Human Resource Practices and Employee Attitudes: A Study of Individuals in Ten South African Companies

Renier Steyn

Abstract

A number of studies have shown that effective human resource (HR) practices correlate with employee attitudes. However, just which combinations of HR practices relate to desirable employee attitudes (EA) are not entirely clear. Arguments for universalistic, contingency, and configurational perspectives are found in academic literature. This paper presents the results of a study involving ten South African companies and 750 employees. It investigates the predictive influence of HR practices on employee attitudes. EA, such as work engagement and particularly intention to quit, are important in business, as these aspects are seen as an antecedent to company performance. The results indicate that, for the whole group (N=750), effective HR practices coincided with desirable EA outcomes. This suggests a confirmation of the universalistic perspective. There were, however, notable exceptions, and in some companies none of the HR practices correlated with EA. There is also little evidence that specific HR practices coincide with particular outcomes or that particular HR practices predict EA across companies. The idea of a generic configurational perspective is therefore not a straightforward view. The results therefore do not support a simple universalistic or configurational perspective of HR, and due to the lack of support for these perspectives it is suggested that the contingency perspective be investigated. However, investigating the prevalence of this perspective was not possible in this specific study as data from only ten companies was available.

Keywords: Personnel Management, Organisational Performance, Human Resources Models

1 Introduction

The literature and certain textbooks on human resource management reflect an implicit link between human resource (HR) practices and desirable outcomes, such as company performance. For example, Noe, Hollenbeck, Gergart and Wright (2008) name the first chapter of their textbook 'Human resources management: Gaining a competitive advantage'. Boselie (2010) name one of the chapters of his book, 'Human resources management and performance: Adding value through people'. The Aston Centre for Human Resources (2008) dedicates a chapter of its strategic human resources textbook to 'Human resources management and organizational performance'. Examples of articles on the suggested link between HR practices and desirable outcomes are also numerous (Guest 1997; Huselid 1995; Lee, Lee & Lum 2008; Petrescu & Simmons 2008; Ramlall 2003). Some of these articles also demonstrate such a link.

HR practices that may be related to desirable outcomes are numerous. When the content of textbooks (Bernardin 2010; Cascio 2010; Gómenz-Mejía, Balkin & Cardy 2007; Noe *et al.* 2008) was scrutinised, six themes were identified: (1) acquiring human resource capacity (this relates to practices such as job analysis and work design); (2) manpower planning and recruiting employees (as well as employee selection); (3) assessment and development (this aspect relates to practices such as performance management and the rating of employees; training of employees; and career development); (4) compensation (this refers to practices such as compensation management; merit pay and incentive awards; and employee fringe benefits); (5) labour-management accommodation (this relates to practices such as employee relations programmes; employee rights and labour discipline; organised labour unions; and collective bargaining); and, finally (6) diversity management and employee health programmes (including health and safety and employee assistance programmes). The practices listed do not differ fundamentally from those described in other textbooks that were examined, namely Currie (2006), Nkomo, Fottler and McAfee (2005), Pynes (2009), Redman and Wilkinson (2009), Snell and

Bohlander (2007), Storey (2007), as well as Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk and Schenk (2008).

The outcomes associated with HR practices can be classified into three broad categories (Boxall, Purcell & Wright 2007; Guest 1997). These are employee attitudes (for example job satisfaction – Chew & Chan 2008; Fiorita, Bozeman, Young & Meurs 2007), behavioural outcomes (such as work performance – Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchinson, Rayton & Swart 2003; Ramlall 2003; Zerbe, Dobni & Harel 1998) and organisational outcomes (such as return on investment – Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg & Kalleberg 2000; Guest 1997; Huselid 1995). In this study the emphasis will be on employee attitudes.

The empirical evidence cited in the previous paragraph, which supports the link between HR and desirable outcomes, is usually based on the correlation between HR practices and outcomes, and has little to say about the reasons behind this correlation. In this research, perspectives on the link between HR practices and desirable outcomes will be explored by focusing on the type or types of HR practices that lead to desirable outcomes. Theories suggest that this link can be explained from at least three perspectives, namely a universalistic, a contingency, and a configurational perspective (Aryee & Budhwar 2008; Delery & Doty 1996).

