

Identifying a guiding list of high involvement practices in human resource management

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Abstract

In today global competitiveness, it is becoming increasingly frequent, the introduction of new management practices to organizations, seeking to enhance performance as a form of Management Innovation (MI). This is so because such practices are usually difficult to replicate exactly from one company to another, provided they are well rooted in the daily work in the organization. The main purpose of this paper is, by reviewing the previous work done in this area, to present a general list of Human Resource Practices (HRM practices) geared towards improving organizational effectiveness and hence better performance outcomes. Many work have been done to date within this topic, but it is difficult to find a consensus about the best way to address to this practices, and this fact makes difficult to compare different studies and their results. We present a detailed but synthesized list of those HR practices to be used as a starting point in any sector whether industrial or services.

Keywords: *HRM practices, High commitment HR practices, Innovative HR practices, High involvement HR practices, High Performance Work practices.*

Introduction: Purpose of the paper and related work

In a world where global competitiveness is one of the main keys to organizations' success; where innovation, flexibility, responsibility and cooperation become particularly relevant to ensure organizational success, or even mere survival (Adamides y Pomonis, 2009; Antonelli, 2009; Burnes, 2004; Paauwe y Boselie, 2005; Zhang et al., 2008), the importance of human capital, as a source of competitive advantage, is gathering especial significance for both, researchers and practitioners alike.

It is becoming increasingly frequent, the introduction of new management practices to the organization, seeking to enhance performance, as a form of Management Innovation (MI) (Paauwe y Boselie, 2005; Perello-Marin et al., 2013). This is so because such practices are usually difficult to replicate exactly from one company to another, provided they are well rooted in the organization's daily work, or in other words, they are part of their own identity (Mol y Birkinshaw, 2009; Thang et al., 2007). If we look at other resources as a source of competitive advantage, different from HR, we can state that they are

becoming more accessible and easy to copy, and therefore, ephemeral sources of competitive advantage, which does not happen with complex social systems (Bowen y Ostroff, 2004; Stavrou et al., 2010).

Selection and implementation of those programs and practices have been extensively studied by the body of research called “strategic human resource management” (SHRM) (Benson et al., 2006; Boselie et al., 2005; Combs et al., 2006; Lawler III et al., 1995; Stavrou et al., 2010; Way, 2002). Within these papers, myriad of programs and practices in HRM can be found to be implemented by the firms to increase its performance. The foregoing papers approach the study either from the perspective of individual practices or on the contrary, as a whole system of practices (though often, with no clear identification of its composition).

The pioneer studies appear around twenty years ago (Arthur, 1994; Becker y Gerhart, 1996; Huselid, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995; Wright y McMahan, 1992). There is quite a lot of literature, since then to date, dealing with the relationship between HRM practices and improving organizational performance (Boselie et al., 2005; Guest, 2011; Huselid, 2011; Paauwe y Boselie, 2005; Roos et al., 2004; Wood y Wall, 2007). Some of the paper have focused on aspects such as market value (Collins y CLARK, 2003; Huselid, 1995), financial performance (Benson et al., 2006; Delery y Doty, 1996; Huselid, 1995), profitability (Gooderham et al., 2008; Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004), operational measures of performance or productivity (Datta et al., 2005; Guest et al., 2003; Huselid, 1995; Ichniowski y Shaw, 1999; MacDuffie, 1995), social climate and culture (Alfes et al., 2013; Collins y Smith, 2006; Pereira y Gomes, 2012; Prieto y Perez Santana, 2012) or turnover (Alfes et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2006; Guchait y Seonghee, 2010; Huselid, 1995; Zatzick y Iverson, 2006).

