

WHAT DO SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH SAY ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES? CURRENT ITINERARIES AND NEW POSSIBILITIES

GISELA DEMO

UNIVERSIDADE DE BRASÍLIA (UNB)

ANA CAROLINA REZENDE COSTA

UNIVERSIDADE DE BRASÍLIA (UNB)

KARLA VELOSO COURA

UNIVERSIDADE DE BRASÍLIA (UNB)

ANA CAROLINA MIYASAKI

UNIVERSIDADE DE BRASÍLIA (UNB)

NATASHA FOGAÇA

UNIVERSIDADE DE BRASÍLIA (UNB)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of people in organizations as protagonists in the production of knowledge and organizational effectiveness, acting as drivers of results such as competitiveness, efficiency, quality, productivity, among others, is already consensual among the main authors of Human Resources and Organizational Behavior. This time, the Human Resources Management (HRM) area must take precedence over the greater personal and professional fulfillment of the employees, since the well-being of people should be the main agenda of organizations (Demo, 2016).

In this perspective, the strategic management of people is the rethinking of policies, practices and activities of Human Resources Management (HRM), taking into account the contextual variables and the multiple actors involved, so as to assume an internal cohesion to the function of HRM, as well as a strategic integration with the objectives of the organization, to obtain more effective results (Boxall, 1996; Buren, Greenwood, & Sheehan, 2011; Cascio, 2015; Lacombe & Tonelli, 2001; Leite & Albuquerque, 2011; Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall, 2011). Also, in the strategic vision of Human Resources Management, HRM practices are fundamental in achieving organizational objectives (Legge, 2006).

Considering the strategic nature of HRM practices for organizations, we focus on the following research question: how to describe the scenario of the current scientific publications on HRM practices in organizations in order to trace the itineraries of international production and discover new research possibilities?

Thus, the main objective of our study is to carry out a systematic and bibliometric review of the international high-impact scientific production to map the recent state of the art in the theme, in order to highlight both the current research itineraries and the literature gaps that launch new research possibilities.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Changes in the political-economic environment, coupled with the continuous pursuit of employees for a better quality of life, led organizations to adapt to new contexts, innovating to gain space in future markets and investing mainly in human capital (Deadrick & Stone, 2014; Reginaldo, Tartari, & Lira, 2016). Thus, HRM evolved from a Personnel Department to a human relations function, later to work relations, industrial relations, and, more recently, to the strategic function of HRM (Deadrick & Stone, 2014).

Thus, the HRM underwent a re-signification that can be illustrated when the conservative version (hard) of human resources management, which focuses on quantitative and calculative aspects, understanding people as any other economic resource (Armstrong, 2014), has given rise to the modern version (soft), which understands people as valuable organizational heritage and source of competitive advantage (Legge, 1995), constituting the most important organizational resource to be managed.

This proposal is in accordance with the Resource Based View presented by Barney (1991), the conceptual framework of our study, which argues that people and their interactions are valuable resources in the production of knowledge and attainment of organizational objectives. These assumptions define the fundamentals of HRM practices, so that, rather than a differentiated perspective of better treatment of people, Legge's (2006)

modern HRM brings with it new roles, challenges and perspectives, laying the foundations for the so-called Strategic Human Resource Management.

Strategic Human Resource Management, in turn, can be understood as rethinking HRM strategies, policies and practices, integrated with organizational objectives, in order to leverage results at the individual, group and organizational levels, taking into account environmental and the multiple actors involved (Boxall, 1996; Buren et al., 2011; Cascio, 2015; Lacombe & Tonelli, 2001; Leite & Albuquerque, 2011; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011).

In this context, Martín-Alcázar, Romero-Fernández and Sánchez-Gardey (2005) indicate that HRM strategies define the guidelines that serve as the north for workforce management, while policies seek to coordinate practices for consistency and follow in the same direction. Finally, the practices are at the end of the operation, assuming the lowest level among the three, and represent the actions themselves, being the main protagonists in achieving results (Legge, 2006).

