

HR professionals exploring configurational human resource management using a serious game: what do they miss?

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Abstract

Configurational thinking in HRM is expected to increase understanding of the HRM-firm performance link and potentially aid HR professionals in the complex task of designing effective HRM. Here, we specify configurational theory in HRM to a level of detail that has been lacking. We present two empirical sections in this paper. First, we assess the extent to which specific HR practices align with cooperative, adhocratic, mechanistic and market strategy according to HR professionals (N=122). Secondly, we assess the ability of HRM professional to design a cooperative HRM configuration using a serious game (N= 40).

By specifying configurational HRM to this level of detail, both the complexity and enormity of HRM configuration design become evident. Based on the first empirical part of this study, a cooperative HRM configuration made up by the HR practices recruitment, selection, job design, development and training, performance appraisal and compensation is presented. Additionally, based on the second empirical part, results indicate that none of the HRM configurations designed by HR professionals is made up solely by the cooperative HR practices presented in the first empirical section. Implications and future research is discussed.

Introduction

Configurational theory potentially aids our understanding of the relationship between human resource management (HRM) and organizational performance (Short, Payne, & Ketchen, 2008). By identifying unique configurations of (HRM) factors (Delery & Doty, 1996) that increase employee effectiveness (Schuler & Jackson, 1987), HRM is linked to the performance of an organization. Some evidence for this relationship between HRM configurations and employee performance has been found. Both Knol (2013) and (Rauf, 2015), for example, found that well aligned HRM configurations yield better employee results compared to HRM configurations that lacked alignment. However, the generalizability of the HRM performance findings is being questioned (Wall & Wood, 2005). Perhaps more troubling is the suggestion that HR configurations are theoretical constructs rather than practical instruments (Delery & Doty, 1996). This leaves HR practitioners with no input on how to design performance enhancing HRM. In this paper, we address this lack of practicality. First, by assessing the extent to which specific HR practices are imbedded in HRM configurations that align with ideal type organizational strategies. Hereby we attempt to add a layer of detail to configurational HRM that has been lacking. Secondly, by testing the extent to which HR professionals are able to design a cooperative HRM configuration in a serious game setting.

Configurational theory in HRM postulates that unique configurations of relevant (HRM) factors result in maximum performance (Delery & Doty, 1996). An HRM configuration can be defined as a combined set of HRM practices. In order for the HRM configuration to be performance enhancing, it must be integrated with the firms' overall business strategy (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Macduffie, 1995). The extent to which this integration is achieved is referred to as vertical alignment. Additionally, horizontal alignment needs to be achieved.

Horizontal alignment refers to the distinctiveness, consistency and consensus amongst the individual HR practices that make up the HRM configuration (Delery & Doty, 1996; Saridakis et al, 2017). Finally, the perception of HRM by employees and the intention of HRM by management should be similar. This so-called implementation alignment safeguards that the HRM intentions of management are translated to the aspired employee behavior (Gratton & Truss, 2003; Nisshii & Wright, 2008). The HRM configuration increases the desired employee behavior if vertical alignment is achieved, it does so consistently if horizontal alignment is achieved and ensures an effect on employee behavior if implementation alignment is achieved. Hence, the levels of vertical, horizontal, and implementation alignment indicate the extent to which the HRM configuration facilitates the desired employee behavior.

While intuitively appealing, designing effective -well aligned- HRM configurations is challenging. The three levels of alignment give raise to a complex playing field in which HR professionals need to operate. Both the interdependence between strategy and HRM, the large number of HR practice design options, and the importance of effective implementation cause the task of designing firm specific HRM to be complex (Campbell, 1988).

The relationship between HRM and performance has often been described as a ‘black box’. After decades of research, there still is uncertainty concerning the underlying mechanisms that enable HRM to affect performance. Specifically, there is a lack of detail describing the mechanisms suggested by the configurational theory in HRM. While some research has considered HRM configurations and alignment levels (Knol, 2013; Rauf, 2015; Verburg, Den Hartog, & Koopman, 2007) no practical input has been put forward that aids HR professionals in effective HRM design. We attempt to fill this gap by opening the black box of

configurational HRM and provide HR professionals with insights that will assist them in effective HRM design. We do so by first specifying configurational HRM and the alignment principles. Subsequently, based on this specification, we present the cooperative HRM configuration. Finally, we assess the extent to which HR professionals design a cooperative HRM configuration when situated in an (fictive) cooperative organization. We do so by using a serious game we designed, entitled InLine.

Ideal type HRM configuration design

Configurational theory postulates that an HRM configuration should deviate from the ideal-type HRM configuration *exactly* proportional to the extent to which the organization's strategy deviates from the ideal-type strategy (Delery & Doty, 1996). Hence, the need for both ideal type strategies and corresponding HRM configurations. We utilize the organizational typologies defined by Cameron and Quinn (2006) to define ideal type organizational strategies. An organization can strategically focus on the effectiveness criteria flexibility, discretion and dynamism or on the effectiveness criteria stability, order and control (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). Likewise, there is a choice to be made to either be strategically focused on effectiveness criteria that emphasize an internal orientation, integration, and unity or on criteria that emphasize an external orientation, differentiation, and rivalry (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). Depending on these two choices, an organization can be strategically labeled as cooperative, adhocratic, mechanistic or market driven (Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Knol, 2013), see table 1.