We have found that an increasing body of work contains the argument that the use of certain practices (including comprehensive employee recruitment and selection procedures, incentive compensation and performance management systems, and extensive employee involvement and training) can improve the knowledge, skills, and abilities of a firm’s current and potential employees, increase their motivation, reduce shirking, and enhance retention of quality employees while encouraging nonperformers to leave the firm (Huselid, 1995; Roos et al., 2004; Way, 2002). These practices can be referred differently in the academic literature as for instance, “high-performance work practices” (Guest et al., 2004; Way, 2002; Wood et al., 2012), “high-involvement work practices” (Benson et al., 2006; Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004; Lawler III et al., 1995; Zatzick y Iverson, 2006), “high commitment practices” (McClellan y Collins, 2011) or “innovative human resource practices or best practices” (Chang et al., 2011; Ichniowski y Shaw, 1999; Marchington y Grugulis, 2000; Paauwe y Boselie, 2005), depending on the author. Each term has little nuances that distinguish each other, but most of the authors agree with the fact that when business capabilities are combined with employees motivation, the resulting organization value is not a sum of its parts, but a multiplication (Combs et al., 2006; Guest et al., 2004; Ordiz Fuertes, 2002) or in other words the method used by firms to manage its workforce can have a positive impact on firm performance (Way, 2002).

This paper deals with Human Resource Practices (HRM practices) geared towards improving organizational effectiveness and hence better performance outcomes; that is, not merely traditional HR practices, but a set of distinct but interrelated HRM practices that together select, develop, retain, and motivate employees that, not only possess superior abilities, but also apply their abilities in their work-related activities; And as a consequence, their work-related activities (i.e. their output) result in these

firms achieving superior intermediate indicators of firm performance and sustainable competitive advantage (Way, 2002). Although there are some works done considering this issue (Boselie et al., 2005; Marin-Garcia y Conci, 2009), we have not found a clear consensus about a clear and concise definition about which particular bundles of practices can be called 'high performance practices' (ie practices that lead to greater employee involvement and commitment and better business results as a consequence)(Combs et al., 2006); and therefore we have gone through this study with a purpose of identifying a detailed but synthesized list of those HR practices called 'High involvement HR practices', 'High commitment HR practices', 'best HR practices' or 'innovative HR practices' by main authors to be used as starting point in any research, no matter the context of the study.

Methodology

In this work, we have gone through the literature of human resource management and related to improve organizational performance by enhancing employee commitment and motivation, looking for the most commonly used HR practices. We have focused only on high involvement practices, high commitment practices, or innovative HR practices, that lead to better performance, but not on traditional Human Resources practices. We do not address either in this work what it does mean by performance.

In doing so, we have employed several methods to guarantee content validity. We have started by a literature review and afterwards we have validated the results with expert panels combined with two steps Q-sorting (Petter et al., 2007).

To identify all available studies, identifying and/or using this kind of HR practices, we dealt with this literature review by using a variety of search techniques. We specially conducted electronic keyword searches as well as manual searches of relevant journals to identify studies that appeared relevant.

To render the task manageable, and to provide a credible guarantee of quality, we restricted our search to articles that have been submitted to international journals specializing in general management, organization science, human resource management and international human resource management that regularly publish studies on human resource management and organizational performance (e.g. *Academy of Management Review*, *Academy of management journal*, *Journal of management studies*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of Business Research*, *International Journal of Operations and Management*, *British journal of industrial relations*, *Journal of World Business*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Human Resource Management Review* or *Human Resource Management*). This decision meant that we had to exclude valuable work published in books, reports, unpublished papers and dissertations. We went through each edition of the journals online, identified articles from their titles and abstract that seemed to match our criteria.

Finally, we examined the reference lists of the collected articles and we supplemented it with other academic and trade articles from outside these journals that appear to contain some identification of HR practices leading a better performance. Those later articles were identified through both the Business Source Premier, Web of knowledge and Science Direct article databases, for the period of time comprised between year 2000 up to mid-2012, by searching using certain keywords.