In fact, several studies have evidenced positive relationships between HRM practices and other variables of organizational behavior, such as commitment, productivity, profitability and quality (Guest, 1987; Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Ulrich, Halbrook, Meder, Stuchlik, & Thorpe, 1991), organizational performance (Boselie, Dietz, & Boone, 2005; Menezes, Wood, & Gelade, 2010; Subramony, 2009), organizational effectiveness (Guest & Conway, 2011), satisfaction, motivation, turnover and absences from work (Katou, 2012), stress reduction and improved health (Bono, Glomb, Shen, Kim, & Koch, 2013).

In addition, studies have shown that HRM practices influence both trust relationships in organizations (Gould-williams, 2003; Horta, Demo, & Roure, 2012; Tzafrir, 2005) as well-being (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008; Turner, Huemann, & Keegan, 2008) and resilience at work (Costa, Demo, & Paschoal, 2019), while they are influenced by organizational values (Demo, Fernandes, & Fogaça, 2017), personal values and perception of organizational justice (Demo, 2010).

It is pertinent to remember that the strategic role of HRM practices applies not only in the private sphere, leveraging competitiveness and results as profitability, but also the public context, which has citizens as a clients and society as a whole, both yield results in terms of effectiveness, no matter how measured (accountability, productivity, service, speed, etc.).

Therefore, these empirical studies confirm the strategic relevance of HRM practices as propellers of different attitudes, behaviors and organizational results, which encouraged us to go a step further and identify the new paths that scientific research in the theme have gone through, as well as the new possibilities of research by which we can venture.

3. METHODOLOGICAL COURSE

Considering the objective of mapping the recent state of the art of scientific production in HRM practices, through the identification of the research itineraries that have shed light on the gaps in the literature and, subsequently, new research possibilities, a descriptive study was carried out, who chose as method the systematic review of the literature, with bibliometric analyzes.

Bibliometry is a quantitative and statistical technique that seeks to measure production indexes or research patterns, as well as to monitor the development and dissemination of scientific knowledge of some subject (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004). In addition, this technique points to the behavior and development of an area of knowledge, while it identifies theoretical and empirical gaps in scientific production (Araújo & Alvarenga, 2011), therefore relevant to the attempts of this paper.

In order to achieve the systematic review of the literature, we take as a basis the protocol proposed by Cronin, Ryan and Coughlan (2008), formed by the following steps: (a)

formulation of the research question; (b) set of inclusion and exclusion criteria; (c) quality of the literature; (d) assessment of relevance and; (e) assessment of eligibility.

Item (a) refers to the research problem already mentioned in the introduction, which is: how to describe the scenario of current scientific publications on HRM practices in organizations in order to trace the itineraries of international production and unveil new possibilities for research?

Thus, to obtain the item (b) of the protocol, was made a survey of the scientific publications in HRM practices, in the month of July, 2019, in the Web of Science (WoS) database, because it is considered one of the most embracing (dating from 1990) and, mainly, to gather the main international journals of high impact (Chadegani et al., 2013). We searched for the keyword "HRM practices" in titles, abstracts, keywords author or keywords plus, totaling 1,237 publications. The results were filtered for the documentary type "paper" and the results were delimited for the last five years, that is, from 2015 to 2019, depicting the recent state of the art of the construct. Next, we selected the following knowledge area filters, namely: "business economics"; "psychology"; and "public administration", since they are the areas related to the object of this study. Thus, step "b" was completed, and from this search, 407 articles returned.

Then, the journals were filtered through the quality criterion (step "c"). We considered only the journals indexed by the Journal Citation Report (JCR), with the purpose of identifying the papers published in journals with high impact factor, which brings more quality to the results of the research. After this screening, the number of articles totaled 279. The impact factor of 2018 was considered because the 2019 index was not published until the close of this study.

