



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGIES AND BUSINESS OUTCOMES: A CONFIGURATIONAL APPROACH

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Abstract

The configurational perspective refers to the need for integration and coherence among different applied human resources practices, or "internal fit", as well as the need to adapt those practices to a series of organisational factors, or "external fit". Using a sample of 48 organisations, we shall attempt to show how applying the coherent systems proposed by Delery and Doty (1996), matching those systems to business strategies, and integrating human resources into a company's strategic processes have positive repercussions on business outcomes.

Key words: Human resources, configurations, outcomes, business strategy, integration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990's many studies have emerged that empirically analyse the effect of companies' human resources management methods on business outcomes. Such analyses, along with others that we will discuss throughout this paper, constitute one of the characteristic elements of the strategic approach adopted by human resources managers in recent years. Research in this field shows that the relationship between human resources practices and business outcomes are based on the following aspects: a) the investment in human capital

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which increases worker productivity (Bartel, 1994); b) the application of “good” human resources practices which improve worker motivation (Ichniowski, Shaw and Prensushi, 1997; Wood, 1999); c) increased autonomy and responsibility granted to workers which allows companies to make the best use of employee knowledge and reduces the number of middle managers (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg and Kalleberg, 2000); d) increased worker commitment to the company and to improved job performance, which translate into higher levels of output (Ichniowski *et al.*, 1997; Batt, 2002); and e) reduced levels of absenteeism and leaving rate (Arthur, 1994, Huselid, 1995) as a consequence of increased motivation and commitment—an extremely important aspect in the service sector in which employee turnover often leads to parallel customer turnover (Batt, 2002).

Universalistic approach

Among the studies that address this problem, there is a group of works whose common denominator is the recognition of the existence of a series of personnel practices, called high-performance, high-involvement, innovative or commitment practices, that have proven strategically valuable to the organisations that apply them. These practices comprise the **universalistic approach**. It has been suggested that using these high-performance practices will result in associated higher levels of business outcomes, regardless of the individual characteristics of the organisation, of the sector in which it is immersed and, in the broadest sense, of any other environmental element (Pfeffer, 1994; Ichniowski *et al.*, 1997). Within this approach, there is a line of research which maintains that, although the application of a series of high-performance practices is recognised as an influence on productivity and company profit (Ichniowski *et al.*, 1997; Huselid 1995), its effect will be much more noticeable when applied within coherent systems, which work to strengthen one another (Arthur, 1994; Pfeffer, 1994; Kochan and Osterman, 1994; Huselid, 1995; McDuffie 1995). In this respect, Becker and Gerhart (1996) state that the effect of human resources practices on business outcomes falls on the architecture of the system and not on so-called “best practices”.

Contingency and configurational approaches

On the other hand, and as a consequence of the strategic approach adopted by current human resources management, there is another set of research that recognises the need to integrate human resources practices or human resources systems with a series of organisational aspects and primarily, with the company strategy (Miles and Snow, 1984; Schuler and Jackson, 1987; Delery and Doty, 1996; Wood, 1999; Hartog and Verbug, 2004; Datta, Guthrie and Wright, 2005). Under this assumption, a series of studies were carried out that were

classified as either **contingency** or **configurational** perspectives, depending on whether isolated practices or systems of practices were considered.

Limitations of the literature

Recent theoretical reviews have identified serious shortcomings within the empirical literature in this field of study (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Wood, 1999): a) a large proportion of studies have been done on companies in the manufacturing sector (Arthur, 1992, 1994; McDuffie, 1995; Ichniowski *et al.*, 1997; Youndt, Snell, Dean and Lepak, 1996; Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg and Kalleberg, 2000; Sanz and Sabater, 2002), ignoring the fact that in capitalist economies most workers are employed in the service sector¹; b) while the term *strategic* implies the need to apply analyses at a corporate level, in many of the principal studies (Arthur, 1992, 1994; McDuffie, 1995; Ichniowski *et al.*, 1997; Youndt *et al.*, 1996) the level of analysis is the business unit or the establishment; and c) the consideration that another evolutionary feature of the function of the personnel department that favours the acquisition of a strategic role is the recognition of a series of variables that condition the human resources-business outcomes relationship— mainly business strategy. This variable, however, has been incorporated in comparatively few works (Banker, Lee, Potter and Srinivasan, 1996; Huselid, 1995; Delery and Doty, 1996; Hoque, 1999; Boselie, Paauwe and Jansen, 2001; Guthrie, Spell and Nyamori, 2002), and in every case the studies have obtained results that were far from the proposals made.

Research objectives

The **primary objective** of this work is to analyse the impact of human resources strategies, that is, the set of human resources practices that an organisation applies, on business outcomes—in terms of market share, profitability, growth, deposits and loans, worker productivity and general customer satisfaction. This analysis will be performed under the configurational perspective (Delery and Doty, 1996; Guest, 1997; McMahan, Virick and Wright, 1999), to test its validity in the Spanish context and for the group of companies considered.