Table 1. Ideal type organizational strategies, based on Cameron and Quinn, (2006, p.35) and Knol (2013, p.24).

		Flexibility			
Internal focus and integration	Cooperative organizations Quality, teamwork and employee participation are important. Employee development and empowerment are key characteristics. Success is defined in terms of quality products and long term customer relationship.		Adhocratic organizations Innovation, uniqueness and employee autonomy are important. Employees searching for new product or market opportunities is highly appreciated. Success is defined in terms of ability to create leading innovative products and services.		External focus and differentiation
	Mechanistic organizations A formalized and structured place to work. Procedures govern what people do. The long-term concerns of the organization are stability, predictability, and efficiency. Formal rules and policies hold the organization together. Success is defined in terms of efficiency.		Market organizations Profitability, bottom-line results, strength in market niches, stretch targets, and secure customer bases are primary objectives. Individual employee performance and competition is highly appreciated. Success is defined in terms of competitiveness and productivity.		
		Stability			

The definition of organizational success varies amongst organizations adhering to different ideal type strategies. To achieve organizational success, an organization geared to one of these ideal type strategies needs specific employee behavior. This employee behavior should enable the organization to achieve its goals. In mechanistic organizations, for example, success is defined in terms of efficiency. To achieve success, employees in mechanistic organizations will need to exhibit efficient work behavior. In an adhocratic organization however, success is defined in terms of innovation. Hence, employees need to exhibit innovative work behavior. As there are four ideal type strategies, four strategy enhancing employee behaviors can be defined. These employee behaviors increase the likelihood of achieving strategic goals in the respective strategies.

While all employee behaviors are based on the four respective strategies, additional research has been used. The cooperative employee behavior is based on the concept of organizational citizenship (OCB) (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Specifically, the sub dimension labeled civic virtue. Organizations geared to the cooperative strategy compete on the basis quality, teamwork and long term customer relationships. As employees are considered key resources to achieve these goals, the organization invests in employee development. In return, employees are invested in the longevity and well-being of the organization. In other words, employees are committed to the organization as a whole. Civic virtue is behavior on the part of an individual employee that indicates that he/she responsibly participates in, is involved in, or is concerned about the life of the company (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Cooperative organizations are in need of employees that exhibit these behaviors in order to achieve strategic goals.

The adhocratic employee behavior is based on the concept of innovative behavior (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Organizations geared to the adhocratic strategy compete on the basis of innovation. Success is defined in terms of ability to create leading innovative products and services. To achieve these goals, adhocratic organizations need employees to be creative and focused on improving current products and procedures. Innovative behavior by employees is illustrated by employees who develop, carry, react to, and modify ideas (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Adhocratic organizations are in need of employees that exhibit these behaviors in order to achieve strategic goals.

The mechanistic employee behavior is based on another sub dimension of OCB, namely generalized compliance (Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006). Generalized compliance refers to adherence to rules, regulations and procedures that help the overall system (Podsakoff,

Mckenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). As organizations geared to the mechanistic strategy compete on the basis of efficiency, there is a need for employees that comply with rules and regulations. Mechanistic organizations are in need of employees that exhibit these behaviors in order to achieve strategic goals.

The market employee behavior is based on the concept of entrepreneurship (Knight, 1997). Organization geared towards the market strategy are in need of employees that are proactive. We defined individual behaviors on the basis of the *entrescale* (Knigh, 1997) which examines innovative and proactive disposition of management at a given firm. Employees need to be willing to introduce new products and services, take risks and compete. Market organizations are in need of employees that exhibit these behaviors in order to achieve strategic goals.

These employee behaviors were defined to distinguish the employee behavior needed to achieve strategic goals in all the four respective strategies. However, these four ideal type organizational strategies share focus on one of the two axis's in the competing values model. For example, both cooperative and adhocratic organizations focus on flexibility rather than stability. Hence, some employee behaviors needed in both organizations might overlap. Table 2 present the four employee behaviors linked to the ideal type strategy.

Table 2. desired employee behavior based on ideal type strategy

Cooperative employee behavior	Adhocratic employee behavior
Employees are focused on the quality of their work rather than speed. Employees enjoy working in teams, have listening skills, provide valuable feedback to colleagues, trust colleagues, divide the work equally and are willing to go the extra mile due to their commitment to the organization as a whole.	Employees are focused on improving current procedures/products and/or developing and implementing new ideas. Employees are independent thinkers, add value based on innovation, are experts and gain and share knowledge within and beyond organizational boundaries.
Mechanistic employee behavior	Market employee behavior
Employees are focused on well-defined procedures and rules that apply to their job. Employees read and comply with job manuals, are punctual, do not slack during working hours, conform to standard work hours and do not question the status quo.	Employees are focused on competition. Winning is the ultimate goal and employees are willing to take risks. Profit maximization is achieved by catering to customer needs. Employees proactively search for new market opportunities and are eager to bring new products and procedure to the market.

