

*Review*

# An investigation into the SHRM perspectives effectiveness: A comparative study

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Accepted 23 November, 2015

The existing Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) approaches have been studied and analyzed in order to identify the main theoretical perspectives or models that are usually applied to SHRM. The investigation of the literature starts with the identification of such popular SHRM perspectives as the universalistic perspective, the contingency perspective, the configurational perspective, and the contextual perspective. Both the traditional and recent studies were examined in order to assert the main concepts of the models and to compare the approaches in relation to their effectiveness when used in the context of discussing HRM practices implemented in the public sector of Qatar in 2009. The literature on the configurational approach was discussed with particular attention, as this approach is usually selected by researchers in order to discuss the effectiveness of the HRM practices' implementation and is often chosen to work with quantitative data. This study will cover the details of different SHRM perspectives, the comparison of the approaches, the advantages of the configurational approach, the appropriateness of using the configurational approach while working with quantitative data, and the aspects of using the configurational approach in different contexts.

**Key words:** Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), SHRM approaches/models/perspectives, universalistic perspective/approach, contingency perspective/approach, configurational perspective/approach, contextual perspective/approach.

## INTRODUCTION

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) can be considered to cover the wide range of management tasks and approaches, including the management of change, the performance of the organization, effectiveness, and culture that represent the organisation's orientation to efficient strategies and future accomplishments (Den Hartog et al., 2013, p. 1640; Dhiman & Mohanty, 2010, p. 75; Gill & Meyer, 2011, p. 6). If traditional Human Resource Management (HRM) covers the areas of recruitment, training and development, rewards, and performance measurement while proposing practices to manage these fields, SHRM is concerned with developing and integrating strategies based on HRM practices that can lead the organisation to achieve the set strategic goals (Katou, 2013, p. 676; Mann, 2006, p. 36; Onyemah, Rouzies & Panagopoulos, 2010, p. 1953; Sanders, Dorenbosch & De Reuver, 2008, p. 413). In this

context, there are different approaches to theorising SHRM. Today, researchers are inclined to focus on four approaches that are used to explain the basic features and principles of SHRM. These approaches, or models, are the universalistic perspective, the contingent perspective, the configurational perspective, and the contextual perspective (Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2005, p. 634). It is important to note that the four approaches differ regarding the specific aspect related to SHRM that is accentuated by the researchers who support using this or that approach to SHRM (Delery & Doty, 1996; Khawaja, Azhar & Arshad, 2014, p. 216; Pfeffer, 1998). The aim of this literature review is to compare the identified approaches to theorising SHRM and to focus on discussing the appropriateness of the configurational perspective to explain the situation regarding the recent adoption of HRM practices in Qatar. From this point, the literature review presents the discussion of four separate

theoretical approaches to SHRM, it compares aspects of the approaches with focus on the configurational perspective, and it analyses the modes of using the configurational approach for analysing the situation in Qatar.

## SHRM PERSPECTIVES

### The Universalistic Perspective

One group of researchers have focused on promoting the universalistic perspective of, or the universalistic approach to, SHRM (Beh & Loo, 2013; Hamid, 2013; Hughes, 2002). Innes and Wiesner define the universalistic approaches as “based on assumptions of human capital theory” and focusing on “the notion that HR practices impact linearly on employee knowledge, skills, and abilities” (Innes & Wiesner 2012, p. 33). According to the proponents of the approach, while discussing SHRM it is important to focus on certain ‘best’ practices, which can be discussed as universally effective and valid to improve the organisational performance, regardless of the specific features of the organisation (Beh & Loo, 2013, p. 157-158; Hamid, 2013; Hughes, 2002).

Thus, in their research, Delery and Doty state that the followers of this perspective claim, “some human resource practices are always better than others and that all organisations should adopt these best practices” (Delery & Doty 1996, p. 803). These researchers admit that there is a linear relationship between HRM practices and the changes in the organisational performance (Zheng et al., 2007, p. 694). If certain HRM practices are implemented in the organisation, they can guarantee increases in performance. For instance, Pfeffer is inclined to offer sixteen best practices, discussed by the researcher as effective, to influence the performance in the organisation (Pfeffer, 1998). The other researchers choose to determine practices oriented to training and development, compensation, security, and employee involvement as important to achieve high performance (Beh & Loo 2013, p. 157-158; Hamid, 2013, p. 186).

