organizational support, whereas negative feelings of interactional justice may adversely affect employees' attitudes and performance.

Another study found support that distributive, procedural and interactional justice can mediate the relationship between HR practices (empowerment, psychological contract fulfilment, and communication) and organizational citizenship behaviour and turnover intentions (Zhang & Agarwal, 2009). These authors found that different HR practices influenced different types of organizational justice (e.g., communication influenced procedural and interactional justice). Furthermore, they found that the three dimensions of justice significantly influenced OCB and turnover intention, with the exception of the link between procedural justice and turnover intention which they attributed to cultural factors (i.e., 'guanxi', a concept describing interpersonal relationships).

Overall, according to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), these studies propose that if organizations develop 'good' HR practices, which are interpreted by employees as fair at the distributive, procedural and personal levels, and understood as caring for them, then they should be associated with more positive employee reactions. Despite the significant insights provided by these studies, they did not examine wellbeing as a critical outcome of HR practices, and their HR practice measures reflect some very specific and limited aspects of HR practices. Our aim is to shed light on the relationship between a broader measure of HR practices and employee wellbeing mediated by organizational justice. We hypothesize as follows:

H2. The relationship between HR practices and employee hedonic wellbeing is mediated by distributive justice (H2a), procedural justice (H2b) and interactional justice (H2c).

H3. The relationship between HR practices and employee eudemonic wellbeing is mediated by distributive justice (H3a), procedural justice (H3b) and interactional justice (H3c).

### The role of gender in HR practices

The role of women has evolved over the years as a result of approaching equality between men and women, especially in the workplace. However, despite the progress made and global commitments to date, the perspectives of women in the world of work are far from being equal to those of men (Iris Lou et al., 2019). Women often have jobs with poorer conditions and lower wages than their male peers and, as well as facing greater difficulties in accessing employment (even precarious employment), once employed they face particular labour stressors that men do not have to face. According to Gyllensten and Palmer (2005), these stressors can be grouped as follows: (1) multiplicity of roles; (2) lack of progress in their professional career; and

(3) discrimination and stereotypes. It has been shown that the performance of women at work is usually attributed to factors that have nothing to do with their abilities. In addition, they are punished when they act in a way that does not fit the expectations associated with their gender (e.g., expressive and kind), yet they must behave in an individualistic way, focused on power, if they want to succeed professionally.

Regarding these working conditions for women, we can conclude that most are the responsibility of, or at least related to, HR practices. So, it seems plausible to suggest that gender plays a key role in HR practices within organizations. Mastracci and Arreola (2016) argue, according to the gender role theory, that no matter the proportions of women and men in organizations, gendered norms and practices maintain traditional roles for women and men, particularly regarding how and where women and men should work. As Perry (2010) pointed out, HR practices produce and reproduce outdated ideals and frustrate the efforts of all employees - women and men - to achieve gender equity.

Against the background of poorer conditions for women in the workplace and considering the gender role theory (Lin & Billingham, 2014), it can be hypothesized that our mediation model is likely to be influenced by gender. Given expected differences between men and women in relation to how HR practices are perceived in terms of justice and how they affect employee wellbeing, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4. The relationship between HR practices and hedonic wellbeing through distributive justice (H4a), procedural justice (H4b) and interactional justice (H4c) will be negatively stronger for women than for men.

H5. The relationship between HR practices and eudemonic wellbeing through distributive justice (H4a), procedural justice (H4b) and interactional justice (H4c) will be negatively stronger for women than for men.

## Method

### Sample

Total population of this study was unknown so a non-probability sampling technique was adopted in which the convenience sampling technique was used. The sample included 1647 employees from 42 Spanish organizations, with 43% of the employees being men ( $n = 714$ ) and 52% being women ( $n = 856$ ), distributed into three age groups: younger than 35 years old (26%;  $n = 432$ ), 35-50 years old (55%;  $n = 910$ ), and over 50 years old (16%;  $n = 259$ ). Regarding their education level, 1% had no official educational qualification ( $n = 20$ ), 13% had primary education ( $n = 211$ ), 37% had secondary education ( $n = 607$ ) and 48% had a university degree ( $n = 753$ ). Finally, mean employment tenure was 7 years (range 1-36 years).

