

OPERATIONALIZING A RELATIONSHIP-CENTRIC MODEL OF HIGH-PERFORMANCE CULTURE: A CONCEPTUAL PRECURSOR FOR SCALE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This concept paper advances the conceptualization of High-Performance Culture (HPC) using a relationship-centric model by integrating a newly validated Employee Work Focus (EWF) and a set of established constructs. We first synthesize the literature on culture–performance links, anchoring the selected model of HPC in Denison’s Mission–Consistency–Involvement–Adaptability model and the Great Place to Work (GPTW) trust-based perspective while clarifying distinctions from high-performance work systems. Building on this synthesis and our earlier grounded work, we define HPC as a socially constructed pattern of desired employee–system interactions; indexed by five measurable domains: Focus (employee–job), Accountability (employee–management), Collaboration (employee–colleagues), Subjective Well-Being (employee–ideal self), and Perceived Organizational Support (employee–ideal organization). We then conceptually operationalize HPC by (a) adopting the validated three-factor EWF instrument for the Focus domain, (b) borrowing established items for Collaboration, Accountability, POS, and SWB from widely used scales, and (c) assembling a content validity matrix that maps items to sub-dimensions and theoretical rationales. Finally, we outline a rigorous scale development plan for constructing an integrative HPC instrument. The contribution is twofold: (1) a theory-consistent conceptualization of HPC as a relational construct, and (2) Providing an operational foundation for its future empirical measurement.

Keywords: Employee Work Focus, High-Performance Culture, Operationalization, Relationship-Centric Model, Scale Development

1. Introduction

What personality is to an individual, culture is to an organization or a society at large. In a world of constant chaos, as Gunathilake & Jayasooriya opined, it is largely responsible for the success or failure of both organizations (2021a & 2021e) and nations (2023) particularly in today's context. Among different conceptions of culture, high-performance culture is regarded as a precursor for superior business results (Wriston, 2007). However, as Bogale (2024) argued High-Performance Culture (HPC) was not sufficiently conceptualized and with no theoretically grounded core dimensions. Furthermore, common concept of HPC remains predominantly trait-centric (e.g., Denison's four traits) or experience-centric (e.g., GPTW trust model). In order to bridge this gap, the study grounds its focus on authors' previous work; the relationship-centric, multilevel HPC model (Gunathilake & Jayasooriya, 2022a) as depicted in Figure 1, that, conceptualized HPC as a set of desired interactions among employees and organizational systems, and their subsequent conceptualization of Employee Work Focus (EWF). Therefore, the study conceptualizes and operationalizes a relationship-centric model of HPC integrating validated constructs across five employee-system relationships. Specifically, we (1) conceptualize a new definition of HPC to incorporate EWF explicitly as the Focus domain, (2) analyze the proposed relationship-centric model in relation to prominent models of organization culture namely Denison and Great Place to Work (GPTW), and (3) develop a theoretically grounded operational framework and propose a validated item pool for future scale construction.

2. Literature Review

Only a few scholarly attempts, namely by Denison & Mishra (1995), Heerden & Roodt (2007) and Wriston (2007) could be traced in distinguishing High-performance culture from the main domain of organization culture. HPC was mostly described using values, behaviors, and systems that yield sustained superior results (Gunathilake & Jayasooriya, 2022a). Denison's framework (1990) connects Mission,

Consistency, Involvement, and Adaptability to performance outcomes. The GPTW trust-based model emphasizes credibility, respect, fairness, pride, and camaraderie as hallmarks of positive employee experiences that correlate with organizational effectiveness. Contemporary work on high-performance work systems (HPWS) underscores the role of mutually reinforcing HR practices, yet HPWS is best regarded as an enabler or context rather than a substitute for culture construct. Our earlier model positioned HPC as an emergent property of five employee–system relationships: Focus (employee–job), Accountability (employee–management), Collaboration (employee–colleagues), Subjective Well-Being (employee–ideal self), and Perceived Organizational Support (employee–ideal organization) (Gunathilake & Jayasooriya, 2022a).

Within these relationships, Focus is theoretically central. Our EWF research conceptualized and validated a three-factor focus structure; Right Focus (prioritization), Sustained Focus (concentration/absorption), and Alternative Search; using mixed methods and best practices in scale development (Boateng et al., 2018; DeVellis, 2012; Hinkin, 1995). Complementary constructs; goal/process clarity (Sawyer, 1992), strategic alignment (Biggs, Brough, & Barbour, 2014), engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010), and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990); inform the content domain of EWF. Collaboration can be operationalized using 17-item collaboration scale of Thomson, et al. (2009) with 6 dimensions namely governance, administration, autonomy, and norms. Accountability is measurable with Han and Perry's (2020) instrument with attributability, observability, evaluability, answerability, and consequentiality as dimensions. Perceived Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) with unidimensional 8 item shortened version and Subjective Well-Being combining the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) complete the five-domain architecture.