In order to select the most adequate key words to be used within the study, we worked in a small group of researchers using interactive brainwriting technique. We chose brainwriting eventhough it is less well known than traditional group brainstorming, since we found evidences that brainwriting often not only

produces more ideas than group brainstorming, but also reduces the inconvenients. Writing ideas instead of speaking them in groups eliminates the problem of production blocking since individuals do not have to wait their turn to generate ideas. It may also reduce evaluation apprehension since the written format eliminates the need for public speaking and is typically more anonymous than oral brainstorming, and finally brainwriting requires less specific training, especially in terms of the moderator, than brainstorming (Paulus y Yang, 2000).

As a result of the brainwriting process, the list of keywords obtained was 'Human Resources Management practices', 'High Involvement work practices', 'innovative Human Resources practices', 'human resource bundles' and 'organizational performance', or 'business performance'. It is important to note that, although we began our review in 2000; however, we have included references prior to this date, but with the only condition of being especially relevant in this topic, as for instance (Arthur, 1994; Delery y Doty, 1996; Huselid, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995). All the articles were examined for HR practices leading to better performance content. The criteria used to select any article was that it may focus on any aspect of this HR practices as we have defined in advance (but not traditional HR practices). In total, after all the different searches, our overview draws on a comprehensive sample of 265 articles. Finally, we read carefully the articles, in order to meet to settle on a final sample of 62 articles.

Once all analyses had been completed satisfactorily, we listed all the practices we identify in the different papers, and we aggregated them. We aggregated only those that, even having different formulation, are equivalents in meaning.¹ Furthermore, on the basis of the literature review described above, a set of HR experts composed of three academics, and four HR professionals, considered that the relevant areas in which human resource practices could be grouped were eight. For this classification, we have employed an adaptation of Guest's classification (Guest et al., 2003) and Way's categories of practices (Way, 2002): 1) Staffing; 2) training and development; 3) Appraisal and feedback; 4) Compensation; 5) Job design and Job Analysis; 6) Internal communication and knowledge management (Information sharing); 7) Employment security and commitment; 8) Quality, Active participation and Teamwork.

At this point, the next step was, by using Q-sorting (Petter et al., 2007), drawing the final compendium of HR practices. We took the complete list of practices identified at the first step, and we classified them into those further eight categories. The process was as follows, once each member of the team has made his/her first classification, we read all the items within each category looking for aggregate any of them (there were, still, many practices referring to same concepts, but using different formulations). As a final step, all the experts shared their final classification in order to compare results and find a common final consensus classification and summary. So that, we obtained the final compendium of all the HR practices, grouped by categories. It becomes more manageable and easy to use in further researches, given the wide variety of conceptual topics covered.

It should be noted that in the first list of practices we made, there were some practices that, while called in this way by authors, they were referred to policies or programs instead. This is due to the lack of consensus in using the terms. In this work, we adopt (Arthur y Boyles, 2007) definition, who distinguish between principles, policies, programs, practices and climate, as different elements of any HR system. Although in the initial table we have enclosed all of them, for the final result we have refined it by selecting only real practices and programs.

Findings

We have summarized the most common HR practices used by scholars to be applied to any sector, location or firm size classifying them into the 8 groups described above. We show here such a general list, not because we follow a universalistic approach, but in order to draw a first-point picture to be used, and completed to any context. The final classification of the most commonly used HR practices to enhance organizational performance is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Most commonly used HR Practices to enhance organizational performance