### Procedure

Researchers contacted the HR managers of each organization to explain the purpose of the research and the main features of the questionnaire and to request their collabo-

ration. Once they accepted to participate in the research, questionnaires were distributed among workers. Questionnaires were filled out in the workplace by the participants, on paper or in a tablet or online via a link. Researchers were available for clarifications. Anonymous and confidential treatment of the data was guaranteed. All employees who wished to participate were invited to do so. Given that we had to rely on voluntary participation, the sampling method could not be completely random.

## Measures

HR practices were assessed with a self-developed 24-item instrument based on previous research on relevant HR practices (Boon et al., 2011, Guest, 2017). The assessed practices were those considered as the main practices in the studies on HR practices (see Boon et al., 2011). Following Guest's (2002, 2017) recommendations, we included additional employee-centred HR practices that are related to employees' well-being (exit system, work-life balance, and security). Thus, our measure covered eight HR practices: training and development, contingent pay and rewards, performance appraisal, recruitment and selection, competitive salary, employment security, work-life balance, and exit system. Each HR practice was measured through 3 items. Despite this dimensionality, according to our research objective, we adopted a global measure of HR practices as done in previous studies (e.g., Fındıklı et al., 2015; Mustafi et al., 2016). The overall constructs represented the overall organizational functions, strategies or processes (Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999). A sample item was: "The organization offers me the opportunity to follow training, courses and workshops". The response scale ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a lot*). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .93.

Organizational justice in its 3 dimensions was measured on a 9-item scale by Colquitt (2001) as follows: distributive justice, (e.g., "To what extent the compensations (salary, incentives) you obtain in exchange for your work reflect the effort you have put into your work"); procedural justice, (e.g., "To what extent the procedures that affect you at work have been applied consistently?"); and interactional justice (e.g., "To what extent your immediate boss has treated you with respect?"). The response scale ranged from 1 (*rarely or never*) to 6 (*very often*). Cronbach's alphas for distributive, procedural and interactional justice were .95, .74 and .87, respectively.

Hedonic wellbeing was measured using the reduced 10-item scale Job Satisfaction Scale (IJSS) by Cooper et al. (1989), which measures intrinsic motivation through 5 items (e.g., 'recognition you get for your good work') and extrinsic motivation through 4 items (e.g., 'your fellow workers') and one general satisfaction item ("What is your level of satisfaction with your job as a whole?"). Agreement with the items was rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*very dissatisfied*) to 7 (*very satisfied*). Cronbach's alpha for hedonic wellbeing was .87.

Eudemonic wellbeing was measured through two subscales of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989): purpose in life with 4 items (e.g., 'I try to improve or make important changes in my life') and personal growth with 4 items (e.g., 'I have a sense of direction and purpose in life'). Cronbach's alpha for eudemonic wellbeing was .72.

## Analyses

Preliminary analyses consisted of computing means, standard deviations and correlations. Confirmatory factor analyses were also computed to examine the validity of our measures. To test our hypotheses on the mediation effects of organizational justice and the hypothesized moderating effects of gender we used multi-group structural equation modelling (multi-group SEM; Byrne, 2010) and AMOS 18 (Arbuckle, 2009). We computed 2 nested models, namely a constrained and an unconstrained model. In the constrained model, all path coefficients and correlations were set to be equal in the men and women subsamples. In the unconstrained model, these parameters were allowed to vary between the two subsamples. Maximum likelihood was used to estimate the parameters of the model. For parameter estimation, the bootstrapping method was applied (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Also, Sobel's test was computed to examine the indirect effect of HR practices on life satisfaction for different dimensions of organizational justice in the men and women subsamples.