An HRM configuration is made up by individual HRM practices. It affects employee behavior by designing these HRM practices so that an organization recruits, selects, facilitates and stimulates employees to exhibit specific goal achieving behavior. Here, we consider an HRM configuration to be made up by the four HRM practices present in every organization: 1. recruitment and selection, 2. job design, 3. training and development, 4. performance appraisal and compensation (Knol, 2013; Rauf, 2015). These HRM practices ought to be tailored to the organizational strategy in order to enhance goal achieving employee behavior. If an organization wants to increase, for example, innovative work behavior of their workforce, the HRM practices ought to be designed differently compared to the HRM practices design in organization wanting to increase efficient work behavior.

Using the four ideal type strategies, we defined four ideal type HRM configurations. We defined, for example, the cooperative HRM configuration to fit an organization that is fully

geared towards the cooperative strategy. Every ideal type HRM configuration is made up by specific designs for all the four HRM practices. These HRM practice designs are based on the ideal type organizational strategy and related employee work behavior. Organizations geared towards the adhocratic ideal type strategy, for example, competes in the basis innovation. In order to innovate, there is a need for employees that are focused on improving current procedures and implementing new ideas. In order to recruit and select new employees that can exhibit these behaviors, recruitment and selection should be based on specific expertise, complex problem solving and innovativeness. Hence, recruitment and selection on the basis of specific expertise, complex problem solving and innovativeness is part of the ideal type adhocratic HRM configuration. Likewise, the HRM practices job design, training and development, performance appraisal and compensation are designed in order to align with the adhocratic strategy.

One can argue that – even within one HR practice – more than one criterion will match each ideal type strategy. In the recruitment and selection example we defined specific expertise, complex problem solving and innovativeness to be geared towards the adhocratic ideal type strategy. To capture the design possibilities within one HR practice aligned to one ideal type strategy, we defined three criteria per HR practice that are aligned with one ideal type strategy.

The ideal type HRM configurations matching the ideal type strategies are presented in table 3. We explained that we defined three design options per HRM instrument per ideal type strategy. This results in twelve design options per HRM instrument over all configurations. It results in twelve distinct HRM choices per configuration as well.

Table 3. ideal type HRM configurations

Cooperative HRM configuration	Adhocratic HRM configuration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment & selection Based on accuracy, versatility and craftsmanship. • Job design Based on pace of work determined by employees themselves, employees cover other employees' work, and quality enhancement over speed. • Training & development Increase job specific knowledge, increase collaboration amongst colleagues, quality enhancement. • Appraisal & compensation Based on accuracy, collaboration and craftsmanship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment & selection Based on specific expertise, complex problem solving and innovativeness. • Job design Employees solve complex problems, employees are part of multiple project teams, employees create unique products/service for customer • Training & development Deepening specific knowledge, learning how to operate in project teams, finding new solutions. • Appraisal & compensation Based on innovation, specific capacities, contribution to project teams.
Mechanistic HRM configuration	Market HRM configuration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment & selection Based on speed, production time and getting the job done. • Job design Employees comply with assigned tasks, have clear instructions and do routine work. • Training & development Increase efficiency, speed and efficient job completion. • Appraisal & compensation Based on speed, production and getting the job done. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment & selection Based on candidates being able to attract new customers, result orientation and commercial skills. • Job design Employees acquire own assignments, work individually and determine their own way to get the job done. • Training & development Increase personal results, commercial competencies, getting better at thing employees are already good at. • Appraisal & compensation Based on commercial competencies, personal targets and work is done individually

Hybrid HRM configuration design

The ideal type strategies are theoretical constructs rather than practical reality. In practice, a large portion of the organizations favor a hybrid strategy combining several elements from these ideal types. An organization might, for example, define effectiveness criteria related to external market forces to a large degree but appreciate some level of internal unity as well. This deviation from ideal types strategy greatly increases complexity for HRM configuration design.

Combining ideal type strategy elements suggests a need for a combination of the ideal type employee behaviors. There might be a need for cooperative employee behavior within a firm while simultaneously a need for adhocratic employee behavior. Hence, the HRM configuration should be designed so that it increases both cooperative and adhocratic behavior proportional to the organizational needs. If an aligned HRM configuration is to be designed, the extent to which the organizational strategy deviates from the ideal type strategy needs to be taken into account. The HRM configuration needs to be designed proportionally.

The ideal typical HRM configurations presented in table 3 do allow for some proportional design. As previously mentioned, each individual HRM instrument has three design elements that match one ideal type strategy. Since there are four ideal type strategies, a total of twelve design options are defined per HRM instrument. Each HR instrument design can be focused on *any* three out of these twelve options, thereby allowing a mix to match the chosen hybrid strategy. Recruitment, for example, can be done on the basis of, primarily, accuracy (cooperative focus), but also on complex problem solving (adhocratic focus), and finally, somewhat based on commercial skills (market focus). This design of the HR instrument recruitment would theoretically be tailored to an organization focused strategically on

cooperation primarily, but with an additional strategic focus on adhocracy and a small strategic focus on market elements.