1.	Recruitment and selection	Authors
PR1	Usage of pre-employment test within the selection process as a means of assessment of abilities and personal skills (numerical, verbal, manuals, etc.). Eg. psychometric tests	(Guest et al., 2004) (Cho et al., 2006) (Huselid, 1995) (Guest et al., 2003)
PR2	Usage of knowledge or capability tests in the selection process: assessment of technical skills.	(Chuang et al., 2012)
PR3	Usage of techniques of simulation in the selection process: assessment of interpersonal skills.	(Bayo-Moriones et al., 2008) (Combs et al., 2006) (Melian-Gonzalez y Verano-Tacorante, 2004) (Wood y de Menezes, 2008) (Chuang et al., 2012)
PR4	Selection of employees focused on their overall fit to the company: values, personality...	(Chuang et al., 2012) (Bayo Moriones y Merino Diaz de Cerio, 2002) (Combs et al., 2006) (Melian-Gonzalez y Verano-Tacorante, 2004) (Wood y de Menezes, 2008) (Chuang et al., 2012) (Tang y Tang, 2012) (McClean y Collins, 2011) (Guest et al., 2003) (Collins y CLARK, 2003)
PR5	Internal candidates take priority over external for job openings: internal mobility or internal recruiting	(Cho et al., 2006) (Huselid, 1995) (Chuang et al., 2012) (Tang y Tang, 2012) (Guest et al., 2004) (McClean y Collins, 2011) (Collins y CLARK, 2003)
PR6	Recruitment and selection process starting from a detailed job description.	(Ahmad y Schroeder, 2003)

2.	Training and development (includes Talent Management)	
PR7	Integration plan for new employees: structured training plan which aims to transmit history, culture and values of the company.	(Chuang et al., 2012)
PR8	Annual training plan covering needs of all employees. Continuous training (whether in-company or outside training).	(Huselid, 1995) (Cho et al., 2006) (Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Tang y Tang, 2012) (McClean y Collins, 2011) (Ahmad y Schroeder, 2003) (Guest et al., 2003) (Gooderham et al., 2008)
PR9	Job rotation and multitasking training for employees to gain experience by moving them across different functional areas or divisions.	(Chuang et al., 2012) (Ahmad y Schroeder, 2003) (Waal, 2007)
PR10	Training in interpersonal skills (eg. Teamwork, problem solving...)	(Altinay et al., 2008) (Chuang et al., 2012) (Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Guest et al., 2004) (Waal, 2007) (Benson et al., 2006) (Collins y CLARK, 2003)
PR11	Technical Training	(Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Benson et al., 2006)
PR12	Leadership and management training	(Waal, 2007) (Benson et al., 2006)
PR13	Training plan taking into account future development: structured and defined internal promotion (promote long-term growth: career plan and succession plan included)	(Huselid, 1995) (Cho et al., 2006) (Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (McClean y Collins, 2011) (Guest et al., 2003) (Waal, 2007) (Gooderham et al., 2008)

3	Appraisal and feedback	
PR14	Employees receive formal evaluation or performance appraisal (managerial or not) based on objective results	(Combs et al., 2006) (Drummond y Stone, 2007) (Camelo et al., 2004) (Melian-Gonzalez y Verano-Tacorante, 2004) (Combs et al., 2006) (Wood y de Menezes, 2008) (Huselid, 1995) (Cho et al., 2006) (Tang y Tang, 2012) (Guest et al., 2004) (Guest et al., 2003) (Waal, 2007)
PR15	Employees receive regular feedback based on performance appraisal results	(Zatzick y Iverson, 2006) (Huselid, 1995) (Cho et al., 2006) (Tang y Tang, 2012) (Ahmad y Schroeder, 2003) (Guest et al., 2003) (Waal, 2007)
PR16	Attitudes, behaviour and performance of the individual employee as criteria of evaluation	(Camelo et al., 2004) (Huselid, 1995) (Cho et al., 2006) (Guest et al., 2004) (Collins y CLARK, 2003)
PR17	Criteria of evaluation based on team behaviour and team performance (not included whole company performance)	(Waal, 2007)