Subsequently, the relevance analysis (step "d") of each of the 279 articles was carried out, checking whether the title, abstract or keywords were relevant or not to the context of HRM practices. This step removed 96 papers, resulting in 183 papers.

Finally, in the eligibility assessment (step "e"), the resulting 183 articles were analyzed in full, verifying whether they were eligible or not. From this stage, 121 articles were produced, which compose the corpus of the present work. Figure 1 presents the diagram of the steps of the systematic review of the literature, inspired by the protocol of Cronin et al. (2008).

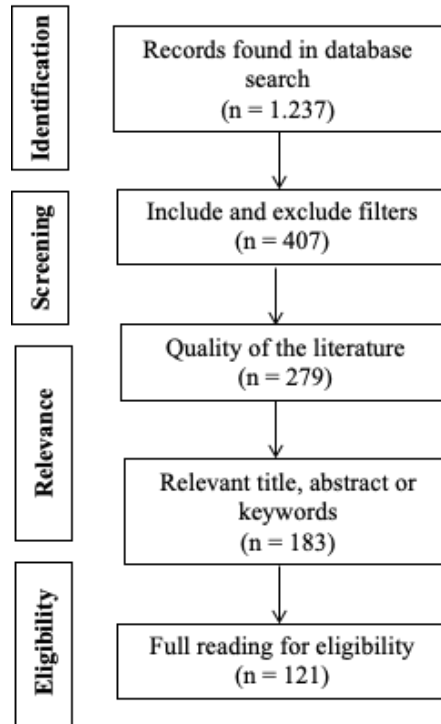


Figure 1: Search strategy flow diagram
Source: elaborated by the authors, 2019.

In order to present the results, bibliometric analyzes were performed using software *VOSviewer 1.6.10*, *Microsoft Excel*, and the web page *Word it Out* for the construction of the word cloud. Using *VOSviewer* makes it possible to group articles in clusters. This grouping of classes assumes that the words are divided into groups of articles with similar research focus, so that a word does not incorporate different classes (Kronberger & Wagner, 2002). In addition, the analysis of data was complemented by the assumptions of Bardin (2016) when, in the context of the content analysis, there is the discussion about the association or analysis of the relations, seeking to identify, besides the frequency with which the words appear in full of the article, the relationship between these elements. The analyzes carried out allowed the development of an agenda for further studies.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

With the objective of analyzing the demographic profile of the scientific production concerning HRM practices, which demonstrates the evolution of the number of publications per year, it is verified, according to Figure 2, that 23% of articles were published in the last year and a half (from 2018 to July 2019, time of data collection in the Web of Science), which may suggest that the production of the area, given its strategic nature, continues to gain the attention of the researchers. The timid production in 2019 may be influenced by the fact that the analysis was only done halfway through the year (July).

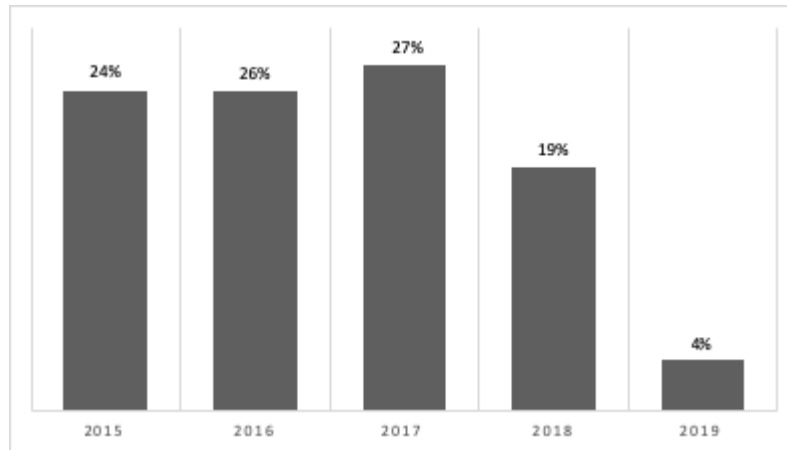


Figure 2. Number of publications per year
Source: elaborated by the authors, 2019.