This work endeavours to contribute to the advance in research in two ways. First of all, we propose a contingency variable, the involvement of human resources management in the strategic process, which has been considered a determining factor in recent studies (Bae and Lawler, 2000; Björkman and Xiucheng, 2002). The scope of this study, however, goes beyond that. In addition to sup-

¹ Guest, Michie, Conway and Sheehan (2003), stress the current tendency in the literature to carry out studies in the service sector.

porting the validity of this influence, we consider that such integration is the fundamental variable that ensures the success of personnel activities undertaken, since environment, business strategy and other circumstances that may condition the administrative process are constantly changing. In this context, only when human resources management is integrated into general management are personnel policies successfully tailored to strategic business needs. Secondly, we focus this study within a context, the financial sector, in which very little research has been carried out either internationally (Delery and Doty, 1996; Arcand, Bayad and Fabi, 2002; Gelade and Ivery, 2003; Bartel, 2004) or nationally (Cano and Céspedes, 2003; Saá and García-Falcón, 2004).

2. THE CONFIGURATIONAL APPROACH IN THE STUDY OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS

The configurational perspective concerns the need for integration and coherence among different applied human resources practices, or "internal fit", as well as the need to adapt those practices to a series of organisational factors called "external fit". Any branch of configurative research seeks to explain a specific phenomenon through the establishment of homogenous groups of companies. The primary theoretical basis for this approach revolves around the resource-based theory of competitive advantage and recognises that the application of ideal human resources systems has a synergic effect on business outcomes. Wright and McMahan (1992) point out that this is the most suitable approach for studying the influence of human resources management on business outcomes. They state that in order to generate higher business outcomes, a high degree of fit must be present, both horizontally between different human resources practices and vertically with organisational and environmental conditions. This approach represents a step forward compared to other approaches inasmuch as it recognises the need to tailor human resources practices to a series of business context variables, but at the same time it emphasises the need to internally fit the human resources practices adopted by the company. It is precisely this internal fit that differentiates this approach from the contingency approach.

There are several important characteristics of this approach (Delery and Doty, 1996). First of all, these configurations of practices create synergic effects such that the result of the combined application of human resources practices is superior to that achieved by individual application. Secondly, these theories incorporate the concept of equifinality, stating that there are different configurations that can maximise the degree to which objectives are met. Lastly, these configurations are considered ideal typologies, more than empirically observable phenomena (Doty and Glick, 1994), and are conceived with the aim of maximis-

ing internal fit in order to subsequently tailor them to other organisational aspects, that is, to achieve external fit.

2.1. Research carried out using the configurational approach

Below we present a review of the empirical research carried out using the configurational approach from with the hypotheses to be investigated in the empirical part of this research arose. We highlight below the primary contributions in terms of human resources strategies/systems that are best adapted to specific business strategies.

Accumulator, facilitator and utilizer HR strategies

Bird and Beechler (1995) analysed a sample of 64 American companies in various sectors that were subsidiaries of Japanese companies. The analysis was based on the strategic typology created by Miles and Snow (1978) on the positive effect of the development of a coherent human resources strategy on business strategy. They thus defined three human resources strategies –accumulator, facilitator, and utilizer– whose application in combination with defender, analyser and prospector business strategies respectively, result in higher levels of business outcomes.

TABLE 1

HR strategies proposed by Bird and Beechler

HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGIES		
ACCUMULATOR	FACILITATOR	UTILIZER
Based on achieving maximum employee involvement: -Hiring workers with high potential -Developing worker abilities, skills and knowledge	Based on the acquisition and creation of new knowledge: -Through hiring self-motivated personnel -Supporting self-development of abilities, skills and knowledge -Establishing coordination mechanisms such as flexible group structures	Based on minimum commitment and high use of worker ability: -The employee must always be in the most suitable position -The employee must have the required abilities at all times

Source: Adapted from Bird and Beechler (1995)

The accumulator strategy aims to achieve maximum staff involvement and efficiency through hiring employees with high potential and through developing workers' abilities and knowledge. The facilitator strategy is based on the creation

and acquisition of new knowledge through hiring self-motivated personnel, promoting independent development of abilities and knowledge through the coordination between suitable assignment of tasks and flexible work teams. Lastly, the utilizer strategy is characterised by low levels of commitment and maximum use of existing employee abilities which are obtained by means of matching positions to workers and using the abilities and knowledge of workers for specific tasks. In terms of business outcomes, companies that have matched both types of strategy (HR and business) have been found to obtain better levels of business outcomes in all aspects measured, with statistically significant results found for employee morale, average employee seniority and turnover, both for members of general management as well as other executives. In terms of their relationship to the measure of business outcomes, higher levels of performance are found in companies which achieve this fit, with statistical significance only in the case of subjective business outcome indicators.

Ideal systems proposed by Delery and Doty (1996)

Delery and Doty (1996) define two human resources systems² (table 2): internal and market-type systems. They propose that the use of either of these human resources systems will have direct repercussions on financial results, provided that the company applies the systems in keeping with the business strategy³ in practice. These hypotheses were partially supported through the application of different statistical techniques, proving that the use of market-type systems is positively associated with financial performance for those companies that employ a prospector strategy.

Administrative system and human capital development system

Youndt *et al.* (1996) carried out a study on 97 companies in the metals sector in which they defined two human resources management systems, the administrative system and the promotion of human capital system, taken from four dimensions: recruitment, training, performance evaluation, and remuneration. They aimed to determine the influence of these systems on business outcomes⁴ as well as whether that influence is affected by business strategy⁵ in that: a) cost strategies are related to an administrative system; b) quality strategies are related to a

² Which, although they do not correspond to those described by Miles and Show (1984), are associated with defender and prospector strategies. In fact, the intermediate system may be associated with the analyser strategy (Sabater, 2002).

³ The internal system fits in with the defender strategy while the market-type system is associated with the prospector strategy.