- The universalistic perspective is based on the pioneering work of Pfeffer (1994; 1995; 1998). Pfeffer found that organisational performance depends on common HR practices, and that this is true regardless of the industry or strategy pursued. These HR practices are: employment security, selective hiring, self-managed teams and the associated decentralised decision-making, compensation based on work-related performance, extensive training, reduction in formal status and barriers between employees, as well as information sharing (Pfeffer 1998). Once a company is able to engage fully in these best practices, performance will follow. Fundamental to this approach is that employees are seen as assets to the company and, as such, as being worthy of development, and that all parties agree that employee skills, and discretionary efforts, are mutually beneficial and that an exchange between the employer and employee will occur (Pfeffer 1998).

- The contingency perspective on the effects of HR practices is that the practices should fit the external context in which they are applied (Guest 1997). Aryee and Budhwar (2008:194) express it elegantly: 'Informed by the notion of vertical fit between HR practices and business strategy, the strategic contingency behavioural perspective posits that organisations that adopt a specific business approach require a specific set of HR practices in order to achieve superior performance'. It is suggested that HR practices should be informed by strategy (Porter 1985) and that these practices would solicit behaviour that corresponds to an organisation's specific goals (Jackson, Schuler & Rivero 1989). This would then be different from the universalistic perspective, where certain best practices across the board (or horizontally) result in organisational performance.

- The configurational perspective reflects the notion that distinctive bundles or patterns of HR practices will result in superior organisational performance, given that the less distinctive practices are provided at a reasonable minimum level (Guest 1997). Guest (1997:271) refers to 'patterns of HR practices that are horizontally integrated'. The configurational perspective has more to do with the pattern of multiple independent variables, than with individual independent variables, and how the pattern of variables relates to the dependent variable (Delery & Doty 1996). In contrast to the contingency perspective that advocates a vertical fit, 'the configurational perspective advocates a horizontal fit. Horizontal fit describes internal consistency among HR practices that actively leads to superior organizational performance' (Aryee & Budhwar 2008:195).

- The aim of this research was to find evidence of the presence of the universalistic and configurational perspectives in data on HR practices and employee attitudes collected from ten South African companies.

- Evidence of the presence of a universalistic model might be that all HR practices would predict organisational outcomes in all companies.

- Evidence of a configurational model might be that specific groups of HR practice(s), when applied effectively, would make a unique contribution to the outcome(s) in all ten companies.

No effort was made to find evidence of a contingency perspective as data on the present strategic position of the companies was not collected.

2 Research Strategy

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were employees in ten different South African companies to which Masters of Business Leadership students had access. The study was thus carried out on an opportunity sample (Rosnow & Rosenthal 2008). The groups involved were travel agency employees (Company 1, N=90), sales personnel from a fast moving consumer goods group (Company 2, N=70), call centre personnel (Company 3, N=30), HR employees at a telecommunications company (Company 4, N=126), local government employees (Company 5, N=97), technical personnel in an engineering environment (Company 6, N=123), financial sector staff (Company 7, N=92), accounting firm personnel (Company 8, N=45), recruitment agency staff (Company 9, N=30), and staff employed by an owner-managed small business (Company 10, N=47).

2.2 Demographic Variables

In total, 750 employees volunteered to participate in the research, of which 376 were male and 374 female. The racial composition was: 319 black African, 88 coloured, 102 Indian, and 241 white. The average age of the respondent was 35.12 years (SD=9.27), and the average tenure was 6.36 years (SD=6.48).

2.3 Measuring Instruments

Five instruments were used: the Human Resources Practices Scale (HRPS; Nyawose 2009), the General Satisfaction items of the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS; Hackman & Oldham 1975; in Fields 2002), the Organisational Commitment Scale (OC; Allen & Meyer 1990), the Utrecht Work

Engagement Scale–9 (Schaufeli & Bakker 2003), and Section VIII of the Workplace Scale (ITQS; Firth, Mellor, Moore & Loquet 2004).

The Human Resource Practices Scale (Nyawose 2009) was used to measure the perceived effectiveness of the HR practices. The questionnaire consisted of 27 items, covering nine HR practices, with three questions per practice. Only five HR practices were assessed in this study, namely training and development (TD), compensation and rewards (CR), performance management (PM), staffing (S), and diversity management (DM). The following is an item from the training and development part of the scale: 'My company is committed to the training and development needs of its employees'. Respondents were requested to indicate their views on this statement on a scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). For each individual HR practice the minimum score would be 3 and the maximum 15. A high score on the survey would be indicative of a belief that HR practices were effective whereas a low score would indicate that the respondents were not satisfied with the HR practices provided. Nyawose (2009) reports internal consistencies varying from .74 to .93 for these scales, and significant correlations (in the expected direction), with outcomes such as occupational commitment and turnover intentions.