## Results

Table 1 presents descriptive data variables for the total sample along with correlations, showing that most variables were significantly related.

Table 1 Descriptive analysis: means, standard deviations and intercorrelations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sex									
1 (0 = female; 1 = male)	-	-	-						
2 HR practices	2.86	.78	.07**	-					
3 Distributive justice	2.92	1.06	.10**	.59**	-				
4 Procedural justice	3.14	.88	.04	.53**	.41**	-			
5 Interactional justice	4.21	.83	-.06*	.34**	.31**	.43**	-		
6 Hedonic wellbeing	5.14	.92	-.01	.59**	.57**	.50**	.52**	-	
7 Eudemonic wellbeing	5.78	.75	-.13**	.11**	.02	.16**	.16**	.28**	-

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 2 presents the multi-group SEM results and the CFA results for our measures. Results evidence a good fit for all our measures: Three structural models for HR practices were examined: one-global factor structure, 8-factor structure and a second-order factor structure. The 3 models appropriately fit the data with similar fit indexes (see Table 2), indicating similar results to those reported by Boon et al. (2011). In methodological terms, therefore, it was possible to measure HR practices through these 3 factor models. However, following to Morgeson and Hofmann (1999), and

taking into account our research objective, the one-factor solution was used in this work; thus, we could examine the overall perception of organizational functions, strategies or processes in HR practices. To corroborate the 3-dimensions structure of organizational justice, two models were examined: one-global factor and three-factors model. Results showed that 3-dimensions model presented better fit than the one-factor solution. Finally, hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing structure were examined by comparing one-global solution and two-dimension structure. Results showed a better fit for the one-factor model for hedonic well-being and the one-factor solution for eudemonic well-being. Hence, we could conclude that our variables presented appropriate validity.

Regarding multi-group SEM results, the unconstrained multi-group model fitted the data very well and significantly better than the constrained model (see Table 2;  $\Delta\chi^2 = 488.47$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In fact, the constrained model which did not take the gender variable into account did not fit the data appropriately, indicating that at least some of the structural parameters differed significantly between the two subsamples of men and women.

Figure 1 displays results of hypothesized relationships. Results partially support H1 in regard to the relationship between HR practices and wellbeing. A significant and positive relationship was found between HR practices and hedonic wellbeing (H1a), whereas the relationship between HR practices and eudemonic wellbeing was non-significant (H1b).

H2, which established the mediation effect of organizational justice, was confirmed, as results showed a significant and positive relationship between HR practices and organizational justice (distributive, procedural and interactional justice) in the men and women subsamples. In addition, a significant link was found for organizational justice (distributive, procedural and interactional) with hedonic wellbeing in both subsamples. The indirect effect of HR practices on hedonic wellbeing via the 3 organizational

justice dimensions was significant in the men subsample (distributive justice, Sobel's  $z = -9.86$ ,  $p < .05$ ; procedural justice, Sobel's  $z = 5.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ; interactional justice, Sobel's  $z = 8.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and in the women subsample (distributive justice, Sobel's  $z = 10.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ; procedural justice, Sobel's  $z = 3.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ; interactional justice, Sobel's  $z = 7.53$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

H3, referring to the mediation effect in the relationship between HR practices and eudemonic wellbeing, was also supported. The indirect effect of HR practices on eudemonic wellbeing via organizational justice was also significant in both the men subsample (distributive justice, Sobel's  $z = -1.99$ ,  $p < .05$ ; procedural justice, Sobel's  $z = 4.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ; interactional justice, Sobel's  $z = 2.93$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and the women subsample (distributive justice, Sobel's  $z = -3.46$ ,  $p < .05$ ; procedural justice, Sobel's  $z = 2.31$ ,  $p < .05$ ; interactional justice, Sobel's  $z = 1.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, the results also showed a significant relationship between organizational justice and hedonic well-being. However, the results showed that the relationship between organizational justice and eudemonic wellbeing varied in significance depending on the subsample. Procedural justice was significantly and positively related to eudemonic wellbeing in both subsamples. However, the relationship between distributive justice and eudemonic wellbeing was only significant for women, whereas the relationship between interactional justice and eudemonic wellbeing was only significant for men.