To complicate matters even further: When we consider this customization of the ideal type HRM configurations, we are assuming that one specific design of an HR practice will align solely with one ideal type strategy. In other words, it would increase only one of the four intended employee behaviors. In practice, this assumption does not hold. Focus in recruitment on versatility might be primarily aligned with a cooperative configuration as versatility enables employees to cover for one another and thereby safeguard long term customer relationship. Additionally, one can argue that the quality of products or services increase when employees are versatile enough to consider multiple disciplines. However, adhocratic employee behavior might increase simultaneously when recruiting versatile employees. Versatile employees might take knowledge from other disciplines and applied it to new domains creating new products or services. Thus, the design of one HRM instrument might have effect on more than one of the four ideal typical employee behaviors.

By specifying configurational HRM design to this level of detail, allowing for proportional design, the enormity of the challenge faced by HRM professionals becomes evident. HRM professionals are faced with the challenge of assessing the deviation of organizational strategy from ideal type strategy and subsequently the design of an HRM configuration out of all the possible options. Additionally, in order to design an effective HRM configuration, horizontal alignment guaranteeing uniformity amongst the HR practices needs to be achieved. Finally, as the goal of an HRM configuration is to increase ideal typical employee behavior, there is also a need for effective implementation. Even when considering only four individual HR practices, four ideal type strategies and twelve HR practice design options, the total number of possible HRM configurations is overwhelming.

In the remainder of this paper, two empirical sections are presented. In section 1, we will unravel configurational HRM theory by specifying the ideal typical HRM configurations presented in table 3. To reduce complexity, we present a detailed version of the cooperative HRM configuration only. We chose the cooperative HRM configuration because many SME's are characterized by precisely this strategic orientation (Knol, 2014).

In section 2, we test to what extent HR professionals can successfully design an effective cooperative HRM configuration using a serious game we designed called "InLine". InLine enables us to study the decisions made by HR practitioners while playing. The game provides them with an abstract representation of reality and presents them with a variety of choices. HR professionals are then challenged to make HRM configuration design decisions in a firm with a specified – in this case cooperative- strategy.

First, we present the methodology and results of section 1 followed by the methodology and results of section 2.

Unraveling the configurational view on HRM

Methodology

In order to assess the extent to which a specific design of an HR practice aligns with the ideal typical organizational strategy, several steps are needed.

While configurational HRM theory suggests the design of ideal typical HR configurations, there is little information on how specific HR practices should be designed to align with the ideal typical organizational strategies. HRM professionals design, implement and evaluate HRM practices in order to affect employee behavior. They experience the effects of their HRM design decision in practice. This is usually done in co-operation with line managers. As line managers experience the effects of HR practice design on a daily base when managing subordinates, the effects of HR practice design is evident to them as well. Based on their experience, we expect both HR and management professionals to be able to assess the extent to which the HR practice design options affect employee behaviors and thus align with ideal type strategies. Hence, the population for this study is selected to be professionals (HR and line managers) in the HRM domain.

18 InLine play sessions have been organized between august 2016 and October 2017.

Participants were invited in groups based on their professional expertise. The groups invited were already existing groups such as HRM domain associations. The groups composition can be found in table 4.

Table 4. InLine play sessions

Group description	Number of times a workshop with these types of groups occurred	Total number of participants
HRM associations	9	123
Organizational HR groups	4	19
HRM professionals educational setting	3	17
HRM consultants	2	20

Prior to a play session, participants were asked to fill out a survey related to HR practice design options and their effects. Due to the time limit of some sessions however, we were unable to ask all groups of participants to fill out the survey. A total of 122 respondents filled out the survey. Approximately 75% of participants were female. For distribution of respondents based on profession see table 5.

Table 5. Respondents

Profession	N	% of total
HRM advisors	54	44,3
HRM managers	20	16,4
* Managers	12	9,8
* HR consultants	11	9
* Research professionals in HRM domain	11	9
** Other	6	4,9
Administrative HR professionals	5	4,1
HR students doing an HRM internship	2	1,6
Not specified	1	0,8
Total	122	100

* Respondent indicate 'other profession' in survey and provided textual answers

** Respondent indicate 'other profession' in survey and stated to be coordinators, recruitment professionals or management assistants

Respondent filled out a survey assessing HR practice design options and their effect on employee behavior. First, using a PowerPoint presentation, we elaborated upon the configurational theory in HRM. Secondly, we informed participants about the ideal type strategies and corresponding employee behavior (table 1 and 2). Thirdly, respondents we asked to assess the extent to which the specific HR design options (table 3) affect the defined

employee behaviors (table 2). Fourthly, HR professionals were asked to assess the extent to which these designs of HRM instrument align with the four ideal typical organizational strategies considering the employee behavior needed to achieve strategic goals. Specifically, respondents were asked to divide one hundred points over the four ideal typical organizational strategies when presented with an HR practices. A high score represents a high level of alignment between HRM design option and the organizational strategy at hand. See table 6 for an example question and answer.

Table 6. Example question.