The General Satisfaction items of the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS; Hackman & Oldham 1975; in Fields 2002) represent 'an overall measure of the degree to which the employee is satisfied and happy with the job' (Hackman & Oldham 1975:162). This part of the survey consists of five items. The first item reads as follows: 'Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job'. Respondents are requested to indicate their views on this statement on a scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). The minimum score is 5 and the maximum 35. A high score indicates high job satisfaction and a low score indicates that the respondents are not satisfied with their job. Hackman and Oldham (1975) report an internal consistency value of .76 and, with regard to validity, report 'adequate' discriminant validity. They also point out that the theory-specific relationships among the scales are in the predicted direction. This points to construct validity.

The Organisational Commitment Scale (OC; Allen & Meyer 1990) is used to assess organisational commitment. The scale consists of 24 questions. The first item of the scale reads as follows: 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation'. Respondents are requested to

indicate their views on this statement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The minimum score is 24 and the maximum 168. A high score on the scale indicates high levels of commitment and low scores signify low commitment. Allen and Meyer (1990) report an internal consistency of .86, .82 and .73 for the three subscales of the scale. Furthermore, Allen and Meyer (1990:13) report evidence of construct validity, and also write that the 'relationship between commitment measures … and the antecedent variables … was, for the most part, consistent with prediction'. This points to convergent and discriminant validity.

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale–9 (EE; Schaufeli & Bakker 2003) is a summative assessment of vigour, dedication and absorption. The questionnaire consists of nine items. The following is a typical item from the scale: 'At my work, I feel bursting with energy'. Respondents are requested to indicate their views on this statement on a scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). The minimum total score is 0 and the maximum 54. A high score on the survey would indicate high levels of engagement and a low score would indicate that the respondents are not engaged. Schaufeli and Bakker (2003:33) report that the 'Cronbach's α of all nine items varies from .85 to .94 (median=.91) across the nine national samples. The α-value for the total data base is .90'. With regard to validity, Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006) say that the suggested three-factor structure of engagement is confirmed (cross samples from different countries) and that the construct is related to other constructs in the expected manner. This suggests construct validity.

Section VIII of the Workplace Scale (ITQS; Firth *et al.* 2004) measures employee intentions to quit their present jobs. The questionnaire consists of two items. The first item reads as follows: 'How often do you think of leaving your present job?' On this item respondents are requested to indicate their views on this statement, on a scale ranging from 1 (rarely or never) to 5 (very often). The minimum score is 2 and the maximum 10. A high score indicates that respondents are likely to leave the job, while a low score indicates that respondents are likely to stay in the job. On reliability, they report an α-value of 0.75. As far as construct validity is concerned, Firth *et al.* (2004) were able to demonstrate that intention to quit correlated, in the expected manner, with related constructs.

2.4 Procedure

The same strategy was followed to identify participants in each company. A list of all possible candidates was drawn up and numbered. Candidates were then selected from the population list using random numbers generated on the internet (see http://www.random.org/integers/). The only exclusion criterion used was educational qualifications. It was a requirement that all respondents had at least a grade 12 to ensure that they had no difficulty completing the questionnaires. Only individuals who understood and who were willing and able to agree to the conditions of the informed consent form were included in the groups that were assessed. Participants were requested to complete the questionnaires and a concerted effort was made to ensure their anonymity. Once the data was collected it was forwarded for coding and statistical analysis.

2.5 Statistical Analyses

All calculations were done with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The reliability of the questionnaires was calculated and was presented as Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Validity information was generated using a principal component analysis and an Oblimin rotation was performed to help in the interpretation of the components. For the different variables means were computed (per company) and differences between means were explored using a one-way analysis of variance. This provided a general overview of the data. Bivariate correlations were calculated to determine if all HR practices (together) correlated with (specific) organisational outcomes. If all HR practices correlated with a specific employee attitude in all companies this would constitute strong support for the universalistic perspective. This analysis was followed by linear regression analyses, which were done to calculate the predictive capacity of HR practices (independent variable) on organisational outcomes (dependent variable). The significance (or not) of the regression coefficient (R^2) was used to indicate the predictive capacity of HR practices on employee attitudes, and was used as another indicator of the universalistic perspective. The significance of the standardised betas in the regression analysis was used as an indicator of the unique contribution of independent variables in the prediction of the dependent variable. This was used to identify possible

patterns of HR practices that relate to organisational outcomes, and reflects on the presence of the configurational perspective.