In addition, most of the articles surveyed are theoretical-empirical, accounting for 93% of the total, while only 7% are theoretical essays. Regarding the nature of the research, it was verified that the majority is quantitative (62%); followed by those of a qualitative nature (21%); multi-method (10%); and do not apply (7%), since they are theoretical essays.

In relation to the countries that have published the most, England stands out with 69% of the publications; followed by the United States, represented at 12%; Netherlands with 6%; Brazil, Australia and Germany tied with 3% each. The rest published 1% each. Regarding the sector of the economy, 64% surveyed the private sector; 4% public; 1% the third sector; 7% conducted a joint study in the public and private sectors; 4% encompassed all three: private, public and third sector; 12% did not report; and 8% do not apply, because they are theoretical essays or bibliometric revisions.

As for the most published journals, the International Journal of Human Resource Management predominated, with 16% of publications, followed by: Personnel Review (11%); Human Resource Management Journal (7%); Employee Relations (6%); Human Resource Management (6%); International Journal of Manpower (4%); and Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources (3%). In relation to the authors, the most productive were Chris Brewster (University of Reading, United Kingdom), with 6 publications; Timothy Bartram (La Trobe University, Australia) with 5 publications; and Tanya Bondarouk (University of Twente, Netherlands) with 4 publications.

In addition, the registry of the list of references in a scientific work reflects the process of constructing the knowledge of the researcher and also presents the dialogue established by him with his peers (Grácio, 2016). Therefore, according to the author, when citing a reference, the researcher reveals which theoretical and methodological references make up the development of his/her work. In this way, in order to map thematic, theoretical and/or methodological proximity between authors, articles, periodicals, countries or other units of analysis, Mashakova (1981) points out that there are two main methods of relational analysis of citations, namely: bibliographic coupling analysis and co-citation analysis.

In order to carry out such analyzes of the 121 articles resulting from our review, we used the *VOSviewer software*, which elaborates a bibliographic mapping through the identification of groups of associated publications (Eck & Waltman, 2017). In this sense, in order to investigate how the topic is found in the literature, a bibliographic coupling study was carried out, in the effort to measure the relationship between two articles, based on the number of common references cited by these articles (Gracio, 2016). Thus, the intensity of the coupling of two articles depends on the amount of references they have in common and the

larger the number of references in common, the greater the binding force between them (Egghe & Rousseau, 2002), whether theoretical or methodological approach (Kessler, 1965).

Figure 3 shows the 41 articles with the greatest total binding force among them, subdivided into 4 clusters. To illustrate some examples, the studies of Aklamanu, Degbey and Tarba (2016), Cafferkey and Dundon (2015) and Saridakis, Lai and Cooper (2017) are the ones with the highest intensity of bibliographic coupling with the other articles, when evaluated in pairs.