⁴ Customer orientation, productivity and team efficiency.

⁵ Cost strategy, quality strategy and flexibility strategy-of development and delivery-.

TABLE 2

Employment systems proposed by Delery and Doty

INTERNAL SYSTEM	MARKET-TYPE SYSTEM
Defender strategy	Prospector strategy
Internal development opportunities	Few internal development opportunities
Formal training systems	Lack of formal training systems
Performance evaluation based on behaviours	Performance evaluation based on results
Remuneration based on position Little use of incentives Little importance on profit-sharing systems	Remuneration based on results Profit-sharing systems
Job security	Little job security
Narrowly defined positions	Broadly defined positions
Some forms of participation	Little participation

Source: Adapted from Delery and Doty (1996)

development system; and c) flexibility strategies are related to a human capital development system. Using a hierarchical regression analysis the authors proved that human capital development systems have positive repercussions on business outcomes when interaction with the business strategy is not taken into account. The inclusion of interactions between the business strategy and human resources systems in the model improves the explanatory capacity of those systems –one for each of the result measures– with the increase statistically significant for the customer orientation variable. There were several specific interactions between business strategy and human resources systems: a quality system-development system interaction, resulting in a positive relationship for the customer orientation, productivity and efficiency variables, verifying the hypothesis; a development flexibility strategy-administrative system interaction –a positive relationship for the customer orientation variable and a negative relationship for productivity; and the interaction between cost leadership strategy-administrative system, a positive relationship for the efficiency variable, partially verifying the hypothesis. Therefore, administrative systems prove suitable in those contexts in which the reduction of costs is fundamental, whereas human capital development systems prove suitable in contexts in which the primary competitive weapon is quality. Lastly, companies that apply development flexibility and quality strategies were shown to achieve better business outcomes⁶.

⁶ For the customer orientation variable. For the productivity variable this relationship was only found for the flexibility strategy, with lower levels of significance, and for the third it was only found for the quality strategy.

Internal and market-type HR systems

Quirós (2003) proposes two human resources systems, internal and market-type, which have to be consistent with a series of organisational aspects: a) culture, considering three dimensions related to flexibility/stability, person/task orientation and individualism/collectivism; b) structure, mechanistic or organic; and c) business strategy, considering the typology developed by Miles and Snow (1978). Various different cluster analyses performed allowed the formation of three groups of companies according to the abovementioned variables in order to then determine the human resources systems present in each of them. It was found that in organisations that have a people-based culture and an organic structure, the internal system is the most suitable for implementing the prospector strategy and that organisations with an organisation-based culture and a mechanical structure that also use an analyser strategy outperform other combinations.

Configurations of human resources and intellectual capital

Youndt and Snell (2004) defined six configurations of human resources practices –acquisition, development, egalitarianism, cooperation, documentation and information– by means of a factor analysis that allowed them to be grouped based on their capacity to create intellectual capital. As the next figure shows, the three dimensions of human, social and organisational capital were included in order to evaluate their effect on business outcomes. Working with a sample of 919 organisations, they were able to verify that these configurations are generally closely related to the organisation's intellectual capital and to business outcomes while also proving that intellectual capital affected the relationship between HR configurations and business outcomes.

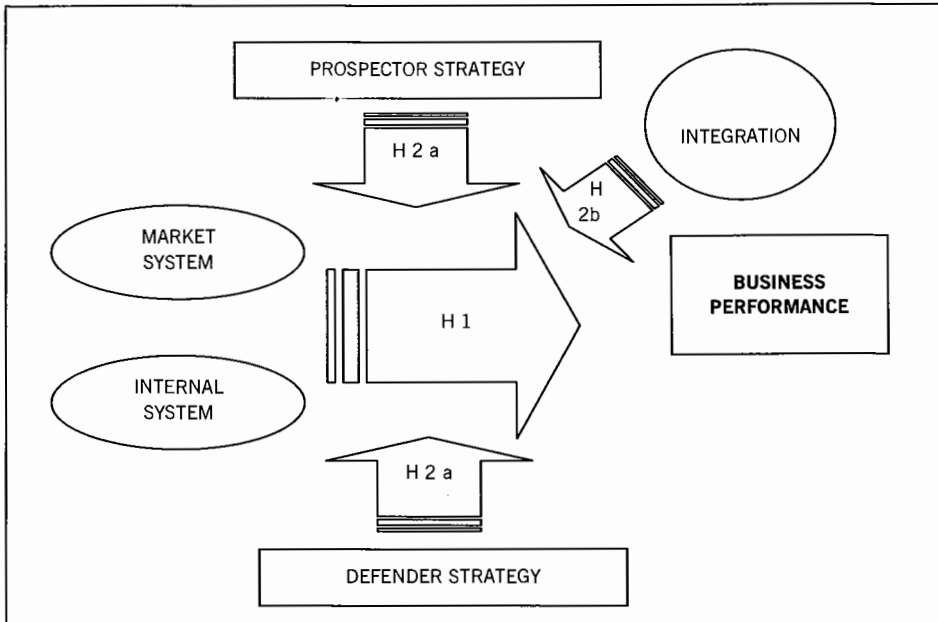
2.2. Research hypothesis

The hypotheses posed in this research, carried out using a configurational approach, appear in the figure below.

The first hypothesis concerns the positive effect on business outcomes that stem from the adoption of ideal human resources systems. Through grouping techniques, we shall attempt to identify systems similar to those put forth by Delery and Doty (1996), internal and market-type, for the purpose of determining whether the adoption of such systems has positive repercussions on business outcomes.