3 Empirical Results

3.1 Reliability and Validity

The reliability of the measures, expressed as Cronbach's alpha coefficients, was as follows: α(CR)=.87, α(S)=.74, α(PM)=.81, α(DM)=.75, α(TD)=.88, α(JDS)=.76, α(OC)=.82, α(EE)=.91, α(ITQS)=.84, with N=750. All the observed coefficients were higher than the .60 margin set by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham (2006).

Due to the regular use and reported validity of the JDS, OC, EE, and ITQS, and because of general acceptance of these measures as assessment instruments of separate constructs, the only validity information reported was that relating to the less familiar Human Resource Practices Questionnaire (HRPQ).

The 15 items of the HRPQ were subjected to a principal components analysis (PCA). Prior to performing PCA, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients or .3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .88, which exceeded the recommended value of .6 (Keiser 1970; 1974), and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett 1954) reached statistical significance, which supported the factorability of the correlation matrix.

Principal component analysis revealed the presence of four components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 42.2%, 9.4%, 8,7%, and 8.00% of the variance, respectively. An inspection of the screeplot revealed a clear break after the second, and a smaller break after the fifth component. The fifth component explained 5.9% of the variance. A five-factor solution was decided on because the HRPQ aims at assessing five human resource practices. The five-component solution explained 73.4% of the variance, with the different components contributing 42.2%, 9.4%, 8,7%, 8.00% and 5.9%, respectively. To aid in the interpretation of the components, an Oblimin rotation was performed. The rotation revealed a simple structure, with variables of the different subcomponents loading substantially on only one component. The interpretation of the five components is consistent with previous literature (Nyawose 2009), which suggests that the various human resource management practices can be separated from one another.

3.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the mean scores of all the measures per company. A one-way analysis of variance revealed that the mean scores of the companies differed significantly on all variables, indicating between-company variance on the different variables. All F-values were significant at the .01 percent level, and the values were 9.81 (CR), 5.70 (S), 3.85 (PM), 8.16 (DM), 7.77 (TD), 7.57 (JDS), 9.42 (OC), 6.61 (EE) and 7.18 (ITQS). In Table 1 the two highest scores (in bold) and the two lowest scores (underlined) per measure are highlighted.

Table 1
Mean Scores for Variable per Company

	Company										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
CR	**3.44**	3.06	2.62	2.88	2.83	3.29	**3.52**	2.28	2.92	2.98	3.07
S	**3.70**	3.22	3.14	3.01	3.28	3.24	**3.63**	3.44	3.02	3.33	3.31
PM	**3.60**	3.38	3.43	3.34	3.07	3.46	**3.64**	3.39	3.01	3.36	3.39
DM	3.42	3.19	2.88	3.08	2.97	**3.54**	**3.71**	3.06	3.14	3.35	3.28
TD	4.07	3.75	3.33	3.81	3.48	**4.08**	**4.20**	3.61	3.19	3.42	3.80
JDS	**4.96**	4.46	4.15	4.34	4.48	**5.00**	4.95	3.97	4.09	4.85	4.62
OC	**4.51**	4.47	4.35	4.08	4.35	4.22	4.45	3.93	4.38	**4.77**	4.33
EE	4.00	4.14	3.45	3.78	3.86	4.10	**4.23**	3.33	3.19	**4.61**	3.95
ITQS	2.16	2.70	**3.00**	2.95	2.70	2.32	2.29	**3.32**	2.93	2.20	2.59

CR=Compensation and rewards; S=Staffing; PM=Performance management; DM=Diversity management; TD=Training and development; JDS=Job satisfaction; OC=Organisational commitment; EE=Employee engagement; ITQS=Intention to quit

From Table 1 it can be seen that companies that scored high on the independent variables also scored high on the dependent variables (see Company 1), and companies that scored low on the independent variables also scored low on the dependent variables (see Company 9). However, no clear pattern can be observed from this table to make any comments on the presence of any of the different perspectives on HR effectiveness. The broad overview of Table 1 is refined when considering the correlations between the HR practices and employee attitudes.

3.3 Correlations between HR Practices and Employee Attitudes

Table 2 reports the correlation between HR practices and job satisfaction.