In this context, Allani, Arcand, and Bayad identify several specific principles, according to which the universalistic model develops. These principles include the universality of the best HRM practices, which can influence organisational performance, the superiority of those HRM practices that can be discussed as strategic, and the autonomy of ‘best’ practices that are usually implemented separately, the effects of which on performance are additive (Allani, Arcand & Bayad, 2003, p. 237). Nevertheless, the problem is in the fact that the supporters of the universalistic perspective do not “study either the synergic interdependence or the integration of practices” (Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2005, p. 634). Researchers that

choose the universalistic approach are inclined to measure only one HRM practice at a time, in order to determine how effective this practice can be at influencing organisational performance or the employees’ attitudes to their jobs (Allani, Arcand & Bayad, 2003, p. 237; Delery & Doty, 1996; Khawaja, Azhar & Arshad, 2014, p. 216; Pfeffer, 1998; Takeuchi, Wakabayashi & Chen, 2003, p. 449).

### The Contingent Perspective

The second group of researchers developed the principles of the contingent perspective, according to which the features of SHRM can be discussed (Bakshi et al., 2014; Bergeron, Raymond & Rivard, 2004; Wan-Jing & Huang, 2005). In contrast to the universalistic approach, the proponents of the contingent approach state that the relationship between HRM practices and the performance of organisation cannot be discussed as linear because it is necessary to achieve a match between HRM practices and the stages of the organisation’s development (Lepak, Bartol & Erhardt, 2005, p. 140; Zheng et al., 2007, p. 694). According to Zheng and the group of researchers, certain HRM practices cannot be totally effective at different stages of the organisation’s progress, and matching the practices and the organisation’s needs is key to success (Zheng et al. 2007, p. 694). The proponents of the idea of contingency choose to pay attention to certain variables that can influence the effectiveness of HRM practices in specific contexts (Wan-Jing & Huang, 2005, p. 437-438). Thus, Bergeron, Raymond, and Rivard state that organisational and environmental factors can influence not only the choice of HRM practices necessary at different stages of the company’s life cycle, but also the effectiveness of the practices’ implementation (Bergeron, Raymond & Rivard, 2004, p. 1003-1004). In turn, Allani, Arcand and Bayad (2003, p. 237) note that the effectiveness of this approach is in the perspective’s responsiveness to a range of external factors that influence the implementation of HRM practices and their fit to the business strategy.

If the universalistic approach accentuates the autonomy of HRM practices, the supporters of the contingent perspective point to the necessity of integrating different practices and factors like innovation, product quality, and customer satisfaction in order to achieve the higher performance (Allani, Arcand & Bayad, 2003, p. 237; Rose & Kumar, 2006, p. 19; Karanja, 2013, p. 2). In this context, contingency means the consistency of using certain practices in different situations when the company takes different strategic positions (Farr & Tran, 2008, p. 378). When different organisations adopt different practices to support their strategies, it is necessary to measure the effectiveness of these HRM practices (Bowen, Galang & Pillai, 2002, p. 106; Shih & Chiang

2005, p. 584). The followers of the contingent perspective measure the HRM practices while focusing on the criteria of a match and its appropriateness, rather than on the criterion of effectiveness (Bakshi et al., 2014, p. 89; Desarbo et al., 2005, p. 51).

### **The Configurational Perspective**

The third group of researchers, who theorise SHRM, adopted the configurational perspective, according to which the theorists identify “configurations, or unique patterns of factors, that are posited to be maximally effective”, in order to promote the performance of the organisation (Delery & Doty, 1996, p. 808). Waiganjo and Awino indicate that a set of configurations, which are properly selected to be implemented as a unit in the organisation, are ‘bundles’ in which certain HRM practices support the other practices in order to lead the organisation to completing its strategic goals (Waiganjo & Awino, 2012, p. 82-83). Nigam et al. note that the HRM practices should be perceived as a system wherein the focus is on the horizontal fit and on the vertical fit that reflect the internal effectiveness of HR practices, and the match of the HR practices with the strategy (Nigam et al., 2011, p. 149). Furthermore, according to the researchers, “a particular business strategy requires a specific approach to SHRM. It emerges from the contingency approach that the relationship between SHRM and performance is contingent upon the business strategy” (Nigam et al., 2011, p. 151). In this context, the configurational approach is the expansion of the contingent approach that is associated with the ideas of fit, synergy, and integration (Bahuguna, Kumari & Srivastava, 2009, p. 101).