<i>Divide 100 point over the four ideal typical strategies. High scores infer high level of alignment between this HRM practice design and the ideal type strategy. Hence, the HR practices encourages employee behavior needed in organizations applying this strategy.</i>				
HR practice design	Strategy			
	Cooperative	Adhocratic	Mechanistic	Market
Recruitment is done based on accuracy	60	20	20	0

Based on playtest session we separated the HRM instruments recruitment and selection, and appraisal and compensation into four individual HRM instruments. As such, the survey consisted of 72 HR practices options (6 individual HRM instrument, 12 design options per instrument).

During a playtest session participant indicated that answering 72 survey questions related to HR practices was more than desirable. Assessing this level of detail was considered complex and the numbers of questions too large. This in itself, by the way, indicates the complexity of HRM configuration design as HRM professionals do deal with these and even larger number of design options when designing HRM. Based on this feedback respondent were asked to fill out a randomly distributed subset of questions. This is why the numbers of responses per individual item varies from 29 to 41. Some HRM design option items were filled out by 41

respondents while other items were filled out by only 29 respondents due to random distribution of a subset of HR instrument design questions during the survey.

The assessments of the HRM professionals has been collected. First, we have calculated the average alignment scores for all the 72 HR instrument design options. Development done to increase commercial skills, for example, was rated by 30 respondents. We averaged the scores of these 30 respondents over all four ideal typical strategies. The average scores for this particular HRM design is presented in table 7 for clarification.

Table 7. Example average alignment scores HR practice employee development

HR practice design	Strategy			
	Cooperative	Adhocratic	Mechanistic	Market
Development done to increase commercial skills	13,83	18,33	61	6,83

Subsequently, we selected those HR instrument design options that score high (average = >50) on alignment with the cooperative strategy. We suggest that HR practice design options that score 50 or higher on cooperation are in alignment with the cooperative strategy as HRM professionals distributed 50% or more of their points to one out of four strategies. Designing a specific HR practice in this matter is argued to, for a large degree, enhance employee behavior needed to achieve strategic goals in the ideal type organizations. Additionally, we selected the specific HRM design options out of each individual HRM practice that aligns most highly with the cooperative organization. By doing so, we make sure that we present a complete cooperative HRM configuration.

We now present both the top five cooperative HR practices and the cooperative HRM configuration respectively.

Results

Table 8 present the HR practices options that score high (>50) on alignment with the cooperative strategy.

Table 8. HR practices that score high (>50) on alignment with the cooperative strategy.

HR practice	Cooperative	Adhocratic	Mechanistic	Market
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job design Jobs within the organization are design in such a matter that being able to take over from colleague is the most important characteristic of the job. (n=40)	52,75	17,88	8,5	20,88
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance appraisal Employees performance is passed on the basis of ability to cooperate with colleagues (n=40)	52,69	19,1	14,49	13,72
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation Employees are compensated based on their ability and exhibition of teamwork and ability to cooperate with colleagues (n=40)	56,3	19,75	11,75	12,25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Employee development within the organization is based on enhancing teamwork and collaboration skills. (n=31)	58	22,35	5,97	13,68
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Employee development within the organization is based on enhancing the ability to execute multiple roles in teams. (n=31)	51,61	25,16	8,39	14,84

While job design, performance appraisal, compensation and development are present in these HR practice designs that score high on cooperation, a complete HRM configuration additionally needs recruitment and selection design. In table 9 we therefore present the HRM practices that scored the highest on alignment with the cooperative HRM configuration per HRM instrument.

Table 9. Cooperative HRM configuration

HR practices	Cooperative	Adhocratic	Mechanistic	Market
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job design Jobs within the organization are design in such a matter that being able to take over from colleague is the most important characteristic of the job. (n=40)	52,8	17,9	8,5	21,4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance appraisal Employees performance is passed on the basis of ability to cooperate with colleagues (n=40)	51,4	18,6	14,1	13,4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation Employees are compensated based on their ability and exhibition of teamwork and ability to cooperate with colleagues (n=40)	56,3	19,8	11,8	12,3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training & development Employee development within the organization is based on enhancing teamwork and collaboration skills. (n=31)	58	22,4	5,97	13,7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment Employee recruitment is done on the basis of new recruits having craftsmanship. (n=40)	39,6	21,4	19,4	20,1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection Employees are selected on the basis of versatility. (n=39)	46,1	25,1	17,7	11,8

According to the HRM professionals in our sample, all HR practices align with more than one ideal typical strategy by enhancing more than one ideal typical employee behavior. Selection on the basis of versatility, for example, does align with the cooperative ideal strategy (46,1). However, there is, according to our respondents, additional alignment with the adhocratic ideal type strategy (25,1) and some alignment with the mechanistic (17,7) and market ideal type strategy (11,8). These findings suggest that the ideal typical HRM configurations defined in table 3 are indeed theoretical constructs rather than practical reality as no HR practices option aligns solely with one ideal type strategy.

Out of the five HR instrument that score high on alignment with the cooperative strategy, two are designs of the HRM instrument training and development. No design of the HR instruments recruiting and selection was scored with an average of 50 or higher on alignment with cooperation by HRM professionals.