4	Rewards and incentives	
PR18	Incentive plans: Employees (no matter whether managerial or not) are regularly rewarded based on performance appraisal	(Anand y Kodali, 2008) (Cho et al., 2006) (Huselid, 1995) (Ahmad y Schroeder, 2003) (Guest et al., 2003) (Waal, 2007) (Gooderham et al., 2008)
PR19	Part of pay related to individual or group performance	(Barrett y Mayson, 2007) (Camelo et al., 2004) (Zatzick y Iverson, 2006) (Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004) (Guthrie et al., 2002) (Guest et al., 2004) (Guest et al., 2003) (Benson et al., 2006)
PR20	Employee incentive plan or bonus based primarily on the performance of the organization (eg. profit sharing, gain sharing, stock ownership plans).	(Barrett y Mayson, 2007) (Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004) (Guthrie et al., 2002) (Zatzick y Iverson, 2006) (Wood y de Menezes, 2008) (Cho et al., 2006) (Huselid, 1995) (Chuang et al., 2012) (Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Tang y Tang, 2012) (Guest et al., 2003)
PR21	Employees are rewarded for learning new skills or be able to develop different jobs	(Barrett y Mayson, 2007) (Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Camelo et al., 2004) (Guthrie et al., 2002) (Anand y Kodali, 2008)
PR22	Importance of job or position in the determination of the salary level (status differences)	(Camelo et al., 2004)
PR23	Compensation/rewards include benefits package (eg. Extra training, pay with time off...)	(Barrett y Mayson, 2007) (Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004) (Tang y Tang, 2012)

5	Job design & job analysis	
PR24	The description of the jobs have been formally analysed and they are formally documented	(Huselid, 1995) (Cho et al., 2006) (Barrett y Mayson, 2007) (Camelo et al., 2004)
PR25	Job descriptions include skill and competencies required list	(Barrett y Mayson, 2007)
PR26	Employees often work in teams: Project teams, multi-functional teams, self-managed teams, mini-business units...	(Zatzick y Iverson, 2006) (Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004) (Combs et al., 2006) (Chuang et al., 2012) (Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Guest et al., 2004) (Guest et al., 2003) (Ahmad y Schroeder, 2003) (Waal, 2007) (Benson et al., 2006)
PR27	Actively tries to make jobs as interesting and varied as possible (Job enrichment, or Job enlargement)	(Zatzick y Iverson, 2006) (Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004) (Wood y de Menezes, 2008) (Marin-Garcia et al., 2011) (Avella et al., 2001) (Anand y Kodali, 2008) (Guest et al., 2004) (Benson et al., 2006) (Gooderham et al., 2008)
6	Internal communication and knowledge management (Information sharing)	
PR28	Downward communication: keeps employees well-informed (Eg. Internal newsletter, database with information for employees, regular meetings etc...)	(Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004) (Tari et al., 2007) (Cho et al., 2006) (Huselid, 1995) (Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Guest et al., 2004) (Guest et al., 2003) (Waal, 2007) (Benson et al., 2006)

PR29	Upwards communication: Employees are provided the opportunity to suggest to their supervisors (Eg. Team briefing, Individual suggestion systems, formal survey of employees', group meetings: face to face contact, survey feedback etc...)	(Cox et al., 2006) (Wood y de Menezes, 2008) (Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Garcia-Lorenzo y Prado Prado, 2003) (Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004) (Guthrie et al., 2002) (Tang y Tang, 2012) (Guest et al., 2003) (Waal, 2007) (Benson et al., 2006)
PR30	Inter-departmental communication (horizontal communication) to generate synergies and identify opportunities (Eg. Meetings to information sharing)	(Zatzick y Iverson, 2006) (Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004) (Combs et al., 2006) (Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004) (Combs et al., 2006) (Hislop, 2003) (Waal, 2007)
PR31	Communication of strategic aspects to employees: company's strategy, business plan, finance, investment or salary determination criteria for instance	(Cox et al., 2006) (Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004) (Combs et al., 2006) (Wood y de Menezes, 2008) (Ahmad y Schroeder, 2003) (Guest et al., 2003) (Waal, 2007) (Benson et al., 2006) (Gooderham et al., 2008)
PR32	Communication to employees of formal information on business operation and performance.	(Cox et al., 2006) (Wood y de Menezes, 2008) (Guest et al., 2003) (Waal, 2007)
PR33	Communication of new initiatives, innovation and continuous improvement.	(Hislop, 2003) (Guest et al., 2003) (Waal, 2007) (Benson et al., 2006)