Table 2
Correlation between HR Practice Scores and JDS

Company											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
CR	.38**	.45**	.51**	.52**	.49**	.31**	.24*	.61**	.52**	.34*	.47**
S	.33**	.19	.41*	.33**	.39**	.16	.22*	.37*	.59**	.15	.32**
PM	.58**	.41**	.39*	.36**	.41**	.33**	.23*	.49**	.50**	.31*	.42**
DM	.20*	.36**	.42*	.36**	.42**	.27**	.21*	.46**	.36	.15	.36**
TD	.72**	.08	.55**	.43**	.42**	.41**	.31**	.34*	.46**	.13	.44**

CR=Compensation and rewards; S=Staffing; PM=Performance management; DM=Diversity management; TD=Training and development
*p < .05; ** p < .01

It can be read from Table 2 that in Company 5 all HR practices correlated with job satisfaction, suggesting support for a universalistic perspective. But this is not the case in all companies. For example in Company 10, only CR and PM correlated with JDS, suggesting that the universalistic approach is not applicable across companies.

Similar results, where in some companies all HR practices correlated with employee attitudes (compared with only some practices in other companies), were found for organisational commitment and employee engagement. In both the cases of organisational commitment and employee engagement all the M practice scores for the total group correlated significantly with these constructs. In the case of organisational commitment the correlation coefficients were .339** (CR), .298**(S), .292**(PM), .331**(DM) and .303** (TD) and in the case of employee engagement the correlation coefficients were .298** (CR), .313**(S), .300**(PM), .255**(DM) and .336** (TD).

The same tendency was found with the correlation between HR practices and intention to quit. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Correlation between HR Practice Scores and ITQS Scores are Presented in table 3

Company											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
CR	-.33**	-.33**	-.21	-.46**	-.39**	-.23**	-.13	-.66**	-.18	-.19	-.38**
S	-.23*	-.16	-.23	-.30**	-.36**	-.09	-.10	-.33*	-.18	-.15	-.25**
PM	-.48**	-.28*	.12	-.35**	-.31**	-.14	-.14	-.42**	-.12	-.21	-.28**
DM	-.03	-.29*	-.35	-.35**	-.32**	-.22*	-.17	-.28	-.13	-.24	-.28**
TD	-.68**	-.20	-.39*	-.36**	-.40*	-.25**	-.27**	-.18	-.34	-.23	-.37**

CR= Compensation and rewards; S=Staffing; PM=Performance management; DM=Diversity management; TD=Training and development
*p < .05; ** p < .01

In Table 3 we can again observe that in some companies (see Company 4) all HR practices correlate with ITQS, and in others, for example Company 9 and 10, not a single practice correlates with the construct. As in the case of JDS, OC and EE, the scores for all the groups combined (see total) correlated significantly with the employee attitudes. This seems to suggest that in general HR practices correlate with employee attitudes, and that the universalistic perspective is usually acceptable. However, this would equate to a generalisation, as this conclusion is not applicable to all companies.

3.4 Regression Analyses

To gain information on the link between HR practices and employee attitudes, and to determine if certain patterns of HR practices predict attitudes, linear regression analyses were performed, with HR practices as the independent variable and organisational outcomes as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

HR Practices as Predictor of Employee Attitudes and Intention to Quit Reported per Company

		Company									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
JDS	R^2	.555	.281	.351	.333	.291	.242	.145	.480	.479	.144
	p	<.01	<.01	n/s	<.01	<.01	<.01	<.05	<.01	<.01	n/s
	β^2	TD	CR		CR		PM, TD	TD	CR, DM	S	
OC	R^2	.283	.353	.403	.260	.267	.201	.134	.513	.273	.185
	p	<.01	<.01	<.05	<.01	<.01	<.01	<.05	<.01	n/s	n/s
	β^2	S, DM, TD	DM		CR, S	TD	DM	TD	CR		S
EE	R^2	.508	.195	.405	.285	.145	.089	.099	.389	.234	.181
	p	<.01	<.05	<.05	<.01	<.05	<.05	n/s	<.01	n/s	n/s
	β^2	S, TD	S		CR, S, PM, TD		PM		PM		S
ITQS	R^2	.523	.171	.349	.260	.219	.105	.092	.522	.124	.104
	p	<.01	<.05	n/s	<.01	<.01	<.05	n/s	<.01	n/s	n/s
	β^2	TD		PM	CR			TD	CR, TD		

CR=Compensation and rewards; S=Staffing; PM=Performance management; DM=Diversity management; TD=Training and development; JDS=Job satisfaction; OC=Organisational commitment; EE=Employee engagement; ITQS=Intention to quit

R^2 reflects the model summary, with CR, S, PM, DM, and TD as dependent variables; p tests the null hypothesis that $R^2=0$; and B lists the independent variables that contribute significantly to the model.