Based on the previously defined theoretical HRM configurations, one HRM practice design scores opposed to what we predicted. All but one of the HR practices options that were scored high on alignment with the cooperative strategy according to HRM professionals were a priority defined to be high in alignment with the cooperative strategy based on theory. The design option for development: *employee development within the organization is based on enhancing the ability to execute multiple roles in teams* however was assigned (by us) to the adhocratic ideal type strategy. With a score of 58 on cooperation alignment and 22,4 on adhocratic alignment, HR professionals indicate that this instrument is highly aligned with the *cooperative* strategy instead of the adhocratic strategy.

Using the average alignment scores enables us to provide HRM professionals with a nuanced view of the cooperative HRM configuration. The extent of alignment can be inferred based on these alignment scores. More specifically, HR professionals now have a more practical input when designing an cooperative HRM configuration. Instead of working out the HRM configuration design using the theoretical ideal typical HRM configuration, we provide individual HR practices alignment scores.

We now present the second empirical section, section 2. Here, we assess the extent to which HRM professionals are able to design the cooperative HRM configuration using the serious game InLine.

The design of the cooperative HRM configuration

Methodology

In order to assess the extent to which HRM professionals design an HRM configuration optimally aligned with a cooperative strategy we hosted multiple workshops in which the serious game InLine has been played. Out of the 18 InLine play sessions mentioned earlier, 5 revolved around the design of a cooperative HRM configuration. A total of 40 respondents played the cooperative strategy version of InLine. The respondents were divided over 8 teams. The number of players per team ranged from 4 to 6. The teams played two rounds of InLine, each round representing one year of organizational life. Teams would first design the HRM configuration for year 1. Then, after getting the results from their design choices, re-design the HRM configuration for year 2. Hence, 16 HR configurations were designed during these sessions (eight teams, two HR configurations per team).

We first present InLine as a serious game and research method, subsequently we present the results of the workshops.

InLine: a serious game for HRM

At the start of an InLine play session, participants are introduced to a cooperative organization for which they will design an HRM configuration. Information on the organization has been limited to:

You are working for an SME and the CEO defined his strategy to be one hundred percent cooperative. The former team of HRM professionals did not do a very good job of tailoring the HRM configuration.. They designed an HRM configuration with no focus.

The playing board used during the workshops is a graphical presentation of the competing values model and is illustrated in figure 1. The strategic orientation of the organization is illustrated using pawns (illustrated as stars ★ in figure 1) on the play board. The current HRM configuration, serving as a starting point for the players, is illustrated on the board using pawns (illustrated as polygons ◆ in figure 1).

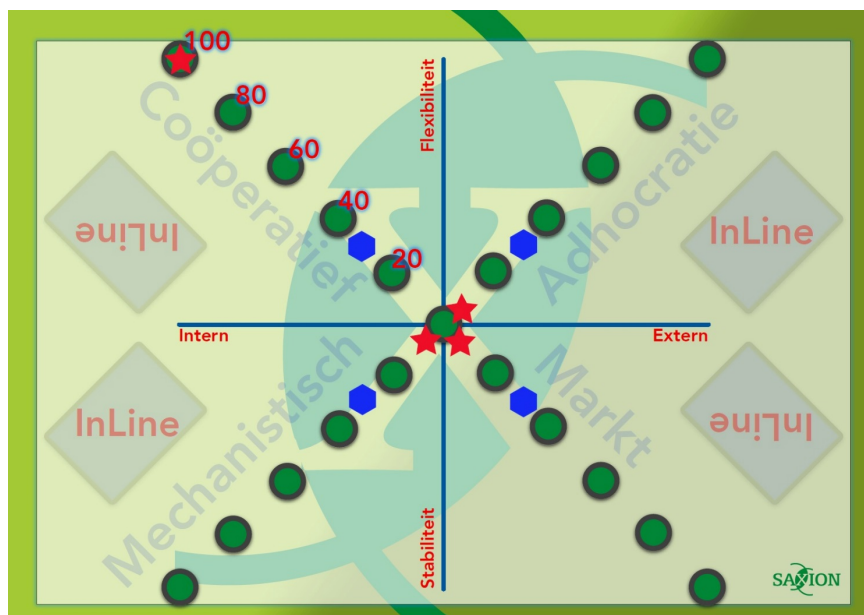


Figure 1: InLine board based on competing values model (language on board: Dutch)

As the HRM configuration should align with the strategy, the game goal is to move the HRM pawns (polygons) so that they will be in the same position as the strategy pawns (stars).

Moving the HRM pawns is done based on the choices made concerning the HR practices (re-design of the HRM configuration). A set of seventy-two playing cards, representing the individual HR practices and design options, is presented to the players. One example HR practice card is the job design practice: *jobs in this organization are designed to ensure that employees are part of project teams*. The HR practices on these cards match the survey items presented in section 1. A subset of the playing cards is illustrated on figure 2.