Figure 1 illustrates our model of HPC that forms the basis of this study while Table 1 and 2 demonstrate an in-depth comparative overview of author's model against Denison and GPTW frameworks. Although the works of Heerden & Roodt (2007) has contributed for the understanding of HPC, a detailed comparison is omitted for parsimony because their excellence/self-assessment-oriented instrument substantially overlaps

with dimensions we already operationalize via validated scales. By contrast, Denison and GPTW provide widely benchmarked, theory-consistent anchors that map cleanly onto our five-domain framework and serve our convergent/discriminate validation aims.

Table 1: Model Comparison: Author's HPC Model vs. Denison and GPTW Models

Aspect	Author's HPC model	Denison Model	GPTW (Trust Model)
Core lens & unit	Relationship-centric: culture as employee–system interactions across five relationships	Trait-centric: four culture traits linked to performance	Experience-centric: trust, pride, camaraderie as employee experience
Primary dimensions	Focus (EWF), Accountability, Collaboration, Subjective Well-Being (SWB), Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	Mission, Consistency, Involvement, Adaptability	Credibility, Respect, Fairness (leader behaviors) + Pride, Camaraderie
Level of analysis	Individual/relational → aggregates to unit/organization	Organization/system level	Individual experience aggregated to organization benchmarks
Performance link (theory)	Performance via aligned focus, fair discipline, collaborative norms, support, and personal resources	Culture traits statistically associated with growth, ROI, quality, satisfaction	High-trust climates predict engagement, retention, innovation; used in Best Workplaces
Measurement approach	Open, research-grade: EWF + established scales (Accountability, Collaboration, POS, SWB)	Consulting survey based on four traits (Denison)	Proprietary Trust Index® (~60 items) with global norms/benchmarks
Strengths	Operationalizable for scale development; includes POS and SWB explicitly; item-level diagnostics by relationship	Clear, widely known org-level culture–performance framework	Strong external benchmarks, simple story for leaders, trust focus

Blind spots	Needs cross-industry validation; integration of five domains requires invariance testing	Less granular at daily behavior/relationship level; SWB & POS not explicit	Accountability & work-focus specificity not explicit; SWB not directly measured
Ideal use	Developing an HPC scale; diagnosing levers (focus, accountability, support, well-being, collaboration)	Top-level culture diagnosis and strategy alignment	Benchmarking employee experience/trust ; certification; change tracking

Note: HPC = High-Performance Culture; EWF = Employee Work Focus; POS = Perceived Organizational Support; SWB = Subjective Well-Being; GPTW = Great Place to Work.

Table 2: Comparative Construct Mapping: Author's HPC, Denison, and GPTW Models

Author's HPC domain	Closest Denison trait(s)	GPTW dimension(s)	Notes
Focus (EWF)	Mission (clarity, direction)	Pride	EWF adds item-level precision on alignment/prioritization (mission → behavior).
Accountability	Consistency (agreements, core values)	Credibility; Fairness	Makes consequences/answerability explicit (often implicit in Denison/GPTW).
Collaboration	Involvement (empowerment, teamwork)	Camaraderie	Governance, autonomy, mutuality, norms add structure beyond 'teamwork.'
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	(Bridges Involvement/Consistency)	Respect; Fairness; Credibility	POS formalizes leader care, justice, and support present in GPTW.
Subjective Well-Being (SWB)	(Indirect via Adaptability/Involvement)	(No single direct dimension)	Author model uniquely treats SWB as a measurement domain.

Note: Mapping is indicative rather than one-to-one; models differ in level (relationship vs. trait vs. experience) and purpose (scale development vs. diagnosis vs. benchmarking).