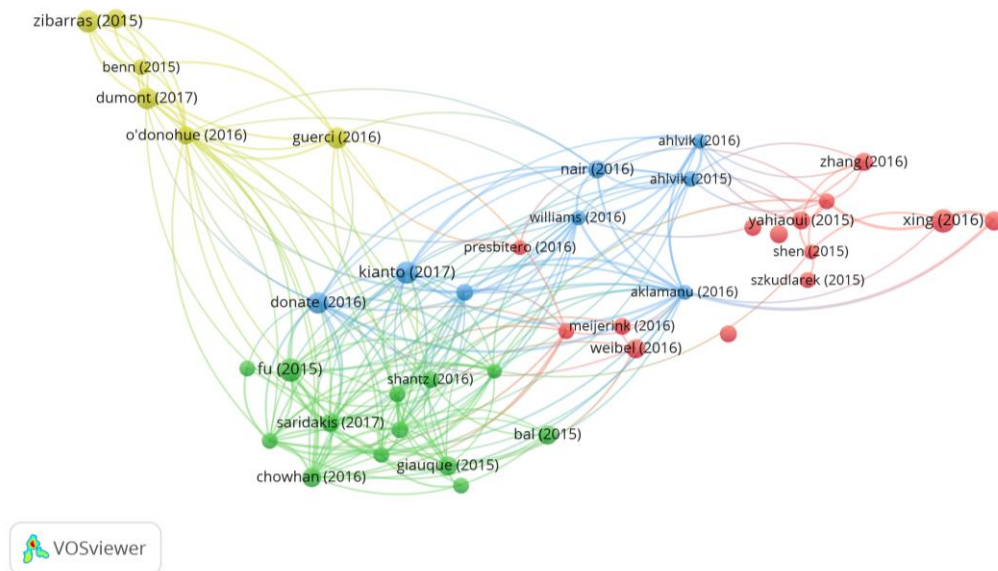


Figure 3. Bibliographic coupling
Source: elaborated by the authors with *VOSviewer*, 2019.

The green cluster has assembled articles that pertain to how HRM practices influence both employee and organizational performance. In this perspective, Shantz, Arevshatian, Alfes and Bailey (2016), when studying the relationship between HRM practices and employee performance, found that practices that seek to improve employee performance, when applied, intensify the sense of involvement them to the organization. The study by Saridakis et al. (2017), when investigating how HRM practice influences performance, concluded that there is a positive relationship between these two variables. In addition, Chowhan (2016) infers that HRM practices, in addition to improving employee performance, also contribute significantly to the performance of the company as a whole.

The blue cluster, on the other hand, analyzes how HRM practices influence the positive results of organizational innovations, both internal and external, such as transferring the company to a new country or in the process of buying/merging organizations. In relation to internal innovations, Donate, Peña and Pablo (2016) concluded that HRM practices allow the employee to acquire skills to deal with new changes in work. In addition, Aklamanu et al. (2016) pointed out that HRM practices constitute one of the reasons for successful mergers and acquisitions, while directly influencing employees' ability to work as a team and share organizational knowledge critical to success of innovations.

The red cluster is composed of studies that investigate the application and effects of HRM practices in different countries: China and Africa (Xing, Liu, Tarba, & Cooper, 2016), France and Tunisia (Yahiaoui, 2015), European countries in general (Weibel et al., 2015), and the Netherlands (Meijerink, Bondarouk, & Lepak, 2016). There is also the study of Shen et al. (2015), that researched in 11 countries how people management influences successful careers.

The authors concluded that HRM practices are great positive influencers, especially those involving Involvement; Training, Development and Education; and Working Conditions.

Finally, the yellow cluster collected studies that relate the HRM practices in the organization and the behavior of employees towards the environment, seeking to identify how these two factors are interrelated. The publications categorized in this cluster analyze two different contexts, namely, organization and environment, so they are further away from other clusters, which analyze HRM practices and their internal influences on organizations. This distancing can be shown by Figure 3, which reveals the yellow cluster furthest from the green, blue, and red clusters.

Then, the analysis of co-citation presents the relationship between two articles in relation to the number of publications in which they are cited concomitantly (Grácio, 2016). Thus, the scientific community defines the proximity and interlocution of two documents insofar as it establishes connections in the process of formation of new knowledge (Grácio, 2016), thus identifying influential and fundamental articles in the scientific community (Small, 1973). The results demonstrate the studies of Huselid (1995), Delery and Doty (1996), Jiang, Lepak, Hu and Baer (2012), Barney (1991) and Bowen and Ostroff (2004) as those with the highest co-citations.

The network of co-authoring by country, in turn, allows to identify the interaction between the authors of different territories (Grácio, 2016). From the results generated by *VOSviewer*, authors from England, Australia, China, the United States and Canada have a greater partnership in the publication of articles.