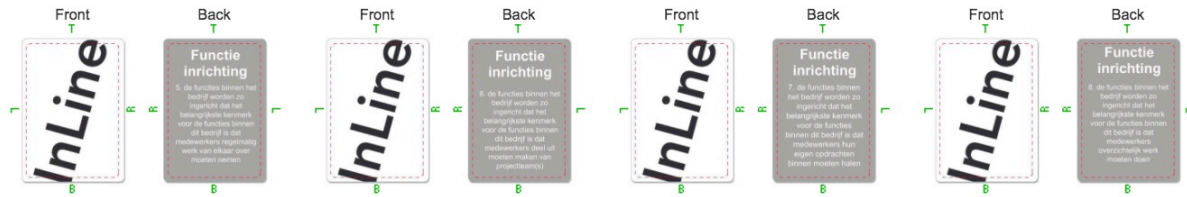


Figure 2: Subset of playing cards related to job design (language on cards: Dutch).

Players are now challenged to select a set of HR practice designs that align with the strategic orientation of the firm. They do so by selecting a number of HRM practices design cards out of the total deck of cards. Respondents are free to select any amount of HR practice design cards. In round 1, players are briefed that they are deciding on the HR practices for year 1. Players submit their HR practice design selection after discussing and consulting each other. The average alignment scores as calculated in the first empirical section of this paper is used as scores for the individual cards/HR practices. Based on the selection of cards by the participants, the average alignment score of their selection is calculated. This average score is used as input to calculate the vertical and horizontal alignment scores using the InLine simulation model.

Simultaneously, while we did specify the HR practices, we want to assess if we can specify the HR practices even further. Hence, players are asked to specify the design of their top three HR practices. Job design to ensure collaboration, for example, has been specified as follows: *formalize project team participation in all job designs in the organization*. This step in the game enables us to gather more detailed information on how HR practices are designed.

At the end of a round, players are provided with the vertical and horizontal alignment (fit) scores by means of an annual report (see figure 2). After presenting these results players are challenged to reconsider their HR practice designs choices to increase alignment. By

simulating multiple rounds, InLine challenges players to design and redesign the HRM configuration of an organization while making explicit the degree of alignment.

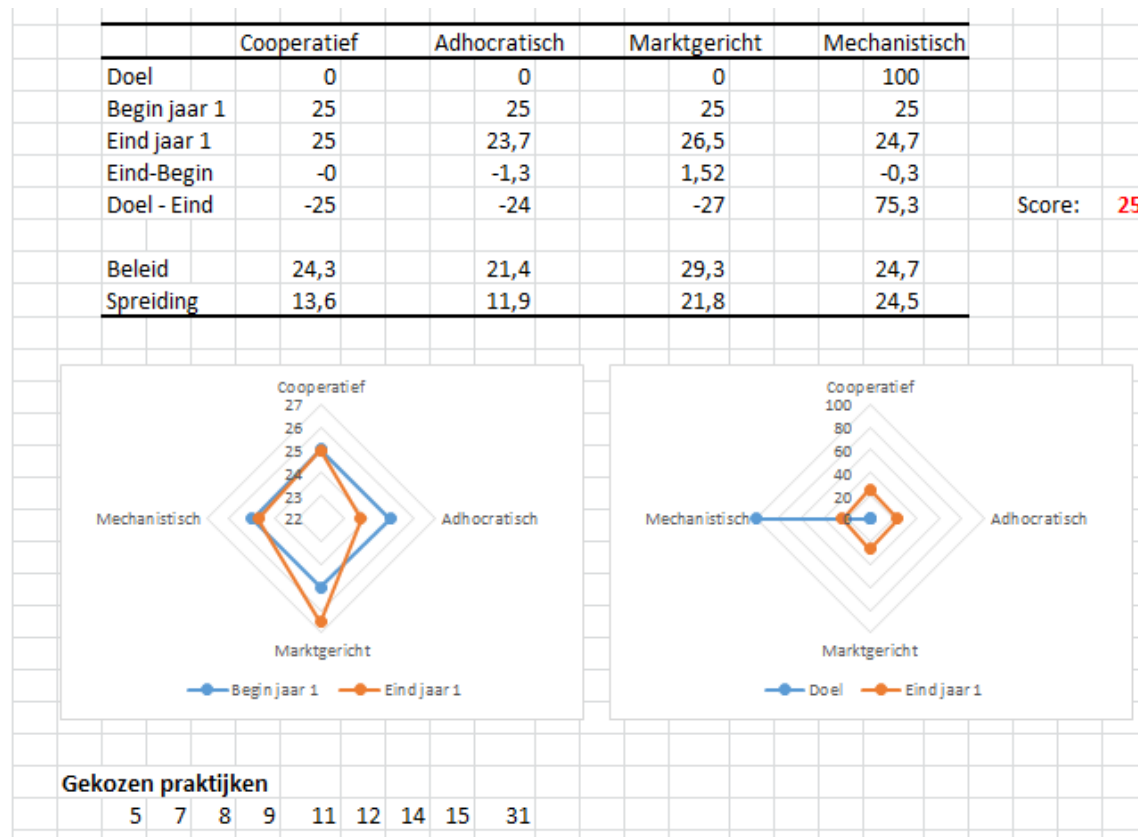


Figure 2. InLine annual report (language: Dutch)

Results

On average, teams selected 10,7 HR practices for year 1. The maximum number of HR practices selected for year 1 was 20 while the minimum number of HR practices selected was 5. None of the designed HRM configurations were made up solely by the HR practices options as presented in table 9. 75% of the HRM configurations missed one or more of the HR practices as presented in table 9. 25% of the HRM configurations added one or more HR practices on top of the HR practices as presented in table 9. The most commonly selected HR practices in year 1 was: *Jobs within the organization are designed in such a matter that being able to take over from colleagues is the most important characteristic of the job*. All teams selected this intervention in year 1.