FIGURE 1

Proposed configurational model



Source: authors

HYPOTHESIS 1: The adoption of ideal systems of human resources management results in better business outcomes.

Furthermore, and continuing with the proposal of the same researchers, as the figure above shows we will analyse the effect of matching these systems with defender and prospector strategies on business outcomes. Furthermore, we will incorporate the integration variable as a key element in the effectiveness of personnel policies. We therefore pose the following hypothesis:

In support of our second hypothesis, we would highlight the following findings (Rodríguez, 2004): a) Long-term investments in human capital, features of the "internal" system, are relatively more profitable in stable settings. Such investments are one of the key elements of this type of strategy. b) Defender organisations accomplish higher stability through internal employee development in which specific knowledge and skills are cultivated. These organisations have lower levels of employee turnover due to scarce alternative employment opportunities given the specificity of employee know-how and a strong sense of belonging to the organisation. c) Defender organisations highly value efficiency. Therefore, it is a system that allows organisations to pay their employees less than the going market salary in exchange for the promise of a continued relationship. Another

way that defender organisations attempt to improve efficiency is through the innovation of processes. Therefore, it can be said that if employees are familiar with a company's processes, they will be better prepared to contribute to such innovations. The market-type system can also be considered a mechanism for generating ideas on new products and markets for several reasons. Hiring employees who have worked in different organisations and in a wide variety of situations stimulates new perspectives in the organisation. Therefore the exchange of ideas among professionals constitutes a means of identifying opportunities. Meanwhile, as opposed to defender organisations, which attempt to control their employees through bureaucratic methods, explorer organisations try to find innovative methods for identifying and resolving problems.

This moderation relationship contained in hypothesis 2b implies that human resources practice systems employed by the company will be more effective when there is a higher degree of participation on the part of the HR department in the formulation of the competitive strategy. Therefore, the position that we take in this work is that the success of human resources policies, more than their fit with the strategy developed by the company, is conditional upon the integration of human resources management in the strategy formulation process. This integration ensures that human resources administration is adapted to the strategic needs of the company. This in turn ensures the adaptation of a company's human resources to the chosen strategy, an essential element in dynamic settings in which constant adjustments have to be made. Furthermore, it is important to point out that the fulfilment of this premise also ensures the adaptation of human resources in the implementation phase of the business strategy.

Based on these considerations we propose the following hypothesis, which is broken down into two parts.

HYPOTHESIS 2: The fit of these systems with:

- a) *Business strategy, in such a way that the application of internal systems in defender companies and market-type systems in prospector companies results in improved business outcomes.*
- b) *The integration of human resources management in the strategic process results in improved business outcomes.*

3. EMPIRICAL WORK

The companies studied, credit cooperatives and savings banks, are credit institutions belonging to the social economy sector. Data collection was carried out by means of a questionnaire sent by post. Although the sample included in

the work is not very broad, which would allow us to use another data collection technique in order to compensate for the shortcomings of the method we chose, the geographic dispersion of the sample as well as the flexibility that a postal questionnaire offers in terms of allowing respondents a more convenient period of time in which to reply, led us to opt for this technique. We received a total of 53 questionnaires. Of these, 5 were considered invalid due to inconsistencies in the responses, failure to meet the criteria of the minimum number of employees, or incompleteness. The final sample is therefore composed of 48 organisations, representing a 44% return rate. For this return rate and considering a significance level of 95%, the sampling error was set at 10.7% (table 3).

TABLE 3

Research specifications

Population	83+47
Sample size	48 companies
Unit of analysis	Company
Geographic scope	National
Interview	Personal by means of questionnaire addressed to HR manager
Sampling procedure	Convenience: accessible or favourable organisations with more than 20 employees
Return rate, valid questionnaires as percentage of total	44 %
Sampling error	10.7 %
Reliability level	95.5%
Date of field work	December 2003 – December 2004

Source: authors

3.1. Measurement of variables

Human resources practices

One of the key aspects of this research consists of defining a methodology for the purpose of making the human resources system an operational variable. In order to create a variable that reflects the human resources system, we have to determine on one hand, the activities to include in the system, and on the other hand, a way to measure it. As for human resources practices, we consider those used by Delery and Doty (1996) in their proposal of employment models. The scales used appear in the following table.

The first variable considered is the existence of internal job markets, measured by means of the scale put forward by Delaney and Huselid (1996), which considers the use of internal recruitment sources and the company's use of career

plans for its employees. The establishment of internal job markets ensures that people holding executive positions have a comprehensive knowledge of the company, business, production process and technology (Pfeffer, 1998).

TABLE 4

Human resources practices

		SCALE USED	ITEMS
HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGIES	INTERNAL MARKET	Delaney and Huselid (1996)	4
	RIGOROUS SELECTION	Snell and Dean (1992)	5
	JOB STABILITY	Delery and Doty (1996)	4
	TRAINING	Snell and Dean (1992)	7
	PARTICIPATION	Delery and Doty (1996)	4
	BROAD POSITION DESIGN	authors	4
	REMUNERATION SYSTEM	Saura and Gómez-Mejía (1996)	5

Source: authors

The thoroughness of a company's recruitment activities is a characteristic of the selection process that ensures the suitability of new employees to meet the needs of the company and to carry out company policies. This was measured using the scale proposed by Snell and Dean (1992).