‘Synergy’ is a specific state, or combination of practices to gain the benefits, that is “achievable only if HRM policies and practices perform in combination and better than the sum of their individual performances” (Arshad, Azhar & Khawaja, 2014, p. 94). Moreover, the ‘internal fit’ refers to the specific situation when the company can work “to develop interconnected and mutually reinforcing HRM policies and practices” (Arshad, Azhar & Khawaja, 2014, p. 94). In contrast to the definition of the ‘internal fit’, there is the definition of the ‘external fit’. In their research, Arshad, Azhar, and Khawaja pay attention to the fact that when the organisation tries to develop a bundle of HRM practices “that comes fit with the business’s strategies even beyond the scope of HRM, case for ‘external fit’ stands for” (Arshad, Azhar & Khawaja, 2014, p. 94). Thus, according to Raymond et al., a configuration can be considered to be “the true essence of strategy to the extent that it results from the alignment (or “fit”) between the firm’s structure, activities, and environment” (Raymond et al., 2010, p. 124). Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez, and Sanchez-Gardey also emphasise the advantage of the configurational approach to SHRM, that is the possibility to develop the synergic

integration of HRM practices as “a multidimensional set of elements that can be combined in different ways to obtain an infinite number of possible configurations” (Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2005, p. 637). To support this idea, it is necessary to refer to the research by Innes and Wiesner, who have found that the multidimensional elements of HRM practices, implemented in organisations as a set or a bundle, can work “synergistically towards internally coherent and valuable configurations of HR practices” (Innes & Wiesner, 2012, p. 33).

If it is possible to apply a set of best HRM practices, based on the internal and external fit, to reinforce the effectiveness of practices in the organisation, it is important to identify the particular features of the organisational context in order to determine “the most effective practices leading to higher business performance” (Arshad, Azhar & Khawaja, 2014, p. 98). While summarising the idea, it is relevant to state that the configurational approach “implied the specific configurations of HR practices with their respective organisational contexts” (Arshad, Azhar & Khawaja, 2014, p. 98). From this point, it is important to speak about the configurational approach to SHRM as the holistic approach, because the focus on configuration means the choice of multiple bonds and non-linear interactions between the specific strategy followed in the organisation and the set of HRM practices (Allani, Arcand & Bayad, 2003, p. 238; Hughes, 2002, p. 222; Uysal, 2014, p. 130; Zheng et al., 2007, p. 694).

### **The Contextual Perspective**

Another group of researchers chooses to focus on the broader perspective, such as the contextual approach, and analyses different contexts within which an organisation can develop (Brewster, 1999; Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2005). According to Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez, and Sanchez-Gardey, “while the rest of the perspectives, at best, considered the context as a contingency variable, this approach proposes an explanation that exceeds the organizational level and integrates the function in a macro-social framework with which it interacts” (2005, p. 638). Innes and Wiesner identify the important features of the perspective while stating that the contextual approach shifts “a level of analysis to a wider network of stakeholders to social, institutional and political forces” (Innes & Wiesner, 2012, p. 33).

In this context, the selected HRM strategies can influence, and be influenced by, both the internal and external factors. Moreover, the role of environmental factors is emphasised because it is important to focus on the broader organisational context (Zheng et al. 2007, p. 695). In his research utilising the contextual model, Brewster emphasises the “importance of such factors as culture, ownership structures, labour markets, the role of

the state and trade union organisation” in affecting the implementation of HRM practices in organisations (Brewster, 1999, p. 48). The contextual approach is often used in studies in order to research the implementation of HRM practices in organisations with reference to contexts that can change the perspective and the overall effectiveness of the certain practices.