In contradiction to H4 and H5, we did not identify stronger effects in women than in men, as the effect of HR practices on hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing through organizational justice were stronger in men.

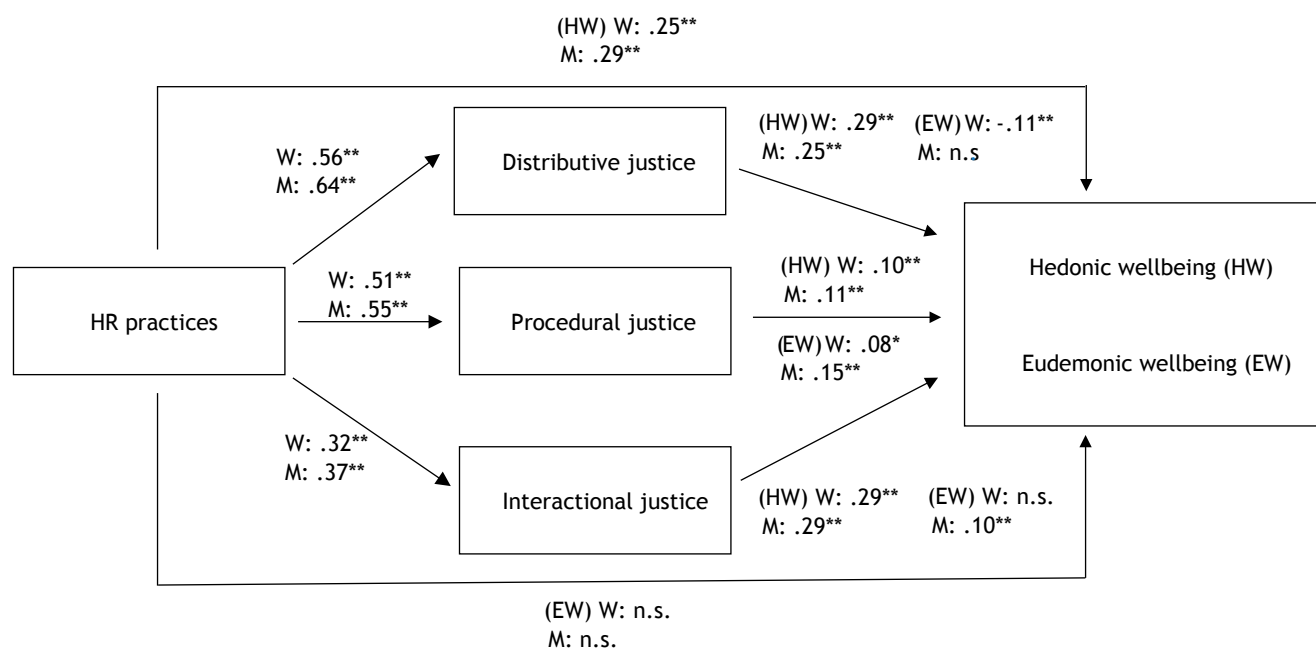
## Discussion

Although literature on HR practices has attracted much research, further development of the relationships of HR practices with other variables is necessary (Guest, 2011, 2017).