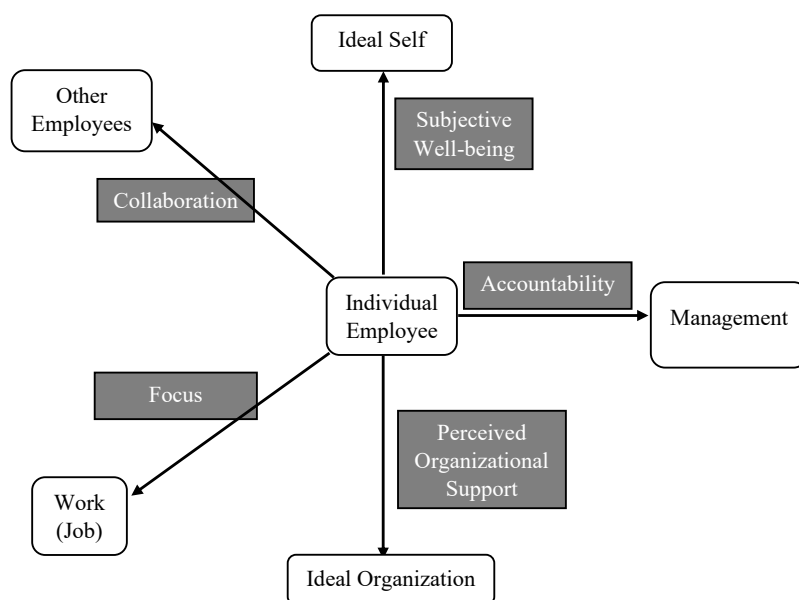


Figure 1: Model of High-performance Culture (Source: Gunathilake & Jayasooriya, 2022b, p. 36)

Revised Definition of High-Performance Culture:

A socially constructed, enduring pattern of desired employee–system interactions that (a) align work priorities with organizational purpose and strategy (Focus), (b) establish clear responsibilities, visibility, fair evaluation, and consequences for performance (Accountability), (c) enable coordinated, trust-based, and mutually beneficial collaboration (Collaboration), (d) cultivate employees’ positive psychological resources (Subjective Well-Being), and (e) signal organizational care, fairness, and support for employee voice and development (Perceived Organizational Support).

This definition integrates Denison’s performance-linked culture traits and GPTW’s trust-based experience while specifying five measurable domains for operationalization, with Employee Work Focus embedded as the Focus domain.

3. Methodology

This study follows a measurement-oriented design to operationalize HPC. First, we mapped theory to measurement by aligning each domain to validated instruments: EWF for Focus (Gunathilake & Jayasooriya, 2022b), works of Thomson et al. (2009) for Collaboration, Han and Perry (2020) for Accountability, Eisenberger et al. (1986) for POS, and the combination of Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) with Diener et al. (1985) for SWB. Second, we generated an initial item pool by adapting original indicators to the HPC context while preserving construct validity. Third, we assembled a content validity matrix (Table 1) to document item–construct mapping and theoretical rationales. Fourth, we specify a validation protocol as adopted from authors previous work: expert review with Lawshe’s (1975) CVR, cognitive interviews for face validity, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for dimensionality, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for structure. Convergent validity will be assessed via AVE ($\geq .50$) and CR ($\geq .70$), discriminant validity via HTMT ($< .90$), and reliability via Cronbach’s alpha and omega ($\geq .70$) (Boateng et al., 2018; Tay & Jebb, 2016). Measurement invariance across sectors will be examined to support generalizability.

4. Results and Discussion

The resulting operationalization specifies five measurable HPC domains with clear theoretical lineage. Focus is captured through the EWF instrument’s three factors; Right Focus, Sustained Focus, and Alternative Search (Gunathilake & Jayasooriya, 2022b); complementing Denison’s Mission dimension and GPTW’s pride/meaning elements. Accountability reflects consistency and performance discipline through attributability, observability, evaluability, answerability, and consequentiality. Collaboration is shaped by governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms. POS reflects credibility, respect, and fairness (GPTW), and SWB represents the personal resources that sustain high performance. Table 3 presents the content validity matrix which also includes the preliminary item pool for future HPC scale development. All five constructions were operationalized using established scales and empirical findings that have previously exhibited strong reliability and validity evidence in their original validations.

Although POS and SWB are often treated as individual outcomes, perspectives in Positive Organizational Scholarship (Cameron &

Spreitzer, 2012) and organizational climate research (Schneider et al., 2013) argue that such states can reflect collective relational norms embedded in organizational culture. POS represents the normative expectation of care, fairness, and reciprocity in the employee–organization relationship, while SWB captures the shared affective tone that sustains vitality and engagement within high-performance contexts. Thus, in a relationship-centric framework, both constructs serve as cultural enablers—institutionalized relational patterns that shape and reinforce performance-oriented behavior.