### Comparison of the SHRM Approaches

The scholarly literature presents different approaches to comparing such SHRM perspectives as the universalistic, the contingent, the configurational, and the contextual models. While comparing the universalistic and contingency perspectives of SHRM, Bahuguna, Kumari, and Srivastava note that there are multiple dimensions of the organisational performance and it is necessary to choose practices that are fitting in relation to certain dimensions and certain aspects of the strategy (Bahuguna, Kumari & Srivastava, 2009). In this context, the contingency perspective is more effective than the universalistic one, oriented to the use of unique ‘best’ practices in all the contexts. Wan-Jing and Huang note that there is lack of evidence to state that the universalistic approach is effective enough to be implemented in organisations and achieve their strategic goals (Wan-Jing & Huang, 2005, p. 437).

In turn, Takeuchi, Wakabayashi, and Chen are inclined to support the use of the configurational approach; there is the evidence to state that bundles of HRM practices should be implemented symmetrically to the specific processes observed in the organisation (Takeuchi, Wakabayashi & Chen, 2003). This model argues against the universalistic approach, when one practice can be considered as fitting in relation to multiple different organisations. When the manager focuses on using HR practices in bundles, the positive effects on performance and effectiveness of operations in an organisation are more obvious (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009, p. 68). Therefore, the configurational approach is more progressive and complex than the contingency approach, which was traditionally discussed as more effective than the universalistic model (Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2013).

Following the configurational perspective, Choi and Lee suggest that the congruence among definite HRM practices followed by an organisation leads to the success and progress of its development (2013, p. 575). Thus, the implementation of only one HRM practice cannot produce the same effect as the implementation of a bundle of connected practices, selected according to the principle of congruence (Trehan & Setia, 2014, p. 790). Furthermore, in contrast to the universalistic approach, or the ‘best practice’ approach, the supporters of the configurational model note that the implementation of one HRM practice, or a series of non-connected practices, cannot lead to such high results as the

implementation of a bundle of efficient HRM practices (Oyler & Pryor, 2009, p. 443; Pourkiani, Salajeghe & Ranjbar, 2011, p. 417).

If the universalistic, contingency, and configurational perspectives share the same theoretical backgrounds, allowing an effective comparison of the approaches, the contextual perspective is based on theories other than the rational theory, human capital theory, and the resource-based theory (Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2013). Still, the researchers focus on comparing the approaches with regards to the appropriateness of the SHRM model to explain all types of relationships observed between the realisation of HRM practices and employees’ attitudes and behaviours (Oyler & Pryor, 2009; Pourkiani, Salajeghe & Ranjbar, 2011). From this point, the universalistic, contingency, and configurational perspectives provide more opportunities for studying the problem than the contextual perspective.

### ARGUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE CONFIGURATIONAL Perspectives

The recent literature on SHRM approaches demonstrates the presence of active debates on the appropriateness of using certain models. From this point, it is important to start by offering the arguments for using the configurational approach, in order to discuss the implementation and analysis of HRM practices in organisations. Thus, the researchers try to answer the question of why the configurational perspective should be selected to discuss the implementation of HRM practices in different contexts and with reference to many ideas and visions (Allani, Arcand & Bayad, 2003, p. 238; Arshad, Azhar & Khawaja, 2014, p. 94; Delery & Doty, 1996, p. 808; Smeenk et al., 2006, p. 2050). One group of researchers is inclined to state that the advantage of the configurational approach is that it is possible to focus on the observed effects of system interaction in the organisation when the bundles of practices are implemented (Bergeron, Raymond & Rivard, 2004; Colbert, 2004, p. 345; Fiss, 2007; Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2013; Morris & Snell, 2011; Payne, 2006). From this perspective, such researchers as Allani, Arcand, and Bayad emphasise the necessity of allocation of four configurations, expansion, development, productivity, and repositioning, in order to achieve strategic goals (Allani, Arcand & Bayad, 2003, p. 238). In addition, the researchers also stress the effectiveness of the configurational approach for developing strategies in the organisation through the actual implementation of them, as this model is centred on “the implementation of strategy (strategy as “realised”) rather than on strategic positioning (strategy as “planned”)” (Bergeron, Raymond & Rivard, 2004, p. 1003-1004; Delery & Doty, 1996, p. 808; Raymond et al., 2010, p. 125).

