

## Family Firms' HRM Practices Configurations: An empirical analysis

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### Abstract

The paper aims at investigating configurations of human resource management HRM practices in family firms. Four configurations of HRM practices (labelled the Administrative, Shared, Integrated, and Professional configuration) are developed and explored in a sample of 849 family firms. Support for the proposed HRM practices' configurations has been verified in the data. Next, the paper explores relationships with the HRM practice's functional goals and organizational performances in family firms. The study verifies the assumption of equifinality of the four HRMP configurations as the combined effect of the HRM practices on the organizational performances of family firms, although these configurations reveal different functional goals. Then, we discuss implications, limitations, and further steps for research.

**Keywords:** *Family firms; Human resources management practices; Configurations; Goals; Organizational performances*

## Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) literature presents a large corpus of theoretical and empirical studies devoted to investigate relationships between HRM practices (HRMP), their strategic and organizational goals, and various indicators of organizational performance (e.g. Batt, 2002; Guthrie, 2001; Ichniowski and Shaw, 1999; Wood, 1999; Becker and Gerhart, 1996; MacDuffie, 1995; Huselid, 1995; Arthur, 1992). Many studies began to deal with multiple HRMP at the organizational, rather than the individual, level. However, most of the empirical work on HRMP has taken place in large public listed firms operating in Western countries. Nonetheless, family business literature (Kidwell and Fish, 2007; Barnett and Kellermanns, 2006; Moshavi and Koch, 2005; Cascio, 1991) investigates too how different specific HRMP (Jaskiewicz et al., 2018) positively impact on managing people (Astrachan and Kolenko, 1994). Literature advances definitions of a “family firm,” consistently with several aspects. Herewith, a family firm is as a company where one or more families own the majority of the equity, where family members cover governance and managerial positions (Gnan et al., 2015; Corbetta, 1995), where multiple generations are involved in the firm’s management (Gnan et al., 2015; Songini and Gnan, 2013; Astrachan and Shanker, 2003; Westhead and Cowling, 1998). Family firms seem to adopt less sophisticated HRMP than non-family firms (De Kok et al., 2006), although they present positive relationships with strategic and organizational goals (Carlson et al., 2006) and relate significantly to higher organizational performance (Tsao et al., 2009). At the best of our knowledge, only a few contributions explore the strategic and organizational value of different configurations of HRMP in family firms (Reid and Adams, 2001; Reid et al., 2000) as recommended by Saridakis et al. (2017).

Nonetheless, HRM and family business literature conclude that the adoption of HRMP allow family firms to achieve substantial benefits, although many questions remain unanswered (Wright and Sherman, 1999; Delery, 1998; Wright and Snell, 1998). How do family firms configure their HRM practices? Which strategic and organizational goals do they want to combine? Which organizational performances do they want to achieve? Grounding on coordination needs, the paper develops and tests a configurational model of HRM practices that family firms adopt in order to achieve their strategic and organizational goals and positive organizational performances. Coordination needs represent the requirements for managing interdependencies among tasks, resources, and people (Marks et al., 2001; Malone and Crowston 1990, 1994; Thompson, 1967) that a family firm recognizes as critical ones for achieving organizational performances (Sirmon and Hitt, 2003). The ultimate goal of coordination is to develop collaborative behaviors in a family firm that shape organizational performance outcomes. We adopt this perspective about the need for coordination from the viewpoint of managing interdependencies to enlighten how different elements of the proposed framework fit together in nurturing collaborative behaviors. The need for coordination represents the extent to which interdependencies have been efficiently perceived as manageable ones.

The paper addresses the research questions, exploring whether and how HRMP in family firms complement each other in pursuing organizational performances through the combining of different strategic and organizational goals. A configuration of integrated, mutually reinforcing HRMP supports the fit with

environmental dimensions (Huselid, 1995; Baird and Meshoulam, 1988) with a positive impact on organizational performance than HRMP individually (Saridakis et al., 2017). Rather than single specific practices, the proposed configurational approach explains how configurations of HRMP represent coherent, unique combinations of practices enabling a family firm to achieve goals and performances. The assumption is that synergistic effects occur, resulting in a multiple pursuing of different strategic and organizational goals. Finally, multiple unique configurations result in maximal organizational performances with an assumption of equifinality (Doty and Glick, 1994). The configuration concept is achieving an increasingly important role in HRM literature. Studies have shown that relationships often exist between the demands of an uncertain environment and strategic and organizational goals and between these goals and organizational performances (Delery and Doty, 1996; Arthur, 1992; Reve, 1990).