7	Employment security and commitment	
PR34	Long-term employment for most of the employees (Eg. long-term contracts, avoiding compulsory or voluntary redundancies, etc.).	(Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Camelo et al., 2004) (Melian-Gonzalez y Verano-Tacorante, 2004) (Combs et al., 2006) (Wood y de Menezes, 2008) (McClean y Collins, 2011) (Ahmad y Schroeder, 2003)
PR35	Active implementation of equal opportunity practices or single status (Eg. All employees are made aware of internal promotion opportunities)	(Tang y Tang, 2012) (Guest et al., 2004) (Guest et al., 2003)
PR36	Flexible working and family friendly practices (er. job-sharing, part-time work, flextime working hours...)	(Guest et al., 2004) (Barrett y Mayson, 2007) (Melian-Gonzalez y Verano-Tacorante, 2004) (Combs et al., 2006)
PR37	The company sponsor various social events to encourage contact and relationship-building among employees.	(Chuang et al., 2012) (Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Collins y CLARK, 2003)
8	Quality, Active participation and Team Work	
PR38	Employee regularly participating in problem-solving groups. There is a formal grievance procedure.	(Tari et al., 2007) (Huselid, 1995) (Cho et al., 2006) (McClean y Collins, 2011) (Guest et al., 2003) (Waal, 2007)
PR39	Employee participate in quality circles or other group suggestion systems	(Bayo Moriones y Merino Díaz de Cerio, 2002) (Garcia-Lorenzo y Prado Prado, 2003) (Guerrero y Barraud-Didier, 2004) (Combs et al., 2006) (Wood y de Menezes, 2008) (Avella et al., 2001) (Anand y Kodali, 2008) (Huselid, 1995) (Cho et al., 2006) (Tari et al., 2007) (Guest et al., 2003) (Benson et al., 2006)

PR40	Employees participate in work improvement teams	(Tari et al., 2007) (Guest et al., 2003) (Waal, 2007)
PR41	Employees have the responsibility of ensuring the quality of their own work. Individuals are allowed to make decisions in workplace.	(Bayo-Moriones y Merino-Diaz de Cerio, 2001) (Tang y Tang, 2012) (Guest et al., 2004) (Guest et al., 2003) (McClean y Collins, 2011) (Waal, 2007)
PR42	Visual management systems (employees have, to out of sight, information on the performance of their work using IT or not)	(Waal, 2007)

Fuente: Elaboración propia

Research limitations and future research

This work presents a detailed but synthesized list of those HR practices called ‘High involvement HR practices’, ‘High commitment HR practices’, ‘best HR practices’ or ‘innovative HR practices’ by main authors. Although we agree there are differences between contexts (Ahmad y Schroeder, 2003; Bayo-Moriones et al., 2008; Cho et al., 2006; dos Santos Moreira, 2008) (sectors, dimensions, locations etc...) in implanting HR practices (contingency framework) (Dewettinck y Remue, 2011), we have found interesting to define a general simple list of practices to be used as starting point in any research, no matter the context of the study. Thus, this initial list might be extended, or particularized for any context, but, studies carried out starting from the initial general list of practices, could be comparable, which at the moment, we have found difficult despite the vast existing literature.

We leave for further research the identification of the success factors; ie those factor that explain that the implementation of certain practices leads to successful results. And also the study of the bundles or configurations of practices that lead to better organizational performance in each different context. It can be used to analyze combinations of HR practices at both, strategic level of the organization (or point of view of top management), and from the point of view of employees.

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ⁱ The complete table with the whole conjunct of Human Resources practices, (not traditional) that authors use to study the enhancement of organizational performance, employee commitment and motivation containing the related references, is available to be consulted.