In year two, the teams selected on average 6 HR practices. The maximum number of HR practices selected was 12 while the minimum number of selected HR practices was 3. The most commonly selected HR practices in year 2 where: 1. *employees' performance is assessed on the basis of ability to cooperate with colleagues*, 2. *employees are selected on the basis of their within firm employability* and 3. *employee development within the organization is based on enhancing teamwork and collaboration skills*. 7 out of the 8 teams selected these three HR practices for year 2.

Out of the cooperative HRM configuration consisting of the HR practices with the highest alignment score on cooperation, as presented in table 9, the 8 teams did not select the HR practices option: *employee recruitment is done on the basis of new recruits having craftsmanship* most often. Out of the 16 HRM configurations designed during these sessions, this HRM intervention was missing in 9 HRM configurations. The second most missed HR practices option was: *employees are selected on the basis of their within firm employability*, missing in 8 out of the 16 HRM configurations. The HR practice present in most HRM configurations designed by the HRM professionals but not in the cooperative HRM configuration as presented in table 9 was: *employee recruitment done on the basis of within firm employability*. This HR practices was present in 10 out of the 16 HRM configurations. In table 10 we present the most commonly missed and added HR practices options.

Table 10. commonly missed and added HR practices options for a cooperative HRM configuration.

HR practices missing in HRM configuration					
HRM instrument	Cooperative	Adhocratic	Mechanistic	Market	Missed in as % of total
Recruitment employee recruitment is done on the basis of new recruits having craftsmanship	39,6	21,4	19,4	20,1	56%
Selection Employees selection done on the basis of their within firm employability	46,1	25,1	17,7	11,8	50%
HR practices added in HRM configuration					
HRM instrument	Cooperative	Adhocratic	Mechanistic	Market	Present in as % of total
Recruitment Employee recruitment done on the basis of within firm employability	34,38	32,63	22,13	10,88	63%

In general, HRM professionals were able to select those HR practices options that align highly with the cooperative strategy when designing a cooperative HRM configuration. While one of the HR practices options most commonly missed was ‘selection done on the basis of within firm employability’, ‘recruitment done on the basis of within firm employability’ was most commonly added.

Discussion

The complexities and enormity of designing an aligned HRM configuration become evident when explicating the principal of proportional design suggested by configurational HRM. While the difficulties faced by HRM professionals are specified in this paper, in reality one can argue that the difficulties are even greater due to a number of factors. One, we considered only six HRM instruments whereas in practice the number of potential HRM instruments used is significantly larger (Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005). This increases the numbers of HRM practices, the number of HRM practices design options but also challenges HRM practitioners with more mutual dependency. Also, two, while the importance of effective implementation seems undisputed, no measure of effective HRM practice implementation was used here. Even if an HRM professional succeeds in the design of an aligned HRM configuration, implementation is key. Lastly, we defined an HRM configuration simplistically by stating it to be a bundle of HRM practices while some research suggests multiple levels in one HRM configuration (Arthur & Boyles, 2007).

We aim to uncover the complexities inherent to designing aligned HRM configurations and provide insight in the underlying mechanics that govern effective HRM design. We do so by peeling back the layers of configurational HRM using HRM professionals experience and expertise. In the current form, HRM professionals already struggled with the number of choices and dependencies. Including all previously mentioned factors will only increase complexity without enabling us to make any better inferences of the plausible underlying mechanics at work.

Using a serious game (like InLine) enables us to observe the behaviors and outcomes of HRM professionals (Jackson, 2011). But, in order for us to draw inferences related to behavior,

HRM professionals need to be immersed in the game. Feedback from respondents has been promising. Respondents indicated that they enjoyed discussing HRM content with colleagues in a team setting. Additionally, they were immersed in the game, competition and learned from their HRM colleagues during the game. However, these responses were not systematically inquired and therefore some caution is needed. In the future, research revolving around the quality of the game experience itself is needed.

Multiple future research endeavors are being discussed. One, as we asked HRM professionals to specify their selection we can add another layer of detail to HRM configurational theory. We could, for example, specify how HRM professionals would actually do employees selection on the basis of within firm employability. Subsequently, the aligned scores can be altered based on this specification. Two, the simulation model used for the serious game InLine can be specified based on experts' opinion. Currently, the effects of HRM practice design options are a one-time linear effect. However, the effect of HRM practices design options might alter over a period of time. It might, for example, take a significant time period for a change in selection policy to affect workforce behavior.

There is still work to be done before we can completely unbox configurational HRM and additionally present an online serious game for SME owners, managers and HR professionals. The first steps toward that end have been presented above.

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