Within the analysis of the hiring process, we analysed the level of job stability that companies offer their employees. This variable is an indicator of the commitment of the company to its employees (Pfeffer, 1991). To measure this variable, we included four items adapted from Delery and Doty (1996) related to how long employees stay with the company and the type of contract the company uses.

Training is one of the variables that in addition to being included in many jobs (e.g. Huselid, 1995), in most cases constitutes an explanatory factor for business outcomes. To measure this we adapted a series of items from the work of Snell and Dean (1992) in order to determine the intensity of these activities.

Worker participation determines the degree of employee intervention in decision-making processes as well as the way in which the company established mechanisms for incorporating the perceptions and suggestions of individuals into the management process. The establishment of participation mechanisms increases employee satisfaction and productivity (Pfeffer, 1998). This variable is broadly treated in the literature (e.g. Arthur, 1994) and was measured for this study using the scale proposed by Delery and Doty (1996).

The broad position design variable attempts to determine the degree to which the company promotes internal job rotation between different positions and gives

employees autonomy to carry out their tasks. These variables have been included in several empirical works (e.g. Bayo and Merino, 2002) and were measured using a scale comprised of 4 items.

Lastly, remuneration policy was measured using the scale developed in the work of Saura and Gómez Mejía (1996). Given the complexity of that scale, especially in terms of the number of items it contains, we chose to extract the most relevant items which have very frequently been considered in different studies as they concern remuneration and determination, salary scale and internal equity.

Human resources system

The human resources system is taken into account in the empirical literature as a general variable in the following ways: a) Bird and Beechler (1995) identify the human resources strategy through the application of the paragraph method in terms similar to those used to determine business strategy. b) By means of adding up the number of practices used by a company (Sanz and Sabater, 2000; Sels *et al.*, 2003; Wright *et al.*, 2003). This technique is mainly used with dichotomic variables. When these are measured using a Likert scale, the average is considered the cut-off point (Delaney and Huselid, 1996). c) By means of a factor analysis to identify different dimensions of the human resources system (Huselid, 1995; Boselie *et al.*, 2003; Cano and Céspedes, 2003; Hartog and Verburg, 2004). d) The primary tendency in the literature is to construct a single index containing a group of pre-determined practices which include aspects related to employee selection, training, development, remuneration and position design (Bae and Lawler, 2000; Ramsay *et al.*, 2002; West *et al.*, 2000; Datta *et al.*, 2005). Becker and Huselid (1998) emphasise that, without being exempt to limitations, this is the most suitable manner in which to construct a human resources index a few fundamental reasons. First of all, a single index reflects the notion of a single human resources management system as a strategic asset. Secondly, given that this index is made up of combinations of scale values, there are multiple combinations that result in improved business outcomes. Lastly, the use of a cluster analysis identifies homogeneous groups according to the practices adopted or simply certain groups of companies according to the number of human resources practices applied (Arthur, 1994; Huselid and Becker, 1996; Conyon and Read, 1999; Applebaum *et al.*, 2000; Bayo and Merino, 2000; Michie and Sheehan, 2001).

In our study we use a cluster analysis to identify companies that apply "internal or make" and "market-type or buy" systems for the purpose of determining whether the business outcomes of these companies are superior to those that clearly do not use either of them and, if the fit of these systems with the company's business and integration strategies results in better performance. This

choice is backed by the work of Becker and Huselid (1998) who affirm that this technique is suitable for the purpose of testing the hypotheses of equifinality, a basic assumption of the configurational approach.

Integration of human resources management in the strategic process

The integration of human resources management measures to what extent the human resources department plays an active role in the formulation of a company's business strategy. To determine this, we used a scale composed of three items based on the work of Becker and Huselid (1998) and applied with minimal adaptation in works such as that of Björkman and Xiucheng (2002) or Khatri (2000). (Table 5)

TABLE 5

Scale for measuring human resources management integration

Indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements regarding the importance of human resources management in your organisation.	very low -	Degree of Agreement	Very high +				
	←—————→						
Your organisation makes a conscious effort to adjust its business strategy to its human resources strategy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The human resources department is involved in the strategic planning process.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
HR managers are considered key management figures.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Source: Becker and Huselid (1998)

Business strategy

The first aspect that appears in relation to the business strategy variable is the determination of the level of the company considered. A revision of the literature indicates a preponderance of business strategies, whether of the type presented by Porter (Arthur, 1994; Bae and Lawler, 2000; Bayo and Merino, 2002) or proposed by Miles and Snow (Bird and Beechler 1995; Delery and Doty, 1996; Fey, Björkman and Pavlovskaya, 2000). In this work we use the second type as it has been applied in more studies within the human resources field and because, as Snow and Hrebiniak (1980) maintain, it is "the only typology that characterises the organisation as a complete system, with a focus on the organisation's strategic orientation." Furthermore, we believe that this typology better allows measurement of the strategic orientation of companies in the financial sector.

There are four methods of measuring business strategy (Snow and Hambrick, 1980): investigator inference, self-typing, external assessment, and objective indicators. In this study we chose⁷ the self-typing technique using the paragraph method (table 6). Within this method we chose to test the configurational model using the Shortell and Zajac (1990) variant in which the respondent has to place the company on a continuous scale from 1 to 7⁸, which allows the incorporation of intermediate measurements. We also chose to test the contingency hypothesis in keeping with the methods used in other studies. This was considered a continuous variable.