The goals of the paper are to examine the four HRMP configurations in family firms and to analyze the impacts of functional goals in fostering the achievement of organizational performances. The paper proposes a typology for family firms consisting of four configurations of aligned HRMP (labeled Administrative, Shared, Professional, and Integrated). First, we tested the presence of the four different HRMP configurations within our data from a sample of 849 family firms. We tested our operationalization of the model, reducing the risk of measuring random configurations. Then, we tested some hypotheses about the strategic and organizational goals of the four configurations and the level of organizational performances they can assure to family firms. We discuss the four configurations observed in practice deriving them from “pure” configurations resulting from coordination theory. We start by describing the configuration factors (i.e., the need for explicit and implicit coordination mechanisms); we then discuss how they relate to strategic and organizational goals and organizational performances in family firms. Finally, we discuss how the four configurations may be applied by HRM family businesses’ practitioners to increase organizational effectiveness.

This paper contributes to the HRM field in family firms by explaining the importance of HRMP configurations. The paper provides empirical as well as theoretical and managerial contributions. From an empirical perspective, it contributes to a deeper understanding of HRMP configurations in family firms, as it explores HRMP configurations about their articulation regarding needs for coordination, the roles that various HRMP play within the four proposed configurations, and the extent to which they play them with respect goals and organizational performances. From a theoretical point of view, it develops the conversation on the idea that some configurations of HRMP would help family firms deal better with the environment, recognize new opportunities in the environment or create a more conducive environment to organizational performances is strongly supported in the paper and deserves further research attention. A managerial contribution of the paper is that it reflects on the possible pros and cons of the four proposed HRMP configurations and the implications for the family and the firm; thereby, it may help family firms design and implement their HRM systems.

The paper proceeds in four sections. First, the theoretical background of the four HRMP configurations. In the second section, concepts are presented, and the hypotheses are derived. The third section describes the

research methods and the sample used to test the hypotheses. The main findings are shown in the fourth section. In the fifth section, we discuss these findings, reflecting on the limitations, implications for family firms, and directions for future research.

## **Theoretical background**

### **The family firms' HRM literature**

Family firms' HRM literature is a quite popular and growing topic (Ferraro and Marrone, 2016; Botero and Litchfield, 2013; Cruz et al., 2011). Herewith, we review the main results and approaches adopted so far, and highlight limitations too.

Firstly, family firms' scholars are likely to assume theories and conceptual backgrounds not strictly embedded in the traditional HRM research, such as Agency Theory (Xiang et al., 2014; Schulze et al., 2003) and Stewardship Theory (Combs et al., 2010; Eddleston et al., 2008). Only some contributions referring to RBV (De Kok et al., 2006; Dyer, 2006; Poza et al., 2004) and Socio-Emotional Wealth (SEW) (Achleitner et al., 2014; Cruz et al., 2014, 2011; Berrone et al., 2012) show some relationships with consolidated HRM streams of research.

Secondly, the family firms' HRM literature proposes a "patriarchal" family model (Cruz et al., 2011; Dale et al., 2008) in defining relationships with employees. Succession planning and the nurturing of a successor are the most critical decisions taken by the patriarch (Cruz et al., 2011; Le Breton-Miller et al., 2004). The patriarchal model involves job security in exchange for family loyalty, substituting the need for incentives. Such a model, however, acknowledges a unique, sole, decision maker, e.g. the founder, reducing the likelihood to explore circumstances that are more complex where different family members share the decision-making power (Haberman and Danes, 2007). In addition, within such an assumption, some HRM's theoretical streams, such as utility theory and compensating wage theory, are too heavily adapted to the context of family firms and this may alter their original goal (Levie and Lerner, 2009; De Kok et al., 2006; Schulze et al., 2003).

Thirdly, most contributions (Kidwell and Fish, 2007; Barnett and Kellermanns, 2006) investigate HR practices in family firms without considering the heterogeneity of this peculiar form of organizations. Family firms are neither equal nor similar (Nordqvist et al., 2014), for example, about size, i.e., large versus small and medium-sized family enterprises. Heterogeneity asks for adopting perspectives of theories and indications of the HRM practices in leading sense-making processes about how to interpret different internal and external environments.