Table 2 Fit indices for CFAs and SEMs

	$\chi^2$	df	$p$	$\chi^2/df$	NFI	IFI	CFI	RMSEA
CFA: HR practices - 1 factor	1486.02	228	.00	6.52	.94	.95	.95	.058
CFA: HR practices - 2 factors	2194.16	224	.00	9.79	.91	.92	.92	.073
CFA: HR practices - second order	2493.99	244	.00	10.22	.90	.91	.91	.075
CFA: Organizational justice - 1 factor	3468.98	27	.00	128.48	.64	.64	.64	.278
CFA: Organizational justice - 3 factors	725.86	27	.00	26.88	.92	.93	.93	.125
CFA: Hedonic well-being- 1 factor	471.18	33	.00	14.27	.93	.94	.94	.090
CFA: Hedonic well-being- 2 factors	2116.80	36	.00	58.8	.69	.69	.69	.187
CFA: Eudemonic well-being- 1 factor	200.57	19	.00	10.55	.91	.92	.92	.076
CFA: Eudemonic well-being- 2 factors	975.08	20	.00	48.75	.58	.59	.59	.170
CFA: Well-being- 1 global factor	2717.94	119	.00	22.83	.69	.70	.70	.115
Multi-group SEM: structural model (with controls) - constrained <sup>a</sup>	181.00	4	.00	45.25	.94	.94	.94	.164
Multi-group SEM: structural model (with controls) - unconstrained <sup>b</sup>	50.78	4	.00	12.69	.98	.98	.98	.087

**Notes.**  $\chi^2$  =chi-square discrepancy; df =degrees of freedom;  $\chi^2/df$  =relative chi-square; IFI =incremental fit index; TLI =Tucker Lewis index; CFI =comparative fit index; RMSEA =root mean square error of approximation; \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ ; <sup>a</sup> equal path coefficients and covariances in both subsamples; <sup>b</sup> different path coefficients and covariances in both subsamples.



**Figure 1.** Results of multi-group SEM (unconstrained) for men (M) and women (W) subsamples

Notes. All parameters are standardized; \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

Some authors point out the need to continue studying the relationship between HR practices and employee well-being (e.g., Kowalski & Loretto, 2017). Hence, the aim of this study was to examine the relationship between HR practices and well-being (eudemonic and hedonic), and explore the mediating role of organizational justice, taking gender differences into account.

In this way, our study contributes to previous research on HR practices in several aspects. First, we found support for a direct relationship between HR practices and hedonic well-being. Thus, our results support the social exchange hypothesis (Blau, 1964) in showing that ‘good’ HR practices ensure a positive exchange relationship between organizations and employees; employees perceive that their organizations value their contributions and care for their wellbeing, and therefore feel comfortable within their organizations. Our results are congruent with previous research on HR practices that suggests a link between HR practices and wellbeing (Guest, 2011; Guest, 2017; Peccei, 2004). On the other hand, the direct relationship between HR practices and eudemonic wellbeing was not significant. According to these results, good HR practices per se are not related to employees’ wellbeing in relation to pursuing excellence, growth and meaning in one’s life.

Second, given that the relationship between HR practices and wellbeing does not seem to be clear in previous research, it is important to identify and analyse some variables that may affect this relationship. One of these variables is organizational justice because, as Heffernan and Dundon (2016) stated, justice perceptions affect employees’ responses to HR practices. The second contribution of our study is providing empirical evidence that organizational justice plays a vital role in the relationship between HR practices and psychological wellbeing. We found empirical evidence supporting the mediation of HR practices through the three dimensions of organizational justice to predict hedonic wellbeing in both subsamples, and four significant

paths out of six to predict eudemonic wellbeing. Our results support the social exchange hypothesis and shed light on mechanisms responsible for the impact of HR practices on employee wellbeing. Organizational justice may be perceived by employees as a signal of reciprocity in their exchange relationship with their organizations. These results are also congruent with previous studies (e.g., Jiang et al. 2012) and support the incipient research that points to organizational justice as a mediator (e.g., Lee & Chui, 2019; Zhang & Agarwal, 2009).