TABLE 6

Scale for measuring organisational strategy

<p>Carefully read the four types of strategic orientation described below and indicate the one that most closely matches your organisation above</p>	<p><i>Very low</i> <i>Very high</i></p> <p>— Degree of Change +</p> <p>← ————— →</p> <p>□ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> <p>← ————— →</p> <p> Type of organisation</p>
<p>A A <i>type A organisation</i> occupies a niche in the sector and offers a relatively stable set of products. <i>Type A organisations</i> are generally not at the forefront of new services, products or market developments within the sector. <i>Type A organisations</i> tend to ignore changes that do not have a direct impact on their current areas of activity and focus on doing the best job possible in the areas they are already involved in.</p>	
<p>B A <i>type B organisation</i> maintains a relatively stable product base while simultaneously moving toward promising new developments in services, products and markets. <i>Type B organisations</i> are rarely the first to offer these new products or services. However, through close observation of organisations such as the <i>type C</i>, below, <i>type B organisations</i> try to provide a better conceived or more cost-efficient product or service.</p>	
<p>C <i>Type C organisations</i> make frequent changes in the set of products/services they offer, especially in adding new products. <i>Type C organisations</i> constantly try to be pioneers and are the first in new product areas and market activities even though not all of these efforts ultimately result in a high degree of success. <i>Type C organisations</i> respond quickly to emerging signs of new opportunities or needs in the market.</p>	
<p>D <i>Type D organisations</i> may at some time or another operate in a way that is consistent with any of the organisations above and therefore cannot be clearly identified as any of them.</p>	

Source: Adapted from Hambrick (1981)

⁷ The reasons for this choice were the following: a) This is the simplest method, with a reduced number of item for improved confidence in the statistical analysis given the reduced sample size. b) Given that the questionnaire was addressed to human resources managers, and recognising that the ideal method of determining the strategy would be to consult the general management, we consider that the paragraph method is the most suitable for measuring strategy when the person who responds to the questionnaire does not have full knowledge of all strategic aspects; c) It simplifies the completion of the questionnaire, which allows a high number of responses; and d) it has been used in reference studies (Peck, 1994; Bird and Beechler, 1995).

⁸ So companies with ratings of 1 and 2 are classified as defenders, with ratings of 3, 4 and 5 are classified as analysers and with ratings of 6 and 7 are classified as prospectors, as proposed by Shortell and Zajac (1990). This way of making the strategy operative has been applied by Peck (1994), Bird and Beechler (1995) and Sabater (2002) in the Spanish context.

Business outcomes

Lastly, our work includes a measure of subjective performance based on Delaney and Huselid's (1996) proposal (table 7), which includes aspects related to the degree to which objectives are met in terms of market share, profitability, growth in deposits and loans, productivity and customer satisfaction. The choice of this type of indicator is supported by the fact that financial indicators are prone to several limitations because, despite being based on accounting data that respond to the general situation, they do not cover many aspects that may be clear evidence of the business reality. These indicators are also widely used, which is supported by the literature in the field.

TABLE 7

Scale for measuring business outcomes

Indicate your degree of satisfaction regarding business outcomes in these aspects over the past year:	<i>Very dissatisfied</i> -	<i>Degree of satisfaction</i>					<i>Very satisfied</i> +
	←—————→						
Market share	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Profitability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Growth in deposits and loans	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Employee productivity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
General customer satisfaction	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Source: Adapted from Delery and Huselid (1996)

3.2. Hypothesis testing

In this section we will test the proposed hypotheses concerning the positive affect of the application of systems of ideal practices on business outcomes (hypothesis 1) and suggesting that this relationship is affected by the degree of fit with the business plan in practice (hypothesis 2a) as well as by the degree of integration of the role of the personnel department (hypothesis 2b).

Therefore, first of all we have to identify homogeneous groups of companies in order to pinpoint ideal patterns or systems of coherent practices using the proposals laid out in the literature. We did this using a hierarchical cluster analysis, which is a multi-variant technique that consists of grouping cases based on similarities between them. This analysis allowed us to detect the optimal number of groups and their composition based on their similarities in terms of one and

several variables. Because, as we can see in the correlation matrix, human resources practices are highly correlated, in order to guarantee the efficacy of the conglomerate analysis we deemed it necessary to perform a preliminary factor analysis. This allowed us to summarise the information contained in the independent variables, to group those that showed a high degree of correlation, and to modify their dimensional structure with a minimal loss of information through the use of an extraction method.

The factor analysis was performed using the principal component extraction method and an orthogonal varimax rotation was applied. Factors whose eigenvalue was higher than the unit were extracted. The table below shows the factors obtained, the commonalities corresponding to each variable as well as the *Kaiser Meyer Olkin* test of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The results of the KMO test and Bartlett's test of sphericity along with the high percentage of explained variance allows us to attest to the suitability of employing a factor analysis in this case.

The analysis shows the grouping of practices into three factors. The first factor, which is comprised of practices related to the development of worker abilities including participation, training and the existence of an internal job market, is called the **development factor**. The second factor, which encompasses the position design and remuneration system variables, is called the **organic factor** in that organic structures offer similar position design and remuneration systems. The last factor concerns aspects related to the selection process and the duration of the working relationship, which is therefore called the **hiring factor**.