Fourthly, a debate on the formality and informality of HRM practices (De Kok and Uhlaner, 2001) in family firms emerges. The resistance of the family managers to formality exists (De Kok et al., 2006) since they search for a flexible approach to cope with higher levels of environmental uncertainty (Holten and Crouch, 2014). Informality helps in developing a feeling of teamwork and strong social relationships and in increasing workers' motivation (Marlow and Patton, 2002). Employees may also feel that they can negotiate work responsibilities, hours, and secure personal loans or other forms of aid within such informality (Marlow and Patton, 2002). Conversely, employees' perceptions of fairness are essential in developing their

commitment (Reid et al., 2002). However, when grievance and discipline matters arise, people may perceive informal practices as an arbitrary and unfair choice. Facing these tensions, balancing both formal and informal practices becomes one of the most significant challenges for family firms, despite the paucity of studies on this balance in adopting formal and informal practices (Reid et al., 2002; Becker and Huselid, 1998; Delaney and Huselid, 1996).

### **The need for coordination**

Family firms, as well as all other forms of firms, coordinate employees with through roles, jobs, tasks, and communication, consistently, with their relevant goals to achieve organizational outcomes, as job satisfaction and motivation (Weller et al., 2018; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2004; Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Allen and Meyer, 1990), organizational efficiency and productivity, as well as developing competencies, and reducing labor costs for enhancing organizational financial results, and market performances (Weller et al., 2018; Lazear and Oyer, 2013; Paauwe, 2009; Dyer and Reeves, 1995).

Coordinating employees implies to address both processual and mechanisms issues. The process allows individuals to manage interdependencies to completing an activity (Claggett and Karahanna, 2018; Malone and Crowston, 1994; Argote, 1982; Thompson, 1967), where mechanisms implement configurations of organizational arrangements allowing individuals to align their behaviors (Claggett and Karahanna, 2018; Jarzabkowski et al., 2012; Okhuysen and Bechky, 2009; Mintzberg, 1979), interpreting interdependencies (Simon, 1957), and completing a previously assigned task.

The need for coordination represents the organizational cognitive awareness for effective and efficient management of interdependencies among roles, jobs, tasks, and communication (Marks et al., 2001; Malone and Crowston 1990, 1994; Thompson, 1967). Literature on coordination processes and mechanisms investigates how different means can help an organization to improve the performances (Claggett and Karahanna, 2018; ; Sherif et al., 2006; Willem et al., 2006; ; Gittell, 2002; Cramton, 2001), or how internal and external environmental factors influence them (Mani et al., 2014; Broekhuis and van Donk, 2011; Bailey et al. 2010; Brown, 1999; Argote, 1982).

Family firms represent an appropriate and unique context to analyze the need for coordination. Family firms show strong interpersonal ties, pervasive traditions, low flexibility (Gersick et al., 1997; Dyer, 1994; de Vries; 1993), and, in particular, all of them present a peculiar role of the family (Sirmon and Hitt, 2003). The “familiness” (Cater and Schwab, 2008; Cabrera-Suarez et al., 2001; Habbershon and Williams, 1999; Tagiuri and Davis 1996) or the family influence pervades every layer of the organization, making interdependencies unique (Sirmon and Hitt, 2003) and affecting not only the strategy, but also on all the coordination system (process and mechanisms) implemented by a family firm. Family firms are a very heterogeneous population (Madison et al., 2018; Jaskiewicz and Dyer, 2017; Nordqvist et al., 2014) and their differences in innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking, autonomy, competitive aggressiveness, and organizational flexibility reflect their differences on the need for coordination.

The need for coordination represents the extent to which interdependencies have been efficiently perceived as manageable ones. We distinguish two different concepts of the need for coordination: the explicit and the implicit.

### **The need for explicit and implicit coordination**

The need for explicit coordination refers to the awareness of the need to set how, when, and with whom/what to coordinate information flows through routinized processes (Simon, 1957), adopting rules, procedures, plans, and programs (Okhuysen and Bechky, 2009; Argote, 1982). Pre-specified routinized processes (Claggett and Karahanna, 2018) often concern controlling communications and tasks (Mintzberg, 1979) to improve individuals' understanding of the overall process and their role in it (Gittell, 2002).

The need for implicit coordination refers to those mechanisms available to family firms from shared cognition and not consciously employed for coordinating. It connects to the perception of synchronization of individuals' actions based on unspoken assumptions about what others are likely to do (Wittenbaum and Stasser, 1996).

In family firms, the owner or the founder plays a fundamental role on influencing employees' mental models, building an affective commitment (i.e., the desire to follow a course of action; Sharma and Irving, 2005), and creating conditions under which family firms may reduce their reliance on explicit coordination mechanisms. Presenting strong and enduring cultures, family firms smooth their awareness of the need for explicit coordination mechanisms (Zahra et al., 2004; Hall et al., 2001).