Additionally, we analyzed the most frequent keywords in the 121 articles surveyed, through the elaboration of a cloud of words, generated in the *Word It Out* platform and illustrated by Figure 4. Of the 447 keywords, we selected only those that were cited at least 3 times, resulting in 26 words.



Figure 4. Word cloud
Source: elaborated by the authors with *Word It Out* software, 2019.

The word cloud seeks to identify the frequency with which words appear in articles by means of the lexicographic visualization of the words contained in the textual corpus examined. It is worth mentioning that the font size of the word reveals whether it was quoted many (large font) or few (small font). Thus, still in Figure 4, the word that appears most is

"Human Resource Management", followed by the words: "HRM practices"; "HRM"; and "human resource management practices", which was expected, considering our subject of study.

Notably, the cloud allows us to unveil the associations that researches have sought to establish between HRM practices and even HRM, in general, with several constructs of organizational behavior. Some of these relations with a recurrent history in the field research such as “firm or organizational performance”, job satisfaction, training, social capital, human capital, employee turnover and innovation (Boselie et al., 2005; Guest & Conway, 2011; Kim & Lee, 2012; Menezes et al., 2010; Subramony, 2009), others seeking to frame HRM practices in strategic and globalized contexts, such as strategic HRM, HRM international, multinational corporations and emerging markets. Also, it caught our attention, the association of HRM Practices with different assumptions and methodological nuances, such as qualitative and mixed methodologies, rehearsing a challenge to the hegemony of quantitative studies in research on the subject.

Such associations undress the routes that research has undertaken to extend the study of the phenomenon to various parts of the world (such as China, for example), in a constant trend of internationalization, ratifying the strategic nature of the implementation of HRM practices and its subsequent impact on important results at the individual, group and organizational levels, as we have already emphasized in the theoretical framework. We also called attention to the effort that has been engendered by researchers to approach HRM practices under different methodological possibilities, favoring multi-method approaches.

5. RESEARCH AGENDA: WHERE ARE WE GOING?

With the objective of analyzing the specific content of the five articles on HRM practices most cited (top five in the theme) to consolidate the recent state of the art in the subject studied and, in particular, to draw up an agenda of future researches based on the agendas proposed by these five studies, we resorted to the Web of Science citation report. Thus, Table 1 lists the 5 articles that received the most quotations in the review period, listed in descending order.

Table 1
Profile of the five most cited articles

<i>Article</i>	<i>Number of citations</i>	<i>Authors</i>	<i>Journal</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Impact factor</i>
Intercultural influences on managing African employees of Chinese firms in Africa: Chinese managers' HRM practices	29	Xing, Y. J., Liu, Y. P., Tarba, S. Y., & Cooper, C. L.	INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS REVIEW	2016	3.639
Knowledge-based human resource management practices, intellectual capital and innovation	29	Kianto, A., Saenz, J., & Aramburu, N.	JOURNAL OF BUSINESS RESEARCH	2017	4.028

HRM practices used to promote pro-environmental behavior: a UK survey	25	Zibarras, L. D., & Coan, P.	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	2015	3.150
HRM practices for human and social capital development: effects on innovation capabilities	23	Donate, M. J., Peña, I., & Pablo, J. D. de S.	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	2016	3.150
Exploring the relationship between HRM and firm performance: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies	15	Saridakis, G., Lai, Y. Q., & Cooper, C. L.	HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT REVIEW	2017	3.685

Source: elaborated by the authors, 2019.

The first study, by Xing et al. (2016), addresses the interorganizational relationship between Chinese enterprises and local unions, investigating the HRM practices of Chinese managers in the management of African employees. In this study, it appears that the practices affect the behavior of local employees, notoriously in the commitment to the organization and their work attitude. In view of this, it becomes imminent the need for further studies, according to the authors, to explore organizational cultural influences in HRM practices. Thus, it is recommended that future research be conducted in emerging market multinationals, because, according to the study, the subject is still untouched, although the wealth of opportunities.