The second group of researchers chooses to focus on the fact that the configurational perspective provides the most complex view of implementing HRM practices in organisations to achieve observable results (Fey, Bjorkman & Pavlovskaya, 2000, p. 2; Raymond et al., 2010; Stavrou & Brewster, 2005; Wiklund & Sheperd, 2005). Therefore, this approach can be discussed as holistic when compared to the universalistic, contingent, and contextual approaches (Katou, 2013, p. 676; Mann, 2006, p. 36; Onyemah, Rouzies & Panagopoulos, 2010, p. 1953; Sanders, Dorenbosch & De Reuver, 2008, p. 413). Morris and Snell, as well as other researchers, note HRM practices should be implemented and analysed as systems because organisations can be perceived to be systems of interconnected human resources, material resources, processes, and operations (Aahunanya, Ifebuzo & Nkemakolam, 2014, p. 408; Morris & Snell, 2011, p. 809). The researchers also conclude that the adopted HRM practices should also be implemented as systems related to each other. These systems, or combinations, of practices help to achieve a competitive advantage in the company (Morris & Snell, 2011, p. 809). The next argument is associated with the concepts of and synergy, and their role for influencing the environment within the organisation (Innes & Wiesner, 2012, p. 33; Krishnan & Singh, 2001, p. 62; Morris & Snell, 2011; Payne, 2006).

In their research, Pourkiani, Salajeghe, and Ranjbar indicate that the managers and leaders in organisations should not only focus on aligning HRM practices and the stages of the company's development, as according to the contingency approach, but also on aligning several HRM practices implemented in the organisation to achieve higher results and to enhance organisational performance and competitiveness (Pourkiani, Salajeghe & Ranjbar, 2011, p. 417). The result of aligning HRM practices is the creation of a coherent HRM system that is oriented to approaching the organisation's strategic goals. This internal alignment can be discussed as the horizontal fit that is associated with selecting the practices that can be effectively implemented as a set or a bundle (Morris & Snell, 2011; Payne, 2006; Pourkiani, Salajeghe & Ranjbar, 2011, p. 417).

It is also necessary to pay attention to the fact that the importance of bundling HRM practices is supported by many researchers, who state that it is ineffective to implement and then assess individual or isolated practices that cannot demonstrate the overall progress in human resource management within the organisation (Bahuguna & Kumari, 2008, p. 5; Becker & Huselid, 2010, p. 381; Kase & Zupan, 2005). In their research, Stavrou and Brewster claim that when HRM practices are discussed by researchers in bundles, it is possible to analyse how different multiple practices can reinforce each other and associated conditions to affect the employees' attitudes and performance (Stavrou & Brewster, 2005, p. 190). Furthermore, different SHRM

configurations can be used to influence different aspects of human resource management; it is important to vary the practices implemented in bundles in order to achieve the set strategic goal and improve performance within a certain area (Pourkiani, Salajeghe & Ranjbar, 2011, p. 419). As a result, there is an opportunity to achieve the benefits of synergy in the organisation (Bahuguna & Kumari, 2008; Morris & Snell, 2011). From this point, Payne states that the main focus is on achieving coherence and contributing to the achievement of the organisational strategic goals (Payne, 2006, p. 758). In this case, the configurational approach to SHRM allows the organisation to not only achieve the strategic goal but also analyse all the management's strengths and weaknesses in a bundle.

While referring to the configurational model, researchers mention that they can concentrate on specific interactions in bundles of HRM practices that can further result in the most effective performance, high commitment, retention, and job satisfaction (Payne 2006; Pourkiani, Salajeghe & Ranjbar 2011; Scully et al. 2013, p. 2300). In addition, while focusing on both horizontal and vertical or internal and external fits, the researcher can conclude about the overall effectiveness of the model and management in the organisation because the stress is not only on the impact of practices on employees but also on strategic configurations (Waiganjo et al. 2012, p. 66). As a result, while using the configuration approach, an investigator can assess the specific need of the organisation for achieving the success regarding the vertical and horizontal fits (Garcia-Carbonell, Martin-Alcazar & Sanchez-Gardey 2014, p. 72).