TABLE 8

Factor analysis on human resources practices

	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3	COMMUN.
INTERNAL JOB MARKET	0.875			0.842
PARTICIPATION	0.753			0.769
TRAINING	0.736			0.718
BROAD POSITION DESIGN		0.865		0.794
REMUNERATION SYSTEM		0.864		0.770
JOB STABILITY			0.896	0.861
RIGOROUS SELECTION			0.860	0.864
Percentage of explained variance=80.2%				
<i>Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin</i> test of sampling adequacy=0.61				
Bartlett's test of sphericity (approximately)=149.081; significance=0.000				

Source: authors

Once the factor analysis had been performed, we went on to carry out a cluster analysis. The number of clusters was chosen based on a study of the dendrogram, which is the graphic representation of the grouping process described above and helps the researcher to evaluate and determine the optimal number of clusters. In our case, the dendrogram showed four clusters as the definitive solution. Furthermore, to ensure the adequacy of the solution we obtained, we performed a cluster analysis using the alternative k-averages method. We subsequently checked that the classification of the companies was similar regardless of the method used. The final solution appears in the following table:

TABLE 9

Cluster analysis. HR strategies

VARIABLES	CLUSTER				Levene statistic	F	Post-hoc (Scheffé)
	1; N=7	2; =18	3; =18	4; N=5			
DEVELOPMENT FACTOR	-1.400	0.760	-0.399	0.890	1.717	27.167***	1,3<2,4***
ORGANIC FACTOR	-1.075	-0.375	0.732	0.000	0.779	11.504***	1,2<3***; 1<4***
HIRING FACTOR	-0.639	0.632	0.136	-2.150	1.657	37.610***	1,4<2,3***; 3<2 *

* Significance p<0.10; *** Significance p<0.01

Source: authors

Strategy 1 (n=7) **“Null”** This cluster includes a set of organisations with low ratings in all three factors, which implies a lack of a defined personnel strategy. It is made up exclusively of small, rural savings banks with a very limited sphere of activity.

Strategy 2 (n=18) **“Make”** This cluster includes a group of organisations that apply “make” or internal human resources systems as proposed by Miles and Snow (1984) or Delery and Doty (1996). As we can see, they provide high levels of job stability to their employees, they encourage employee development activities and the remuneration system, as well as the way they design job positions, are typical of mechanistic structures.

Strategy 3 (n=18) **“Buy”** this cluster is comprised of organisation employing the “buy” or market-type systems defined by Miles and Show (1984) and Delery and Doty (1996) which are characterised by little employee development, organic remuneration systems and short-term employment relationships. In the latter aspect, we found higher values in the factor compared to the first and third group although having a developed human resources strategy along with a high level

of stability in the sector meant that these values allow us to identify their hiring policy as typical of market-type systems.

Strategy 4 (n=5) **“Inconsistent”** These are companies that invest in human resources development, offer lower levels of job stability and do not use rigorous selection techniques. These companies are called inconsistent because they invest in human capital which has not been adequately chosen and they have a high degree of employee turnover because they do not offer stable employment.

We performed a one-factor⁹ ANOVA in which the dependent variables were business outcomes and inclusion in each of the above-defined groups. We found significant differences between them (table 10). The post-hoc tests revealed that companies that use ideal human resources strategies achieve better business outcomes. However, these differences are only significant with companies who employ a null strategy, partially verifying our first hypothesis as synergies derived from the use of ideal systems were not clearly determined.

TABLE 10

One-factor ANOVA on ideal HR systems

VARIABLES	HR STRATEGIES				Levene statistic.	F	Post-hoc (Scheffé)
	1	2	3	4			
BUSINESS OUTCOMES	3.94	5.06	4.66	4.53	0.169	4.005**	1<2,3**
**Significance p<0.05							

Source: authors

Below we test hypothesis 2^a which concerns the fit between human resources systems and business strategy and the positive repercussions of such a fit on business outcomes. To do this, we have used contingency tables in which the human resources system adopted appears in the columns and the business strategy in the rows. In general, a χ^2 test was performed which allowed us to test the hypothesis of independence between the two classification criteria through the comparison of observed frequencies (those we really obtained) and expected frequencies (those that should have been found if the independence hypothesis were correct).

⁹ We chose this technique to test the configurational hypotheses because the reduced simple size along with the need to use dummy variables to introduce the human resources strategy into the model made the predictive capacity of the regression models modest and obtaining significant results difficult.

TABLE 11

Contingency table: human resources system-business strategy

		HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY				TOTAL
		NULL	MAKE	BUY	INCONSISTENT	
BUSINESS STRATEGY	DEFENDER	2	3	6	1	12
	ANALYSER	2	9	5	1	17
	PROSPECTOR	1	4	6	2	13
	REACTIVE	2	2	1	1	6
TOTAL		7	18	18	5	48
$\chi^2 = 6.408$, Sign. 0.699						

Source: authors

According to the results obtained (table 11) and given the value achieved from the χ^2 statistic, we cannot reject the null hypothesis of independence between the two variables, which partially contradicts the approaches that served as a basis for posing this hypothesis, although there have been other studies, such as that carried out by Bird and Beechler (1995) and Sabater (2002), in which the results obtained were not consistent with those set out in the literature.

We later performed this analysis again, but this time considering the degree of integration of the human resources management in the strategic process. To do this we performed a k-average cluster analysis to divide the companies into two groups based on the degree of integration found. The contingency table below shows in the columns whether the company used ideal human resources strategies or not and in the rows the existence of either high or low degrees of integration.