When a family firm operates in a dynamic competitive setting characterized by environmental changes, uncertainty, or risks, fostering implicit coordination improves employees' organizational identity and commitment (Eddleston et al., 2008) and activates stewardship behaviors (Sharma and Sharma, 2011, Zahra et al. 2008). Organizational identity and commitment strongly relate to implicit coordination mechanisms, such as extra-role and discretionary contributions of employees (Ricketta, 2002). Organizational cognition research suggests on implicit coordination (Klimoski and Mohammed, 1994; Cannon-Bowers et al., 1993) that, in an organization, individuals interact and gain expertise with a joint task, developing their awareness about the task and the others. Implicit coordination mechanisms contribute significantly to developing commitment (Randall et al., 1990) and high-quality relationships improve coordination (Claggett and Karahanna, 2018). Higher levels of organizational identity and commitment raise the likelihood that individuals will subsidize efforts on behalf of the in family firms, even in the absence of strong supervision or strict rules and procedures, revealing stewardship behaviors. When family firms are in a dynamic competitive setting, implicit coordination mechanisms may be most appropriate to anticipate task statuses, individuals' behaviors and help family firms to manage interdependencies.

### **HRM practices for explicit and implicit coordination in family firms**

Due to their heterogeneity, family firms choose their configuration of HRMP relying on the awareness they framed of the need for explicit and implicit coordination mechanisms.

Following the framework of the Strategic Human Resource Management practices (SHRMP) stream of research, we propose a configurational model for HRMP (Jiang et al., 2012a; Chadwick, 2010; Kepes and

Delery, 2010; Gerhart, 2007; Delery and Doty, 1996) in family firms. The configurational perspective provides a systemic viewpoint for designing a specific HRMP composition (Kaufman, 2010).

Literature indicates that HRMP are: 1) Recruitment and selection (Khan, 2010; Katuo and Budhwar, 2006; Kulik, 2004; Ahmad and Schroeder, 2003; Chiu et al., 2002; Lam and White, 1998), 2) Compensation (Ahmad and Schroeder, 2003; Chiu et al., 2002; Lam and White, 1998; Ngo et al., 1998), 3) Training and development (Khan, 2010; Katuo and Budhwar, 2006; Ahmad and Schroeder, 2003; Kundu, 2003; Chang and Chen, 2002; Lam and White, 1998; Ngo et al., 1998), 4) Internal communication (Oladipo and Abdulkadir, 2011; Osman et al., 2011; Geringer et al., 2002; Richard and Johnson, 2001; Ulrich, 1997), 5) Performance appraisal (Khan, 2010; Chang and Chen, 2002; Bernardin and Russel, 1993), 6) Workforce planning (Mathis and Jackson, 2004; Chang and Chen, 2002), 7) Career planning management (Schein, 1996), 8) Job design (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006; Champion, 1988).

Combining the two needs for coordination mechanisms, we can identify four different configurations of HRMP in family firms, labeled as Administrative, Shared, Professional, and Integrated ones.

## **HRM practices' configurations in family firms**

### **The description of the four configurations**

In the Administrative configuration, family firms present low levels of both needs for coordination mechanisms. Family firms mainly adopt recruiting/selection and compensation practices. Family firms belonging to the Administrative configuration operates in a simple and not dynamic environment where they manage human resources through the adoption of a few rules and procedures (Kaman et al., 2001). They aim at the standardization of processes and pursue efficiency. The family-owner usually recruits and selects employees within his or her networks, leveraging informal channels to approach people known directly or indirectly to the firm. Newcomers, who have been referred by friends and acquaintances, are most likely to have accurate and realistic job information (e.g., Weller et al., 2018; Werbel and Landau, 1996; Moser, 1995; Saks, 1994; Williams et al., 1993; Blau, 1990; Breugh and Mann, 1984; Quaglieri, 1982;) and are less likely to quit early (Weller et al., 2009). There is no a systematic or rational approach in their compensation practices. In the Administrative configuration, family firms adopt fixed compensations since they do not consider the use of more sophisticated compensation practices as essential for improving productivity (Amba-Rao and Pendse, 1985; McEvoy, 1984). They set the level of the salary not considering the employee's specific profile, but according to the local norms and considering if employees are family members or not (Schulze et al., 2003).