Still, there are many opponents of the configurational approach to discuss the effectiveness of SHRM practices. Such researchers as Beh and Loo pay attention to the fact that there is no need to complicate the process of analysing the data when it is possible to use such linear approaches as the universalistic model (Beh & Loo, 2013; Hamid 2013). This idea is also supported by Hamid, who states that the universalistic approach is appropriate in many cases because it enables the researcher to focus only on one point or practice at a time. As a result, the accuracy of conclusions increases (Hamid, 2013). The other researchers point at the possibility to use the contingent approach because it is often used to demonstrate the relationship between the implementation of HRM practice and employees' performance or perceptions (Lepak, Bartol & Erhardt, 2005). Nevertheless, there is no other model that allows the discussion of all practices and several clusters at a time. From this point, while focusing on the holistic analysis, it is necessary to choose the configurational model.

### **The Configurational Perspective and the Quantitative Method**

Following the claim by Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez, and Sanchez-Gardey, it is important to note

that the configurational model is a single approach to SHRM, which allows focus to be placed on the quantitative method in the research supported with references to the cluster analysis and factor analysis (Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2005, p. 637). As a result, this model is usually used in empirical SHRM studies that are focused on discussing different sets of HRM practices as effective for different firms and organisations (Alusa & Kariuki, 2015; Innes & Wiesner, 2012, p. 48; Meyers & Woerkom, 2014). Thus, in their research, Ibrahim and Shah studied such HRM variables as training, performance management, appraisal, and compensation, and their impact on the employees' performance and job satisfaction. It was found that HRM bundles of practices had a positive impact on the employees' job satisfaction and productivity (Ibrahim & Shah, 2012, p. 52). The literature shows that the use of the configurational approach allowed for discussion on the effects of HRM practices on performance and satisfaction from a larger perspective (Alusa & Kariuki, 2015, p. 73; Bao & Analoui, 2011, p. 33). Meyers and Woerkom also suggest the use of the configurational approach to measure HRM practices in order to avoid the misleading results associated with measuring individual HRM practices (Meyers & Woerkom, 2014, p. 193). It is also important for organisations to focus on bundles of appropriate HRM practices in order to understand the synergistic connections, as well as the consequences of these connections for the employees' work (Guest et al., 2003, p. 293; Maryam & Sina, 2013, p. 703; Trehan & Setia, 2014, p. 790). From this point, the configurational approach is usually discussed as the most appropriate model to study the effectiveness of HRM practices from the holistic perspective and with reference to the quantitative data.

However, according to Fiss, it is difficult to measure configurations because it is necessary to refer to clustering algorithms that are usually too complex to be used frequently (Fiss, 2007, p. 1180). Still, it is important to state that the configurational approach continues to be actively used in the field because of the necessity to work with variables, which are supported by quantitative data, and that should be examined with the focus on the statistical analysis (Bartel, 2004; Wiklund & Sheperd, 2005, p. 73). In spite of the fact that the reference to the configurational approach means the focus is on complex, nonlinear relationships, it is a single approach that provides researchers with an opportunity to study nonlinear relationships, as well as the effects of synergy and interaction (Marler, 2012, p. 7; Michie & Sheehan, 2005, p. 446). As a result, the researcher is able to create the empirical profile for studied configurations, measure them, and determine their effectiveness and impact on the employees within the organisation (Bartel, 2004, p. 185; Fiss, 2007, p. 1183). In the context of Qatar, bundles of practices or clusters that are effective when

implemented in the public sectors are training and development practices, compensation practices, promotion programs, and performance management programs.

The results of the implementation of identified programs and practices can be calculated. This fact is one of the main reasons to choose the configurational approach when discussing the issue. The assessment of HRM practices with reference to the quantitative method means that a statistical analysis is likely used, and the main focus is on relationships between the identified variables. In this context, much attention should be paid to the configurational model, which allows for explanation of the relationships from many perspectives (Guest et al., 2003, p. 293; Maryam & Sina, 2013, p. 703; Trehan & Setia, 2014, p. 790).