In this case we were able to prove that companies that incorporate human resources management into their management processes adopt ideal human resources systems to a greater extent than those that do not (table 12). The χ^2 value found allowed us to reject the null hypothesis of independence between variables, thereby allowing us to affirm that companies that integrate human resources management into their strategic planning processes, as would be expected, tend to use ideal human resources systems.

Following the method used by Bird and Beechler (1995), we classified the companies into three groups: a) those that use a make system and show high levels of integration; b) those that use a buy system and show high levels of integration; and c) those that either do not employ ideal systems or do not show high levels of integration of human resources management. A one-factor ANOVA allowed us to establish the existence of differences in business outcomes depending on the ideal system-high integration fit.

The results of the analysis shown in table 13 support hypothesis 2b, whilst the companies with an ideal system-high integration fit produce better business

TABLE 12

Contingency table: human resources system-integration

		HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY			TOTAL
		NOT IDEAL	MAKER	BUYER	
INTEGRATION	LOW	8	6	7	21
	HIGH	4	12	11	27
TOTAL		12	18	18	48

$\chi^2 = 10,000$, Sign. 0.007

Source: authors

outcomes. Furthermore, the business outcomes of these organisations are higher compared to those that only employ those systems¹⁰.

Therefore, we can affirm that ideal human resources systems are more effective in companies in which human resources management is integrated into the strategic management process.

TABLE 13

One-factor ANOVA: human resources system-integration fit

	MAKE +INT (12)	BUY +INT (11)	NO FIT (25)	Levene statistic	F	Post-hoc (Scheffé)
BUSINESS OUTCOMES	5.39	4.81	4.24	1.319	14.979***	3<1.2***

*** Significance $p < 0.01$

Source: authors

4. CONCLUSIONS

Using a configurational perspective, with this work we have attempted to determine the extent to which a company's use of ideal human resources systems improves business outcomes. Furthermore, we have tried to define how this relationship is affected by business strategy and the integration of HRM in the strategy formulation process.

We have shown that the application of ideal human resources systems, market-type and internal, has a positive impact on business outcomes although the relationship is not completely clear in that the results of the application of such systems are only superior in those organisation that apply systems in which no

¹⁰ For human resources strategies 5.31 vs. 5.18 –make system– and 5.13 vs. 4.95 –buy system–. For business strategies 5.39 vs. 5.06 –make system– and 4.81 vs. 4.66 –buy system–. A one-factor ANOVA performed for each indicator showed that these differences are significant at $p < 0.05$.

practices are used. Based on this, a company's application of internal development practices will have a positive influence on business outcomes.

Furthermore, business strategy does not seem to constitute a moderating variable in the relationship described above. These results contradict the affirmations of Arthur (1994), McDuffie (1995), Huselid (1995), Bae and Lawler (2000) and Bayo and Merino (2002) and may be explained by the fact that the static character of the human resources-business strategy fit may not be adjusted to the current situation in the financial sector which is characterised by a high degree of change.

Third, the primary contribution of the study is found in the proposal and empirical validation of the moderator effect that the integration of HRM in the strategic process variable has on the human resources-business outcomes relationship. It seems that the positive impact of the application of ideal human resources systems is higher in organisations which achieve high levels of integration between human resources management and the general management. This could mean a shift in the way we analyse the effectiveness of human resources practices in a few different ways. It may mean going from seeking coherence and fit with the business strategy toward seeking flexibility and adaptation to varied and changing strategic needs, or from analysing the contents of human resources strategies toward studying their implementation. Lastly, it is important to stress the need for the direct participation of human resources departments in the companies' strategic processes, placing human resources management near the top of the organisational chart as a guarantee for accomplishing organisational goals.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of this study should be considered and interpreted with a certain degree of caution due to the presence of some limitations.

Among these, we should first of all stress the reduced sample size along with the fact that the study was restricted to a single sector. These circumstances mean that we can make limited generalisations about the results we obtained, we were not able to use structural equation models, and we are restricted in the interpretation of the results.

Another limitation of the study is related to the use of transversal¹¹ data which does not allow the establishment of exact relationships of causality. This limitation was partially overcome by considering the profits of the four previous

¹¹ A longitudinal study may be more appropriate due to the dynamic character of the aspects included in this study. However, these are costly to carry out and may appear unsuitable when the respondent is not capable of discerning the content of an item at different points in time.

years and finding that the human resources-business outcomes relationship is less pronounced in this case.

Third, the questionnaires provided us with information related to human resources practices and business outcomes. In this situation there is a tendency for the respondent to rate variables over which they have a direct influence more favourably. Furthermore, there may be differences between the practices laid out by human resources management and those applied by middle managers.

Future research should look toward overcoming the limitations mentioned above and extending the scope of the research based on the findings of this study in terms of other possible contingencies that condition the effectiveness of personnel policies with a focus on the way in which companies implement personnel strategies.

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Resumo

A perspectiva configuracional, a qual se faz referência, a necessária integração e coerência entre as distintas práticas de Recursos Humanos aplicadas - ajuste directo - assim como a necessidade de adaptação em diversos aspectos organizativos - numa amostragem de 48 organizações pretendemos demonstrar a forma como é aplicados os sistemas coerentes com a proposta de Delery y Doty (1996) e a sua adequação e a estratégia de negócio e integração dos Recursos Humanos no processo estratégico e a repercussão positiva nos resultados empresariais.

Palavra chave: Recursos Humanos, configurações, resultados, estratégia de negócio, integração.