The work of Kianto, Sáenz and Aramburu (2017) proposes a conceptual model in which an explicitly knowledge-based HRM practices system impacts the intellectual capital of a company, producing greater innovation performance. Through an empirical study with Spanish companies, the results showed that intellectual capital positively mediates the relationship between HRM practices based on knowledge and innovation performance, and illustrates the essential role of human capital in this relationship. In this sense, the article suggests the expansion of the research model for alternative contexts and also the exploration of new strategic contingencies related to industry. Therefore, a fruitful path for future research could be the application of the proposed model in other organizational environments, as well as to extend the explanation of the relationships tested using qualitative methods.

Zibarras and Coan (2015) investigated the HRM practices used to promote pro-environmental behavior in UK organizations. Overall, the results pointed out that managers are the "guardians" of environmental performance and that the most prevalent practices incorporate employee involvement. In order to obtain long-term competitive advantage, the authors suggest new studies that seek to relate the practices of HRM with the development of capacities that allow the change to reach goals related to sustainability and the environment. In addition, one can conjecture as an agenda the challenges faced in the implementation of HRM practices in view of the specific role that managers play, relating HRM practices to leadership styles and other variables of organizational culture.

In the fourth article, we analyze the effect of systems of HRM practices on innovation capacities in a Spanish company (Donate et al., 2016). As a result, personal HRM practices positively influence human capital, while collaborative practices influence social capital,

which in turn affects innovation capabilities. The authors suggest for future studies to address the relationship of practices with leadership styles and cultural values, in unison with what we proposed in the previous paragraph.

Finally, in the fifth study, Saridakis et al. (2017) attempted to estimate the effect size of the relationship between high-performance HRM practices and company performance measures based on longitudinal studies. The researchers' findings provide support for the already consensual claim in the academic literature that high-performance HRM practices positively affect company performance. Thus, the authors propose as a research opportunity the possibility of advancing to research models that examine the causal link between HRM practices. Moreover, the findings of this study reinforce the pertinence and necessity of conducting longitudinal studies, still extremely poor in the scientific literature, which allow to follow the trends and challenges of the implementation of HRM practices in a continuous and updated basis.

Although proposing new research possibilities, based on the agendas of the five most cited articles, present the main theoretical contributions of our study, we would like to highlight the relevance of the development of multi-method studies. Such studies seek the so-called triangulation as a way of better approaching and understanding research objects. By combining methods and quantitative techniques that deal with the measurement of a phenomenon, the qualitative approaches, with hermeneutical epistemological assumptions, advance in their interpretation, revealing important nuances that the numbers, by themselves, do not show.

In spite of the database used, Web of Science, concentrate the largest number of high-impact multidisciplinary journals (Chadegani et al., 2013), the production of the theme has not been exhausted and lies the main limitation of our review. Thus, if the desire is to map the production of the theme to its completeness, it is suggested to carry out a broader research that includes other databases, such as Scopus, and includes working papers, such as those presented at congresses and seminars, as well as books, theses and dissertations.

6. CONCLUSION

By tracing research itineraries into HRM practices, presenting the state of the art of scientific production in high impact journals and revealing new possibilities for further studies, we have achieved the objective of this review.

As theoretical contributions, we hope that the results so far collected contribute to the creation of new lines and research agendas in the theme, arising from the gaps outlined. In addition, students and researchers can identify centers of excellence and reference readings to develop their research, establishing partnerships. With respect to the managerial implications, the trajectories of research traced can inspire managers to bring the results of the empirical researches listed here to the organizational practice, recommending an increasingly participatory and effective human resource management.

Finally, our study advances by pointing out the trends in research on the subject, indicating new paths of research that can still be covered, as well as the different theoretical frameworks and methodological possibilities that will enable a new look at HRM practices in organizations.

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