### **The Implementation of the Configurational Theory in Different Contexts**

The implementation of the configurational theory in different contexts is usually studied from a cross-cultural perspective. The supporters of this idea note that the configurational approach can be effectively used in environments other than the United States and Europe, when there are barriers for using it in the context of African, Eastern, and Asian countries (Arshad, Azhar & Khawaja, 2014; Brewster, 1999; Onyemah, Rouzies & Panagopoulos, 2010). Thus, researchers agree that the universalistic and contextual approaches are usually to be used in the western context, when the configurational and contingency models are appropriate to explain management systems in the eastern context (Brewster, 1999; Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2005, p. 638; Nigam et al., 2011, p. 149). The proponents of discussing the situation in Qatar, with reference to the configurational approach, suggest that the discussion of patterns of HRM practices in an organisation can be more effective than focusing on individual practices; there are many cases in eastern countries where managers try not to implement specific individual HRM practices, but focus on clusters of practices (Arshad, Azhar & Khawaja, 2014; Williams, Bhanugopan & Fish, 2011). Thus, in the broader context, the integration of the new HRM practices in Qatar's public sector should be discussed from the point of the configurational approach. The proposed approach focuses on HRM practices that are directly associated with each other, while aiming to reform the basic approach to using the HRM practices in the sphere (Williams, Bhanugopan & Fish, 2011, p. 201).

The literature on SHRM models demonstrates that the configurational approach is associated with the idea that the performance and perception of employees can be influenced by the combination of certain HRM practices implemented in an organisation in order to achieve its strategic goals (Brewster, 1999; Martin-Alcazar, Romero-

Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2005; Nigam et al., 2011). As a result, a configuration of HRM practices can guarantee that the practices implemented as a set are reinforced by each other. This is due to the implemented bundle being a source for additional conditions that influence the development of practices within the organisation (Nair et al., 2007, p. 2; Williams, Bhanugopan & Fish, 2011). When applying this idea to the context of Qatar's public, it is important to note that a positive effect is possible when the HRM practices proposed in 2009 are implemented as bundles in public organisations. Effective analysis of these outcomes is expected when the configurational approach is applied to the research that discusses the changes in the attitudes of employees affected by the bundles of HRM practices (Nair et al., 2007, p. 4-5).

The implementation of bundles of HRM practices in organisations means that there are strict relationships between the training and development practices and programs, compensation management practices, promotion, and performance management practices in relation to their impact on the employees' perception of their organisation and, subsequently, their performance (Nair et al., 2007, p. 2; Shih, Chiang & Hsu, 2006, p. 757). In order to enhance the positive changes in the public sector, HRM practices should work together (Arshad, Azhar & Khawaja, 2014, p. 94). As a result, a complex implementation of practices, based on the developed and proposed HRM policies, is expected. In this context, it is necessary to see the whole picture and analyse the situation from every side (Lahteenmaki & Laiho, 2011, p.168). The examined literature shows that the configurational approach adopted in the research is effective in this case. It allows the researcher to state whether the implementation of HRM practices as bundles in the public sector in Qatar can be discussed as the most effective strategy and whether the proposed HRM policy is strategically oriented (Nair et al., 2007).

## CONCLUSION

The attempts to compare different approaches to SHRM was made by many researchers, and the literature provides much evidence to state which model can be effectively used in different contexts. However, it is important to note that the focus on the concrete perspective depends on the objectives of the researcher and on the context within which the certain model can be used. The configurational approach, adopted in the research of HRM practices within the context of Qatar's public sector, can be discussed as an effective choice because this SHRM model allows for the discussion of the results from a holistic perspective. In addition, it is possible to use and analyse the quantitative data with reference to the configurational approach, as it is oriented to the use of statistical tools and instruments for the

analysis. The literature on the configurational approach demonstrates that with the opportunity to analyse the HRM practices in bundles, the researcher can refer to both the horizontal and vertical fits in order to conclude whether there are significant impacts of the implemented HRM practices on the employees' attitudes and behaviour. The examined literature supports the idea that the configurational approach is the most appropriate choice to discuss sets of HRM practices and their overall effect on the employees' retention in the public and semi-private sectors of Qatar.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work is supported by The Ministry of Defense of State of Qatar (Qatar Armed Forces).

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