Third, HR practices are related to inequalities (Stamarski & Son Hin, 2015). Hence, we proposed to examine the role of gender in the association with HR practices and well-being mediated by organizational justice. We found results that contradict our initial hypothesis. We assumed stronger effects for women because of their poorer working conditions and job opportunities, but our data showed the opposite. A possible explanation is to be found in the “justice paradox” (Crosby, 1982; Mueller & Wallace, 1996). Justice evaluation involves a social comparison of one’s own situation with that of others, but this comparison is done with individuals similar to oneself. Thus, it may occur that female workers are satisfied with less than male workers because they compare themselves, not to men, but to other female workers when assessing justice. Given that other women also work in poor conditions; they perceive their situation as just because their conditions are similar to those of other women. Studying the mechanisms explaining the stronger effects in the women subsample is undoubtedly an interesting direction for future research.

## Limitations

Despite the insights of this research, it also presented some limitations. The cross-sectional design did not allow

for an assessment of causality, which means that causal relationships among the independent and dependent variables cannot be concluded. Longitudinal studies are necessary to examine causality or changes over time in those relationships. Furthermore, our data collection method was based on a convenience sampling. This method may limit the extrapolation of results. However, as in other works (e.g., Bakker et al., 2019), it is not likely that this threatens the validity of our results. It seems more probable that the studied variables and their relationships are similar in other samples. Finally, our variables were self-reported measures, which points to the possibility that our results are affected by common method variance. However, it is important to note that variables such as well-being are variables which are focused on individual feelings, so it is complex that these feelings can be evaluated with the same precision from other sources. However, future research should consider including other external or more objective sources of data, such as the employer as a source for HR practices.

### Future Research

One avenue for future research is to continue examining social exchange as a framework for understanding the motivational underpinnings of employee work attitudes and behaviours. We examined wellbeing, but multiple and additional outcomes could be related to HR practices. On the other side, we have measured HR practices with a global measure. It is important to explore in future research whether it is preferable to take this global measure or on the contrary, analyse whether different dimensions will affect different variables unequally. It is important for HR managers to identify if some practices have more weight than others in leading to perceptions of justice, to different types of well-being, or affect men and women differently.

Our results found in general a weaker relationship between HR practices and eudemonic well-being than with hedonic wellbeing. It would be important to identify and explore which HR practices may be more related to eudemonic well-being, such as those that help balance work-life. Likewise, as mentioned above, it is important to investigate whether the obtained results about gender are due to the fact that women have adopted other women as the reference group or if other mechanisms play a part. Finally, in this study we have analysed HR practices and the different types of justice. It would be interesting to address the study of new antecedents of well-being, and relevant consequences such as performance or intention to quit. Besides, it would be interesting for future research to analyse whether the two types of well-being (hedonic and eudemonic) have different consequences for workers.

### Theoretical and practical implications

The present study contributes to the literature by (1) providing empirical evidence on the effect of HR practices on employees' well-being, (2) showing how employees' perceptions of organizational justice mediate the association between HR practices and well-being, and (3) demonstrating how gender may differently affect employees' well-being as

a function of their HR practices and organizational justice perceptions. It confirmed the critical role of gender in HR practices.

This study also presents practical implications. For companies to be able to maintain high levels of well-being among their workers, it is important to identify which variables influence well-being. Our results evidence the need for organizations to adopt "good" HR practices that not only promote employees' performance but also enhance their well-being within organizations. Likewise, organizational justice, in its three dimensions, was also critical to maintain employees' well-being. In other words, HR managers should promote not only fair retributions or rewards, but also fair organizational processes and treatment for their employees, in order to promote employees' well-being.

Human resource practices and organizational justice offer tools to HR managers on how to act in order to maintain and improve well-being levels. Hence, one critical recommendation for those HR managers who wish to promote and guarantee their employees' well-being, is that they develop and apply "good" HR practices as well as ensure that their employees perceive organizations as fair in terms of retribution, processes, and interactions.

### Conclusion

This study contributes to the current understanding of the link between HR practices and well-being, showing the positive relationship between them. HR practices had a direct effect on hedonic wellbeing, and a mediated through justice effect on both hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. This confirms the importance of organizational justice, as a mediator between organizational HR-practices and employees' well-being. Furthermore, it provides evidence on the importance of considering gender in order to shed light on differential relationships between the study variables.

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