Evidence of a universalistic model could be that HR practices (together) across companies consistently contribute towards outcomes, considering the significance (or not) of the R^2. When considering the regression models for JDS in Table 4, the fact that HR practices do not significantly explain the variance in JDS in some companies (see Company 3 and 10), suggests the rejection of the idea of a universalistic model. The same can be observed for Companies 9 and 10 for OC, Companies 7, 9 and 10 for EE and Companies 3, 7, 9 and 10 for ITQS. In these cases HR practices did

not predict the outcomes significantly. This suggests that the universalistic model of HR may not be valid in all cases.

Evidence of a configurational model could be that the same HR practice(s), carried out consistently across companies contribute uniquely to the outcome(s). This would suggest that the same independent variable(s) would stand out in predicting the dependent variable. From Table 4 it can be read that, for Company 1, in a model that includes CR, S, PM, DM, and TD as independent variables, 55.5% of the variance in JDS (the dependent) is explained. A null hypothesis that R^2 is equal to zero can be rejected ($p<.01$). TD is the only independent variable that makes a significantly unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable (JDS). For Company 2, as another example, 28.1% of the variance is explained, with CR making a significant and unique contribution to the explained variance. When considering all ten companies, it becomes clear that no distinct pattern can be observed regarding the variables that contribute to JDS. This suggests the absence of a configurational explanation of the effects of HR practices on JDS. The same situation repeats itself for OC, EE, and ITQS, where no clear pattern of HR practices predicts these outcomes. The results do not seem to support the configurational model.

4 Summary and Conclusions

The aim of this study was to obtain evidence regarding the presence or dominance of a specific theoretical perspective on how HR practices relate to employee attitudes in South African companies. Employees from ten companies participated. In total 750 respondents reported their perceptions on the levels of HR and employee attitudes.

The reliability of the measures was acceptable (Cronbach alpha above .75) as well as the test of validity.

The results from the means table provided no clear indications of the presence of any of the theoretical perspectives on HR. The results from the correlation table provided evidence in favour of the universalistic perspective, indicating that, for companies in general, a broad spectrum of effective HR practices correlated with employee attitudes. This is particularly evident in the correlations with the total scores, and was present in all the observed cases. There were, however, some exceptions. Most noticeable, as from Table 3, was the small recruitment agency (Company 9, N=30), and an owner-

managed small business (Company 10, N=47). In both cases, the HR practices did not predict variance in employee attitudes. This suggests that, although the universalistic perspective may be true in general, it is not true in all cases. The results found for the small companies may be because the HR systems were not formalised, and this may explain these exceptions.

Evidence from the linear regression equation does not support the universalistic perspective as well as the data from the correlation tables. The inconsistent nature of these results makes the blanket acceptance of the universalistic perspective irresponsible.

Evidence supporting the configuration perspective was not found. No particular patterns could be identified in beta values in Table 4, making this hypothesis unlikely. The number of companies involved in the study, namely ten, was a problem in this regard, as this made the identification of patterns or configurations difficult. It would be advisable that any future researchers involve more companies and that extensive information be obtained regarding the delivery of HR practices, rather than focusing solely on the outcomes of these practices.

A constraint in this research, particularly about the interpretation of the results, was the limited information obtained on the companies themselves. More information on topics such as the amount of formalisation of systems, the size of the company, the size of the HR department, as well as the type of business environment, could have contributed meaningfully to the analysis and discussion.

A further possible problem is related to the measurement in general, and measurement in HR in particular. In this regard Edgar and Geare (2005), with reference to the measurement of HR practices and employee attitudes, declare that different measures often produce different results. Thus, the tools used in this study may influence the results, and it could be suggested that the study be replicated in a different environment, using different tools.

From the aforementioned it is clear that the final word on the perspectives of which HR practices to implement has not yet been written, and that there is still a need to research this topic in more depth.

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Graduate School of Business Leadership
University of South Africa
Johannesburg, South Africa
steynr@unisa.ac.za