Table 3: Content Validity Matrix for Operationalizing High-Performance Culture

HPC Dimension	Sub-dimension	Item wording	Original source	HPC rationale
Collaboration	Governance	Our team has clear and agreed-upon decision-making processes.	Thomson, Perry, & Miller (2009)	Governance clarity enhances coordinated action and trust, fostering a culture of joint accountability.
	Governance	Decision-making responsibilities are shared fairly among members.		Fair distribution of decision power encourages ownership and engagement.
	Administration	We coordinate our work effectively.		Effective coordination ensures smooth execution of shared goals.
	Administration	Administrative support for our work together is efficient and reliable.		Reliable admin systems support collaborative performance.
	Autonomy	Members respect each other's independence while working toward shared goals.		Balances independence with interdependence, enabling creativity and accountability.
	Autonomy	Each member is free to make decisions within their own scope of responsibility.		Autonomy reinforces empowerment and trust.
	Mutuality	Resources (information, time, expertise) are shared freely among members.		Resource sharing strengthens mutual support and collective performance.
	Mutuality	We depend on each other to achieve our objectives.		Interdependence fosters unity and high commitment.
	Norms	We have established norms for respectful interaction.		Behavioral norms underpin psychological safety and cooperation.
	Norms	Our group resolves disagreements constructively.		Constructive conflict resolution supports sustained collaboration.
Accountability	Attributability	My responsibilities are clearly defined.	Han & Perry (2020)	Clarity of responsibility increases ownership and performance alignment.
	Attributability	People know which outcomes I am accountable for.		Transparency ensures that contributions can be tracked and recognized.
	Observability	My work performance can be observed by others.		Visibility supports feedback and recognition mechanisms.

	Evaluability	My performance can be evaluated against clear standards.		Clear standards allow fair, consistent performance evaluation.
	Answerability	I have to explain and justify my decisions when asked.		Answerability reinforces responsibility and integrity.
	Consequentiality	Good performance is recognized and rewarded.		Linking performance to consequences motivates sustained high performance.
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	–	My organization values my contribution to its well-being.	Eisenberger et al. (1986)	Recognition from the organization enhances loyalty and discretionary effort.
	–	My organization cares about my well-being.		Support for well-being fosters engagement and retention.
	–	My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.		Perceived support builds resilience and commitment.
	–	My organization takes pride in my accomplishments.		Pride in employee achievements reinforces a high-performance mindset.
Subjective Well-being	Subjective Happiness	In general, I consider myself a happy person.	Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999)	Happiness correlates with energy, creativity, and productivity.
	Subjective Happiness	Compared to most of my peers, I am happier.		Positive effect supports sustained engagement.
	Life Satisfaction	In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.	Diener et al. (1985)	Life satisfaction is linked to work engagement and lower burnout.
	Life Satisfaction	I am satisfied with my life.		Higher satisfaction levels often result in higher discretionary effort at work.
Focus (EWF)	Right Focus (Prioritization)	I understand how my work relates to the overall objectives of my work unit.	Gunathilake & Jayasooriya (2022)	Alignment of daily tasks with unit goals ensures relevance and priority clarity.
	Right Focus (Prioritization)	I'm aware of how my daily work aligns with the organization's priorities/goals.		Day-to-day goal clarity sustains strategic alignment.
	Right Focus (Prioritization)	I know how to divide my time among the tasks required for my job.		Time allocation reflects ability to focus on high-impact activities.

Sustained Focus (Concentration)	I'm immersed in my work.	Deep immersion drives quality and efficiency.
Sustained Focus (Concentration)	Time flies when I'm working.	Flow state supports sustained attention and productivity.
Alternative Search (R)	I hardly settle; I always look for more and better things at work.	Continuous improvement mindset encourages innovation but needs balance to avoid distraction.
Alternative Search (R)	I'm uncomfortable making decisions before I know all my options.	Cautious decision-making may protect quality but can delay action.

Note: HPC = High-Performance Culture; POS = Perceived Organizational Support; EWF = Employee Work Focus; (R) = reverse-coded item. Sources are as cited in the study's references.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This paper offers a theory-consistent and measurement-ready operationalization of High-Performance Culture by integrating a relationship-centric framework with the validated EWF instrument and established measures of Collaboration, Accountability, POS, and SWB. The revised definition specifies five measurable domains that can be assessed with psychometric rigor. This relationship-centric of HPC positions organizational culture as an emergent network of recurring employee-system interactions rather than a set of static traits or generalized experiences. This relationship-centric operationalization further provides organizations with a diagnostic basis for assessing performance culture through relational indicators, offering actionable insights into how trust, accountability, and well-being jointly sustain high performance.

Future work will complete the scale development process through expert review, big sample pilot testing (EFA), cross-validation (CFA), and tests of reliability, construct validity, and measurement invariance across industries, job levels, and countries to ensure generalizability. Prediction validity can also be tested by linking HPC, mainly EWF and accountability aspects to objective KPIs such as productivity, quality defects, sales, and to HR outcomes like turnover and absenteeism. Practically, the resulting instrument can underpin strategic culture diagnostics and targeted interventions that align mission clarity, discipline, collaboration, support, and well-being with sustained performance. Finally, such interventions can be extended to estimate ROI from observed improvements in HPC scores and performance.

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