The administrative configuration represents a very simple context, with a low level of both needs for coordination, few HRM practices, and no HR function. In the Administrative configuration, there are only basic people management practices related as compensation and bookkeeping. As long as the organizational complexity rises following an increase of the dynamicity of the environment, family firms move toward a configuration where they combine structured and formal solutions for coordination with some more organic

ones. In such a case, family firms adopt more commitment based HRMP to assure a higher level of involvement and engagement of employees within the firm.

In the Shared configuration, family firms present a high level of the need for implicit coordination mechanisms and a low level of the need for explicit coordination mechanisms. In this configuration, family firms operate in a dynamic and complex environment, where the adoption of HRM practices try to improve the motivation of employees and their flexibility to generate a sustainable competitive advantage. In the Shared configuration, family firms assume a resource-based approach to the measurement of high-performance practices (Combs et al., 2006). In the Shared configuration, family firms mainly adopt recruiting and selection, compensation, training and development, and internal communication practices. Recruiting and selection can be simple and informal, with application forms or face to face interviews (Carroll et al., 1999), relying on existing channels and contacts and not on specialist expertise. In the Shared configuration, family firms use referral networks to provide informational, reputational, and cost advantages (Pieper, 2015; Marsden and Gorman, 2001; Fernandez et al., 2000). When friends serve as referrals, they are likely to go beyond simple job descriptions to reveal whether prospective workmates will be congenial to the family culture. Recruiting and selection practices foster a very family-friendly atmosphere to achieve the goal of identifying and hiring employees presenting similar or overlapping family values. In the Shared configuration, compensation practices are not formally structured as well. While compliant with general and labor law, family firms do not possess any compensation plan. The motivational goal of the practice does not relate to the level of the compensation package, but to the opportunity to work in a family atmosphere (Wilkinson, 1999) where all members understand employees' needs, characteristics, and financial necessity. While family business literature focuses on salary differences between family and non-family members (Reid and Adams, 2001), the cited family atmosphere can nurture strong relationships within and between employees, improving not only their motivation but also the family firm's awareness of employees' expectations. In the Shared configuration, family firms do not provide structured training, the training and the development practice are still informal and a 'learning by doing' approach emerges. Herewith, family firms deploy a twofold training: on the task or the role that employees will cover and on understanding cultural values of the family. The Shared configuration strives to enforce the affective commitment of employees (Sharma and Irving, 2005; Randall et al., 1990; Horton, 1986; Donnelley, 1964), warm, friendly, and intimate relationships within the firm (Horton, 1986), and the potential for transferring in-depth firm-specific tacit knowledge (Sirmon and Hitt, 2003). Adopting consistent internal communication practices, family firms search for organizational identity (Zellweger and Sieger, 2012; Arregle et al., 2007; Sirmon and Hitt, 2003; Hall et al., 2001; Albert and Whetten, 1985). The goal is to create an effective organizational environment based on personal relationships where managers and employees work together showing collaborative behaviors (Bedwell et al., 2012). The family atmosphere contributes to this positive picture, which shows easier communication, greater flexibility, and lower levels of conflict (Wilkinson 1999). In the Shared configuration, through increasing internal communication, family firms characterize themselves with



strong internal relationships (Arregle et al., 2007; Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2005) that facilitate the development of social norms and maintain the trustworthiness among family and non-family actors.

The Professional configuration presents a high level of the need for explicit coordination mechanisms and a low level of the need for implicit coordination mechanisms. It refers to relatively stable, but complex environmental dimensions. The Professional configuration lookfor managing human resources through rules, complex procedures, and articulated plans, aiming at the processes standardization and efficiency. The goal is to create an efficient organizational environment where family firms manage functions, or divisions of the organizational structure, in direct response to business needs. In a Professional configuration, family firms mainly adopt recruiting and selection, compensation, training and development, performance appraisal, workforce planning, and job design practices. Professional managers design and implement recruitment and selection practices to provide professionalization and to incorporate and develop managerial skills, adopting standardized assessment tests and centers with the support of external consultants. Family firms recruit and select employees through effective data collection, internet, and company based websites, or widely circulated publications for attracting job applicants that professionally fit with tasks and roles of open job positions (Carlson et al., 2006). Consequently, skills and competencies of the future employee are defined and known. In the Professional configuration, to find the best candidate, family firms adopt a sophisticated recruitment and selection system that takes into account the personal characteristics and potential of candidates and tests their fit with the job position. In this configuration, compensation practices are related to tasks and roles of employees. In this context, professional management techniques foster training and development to increase employees' qualifications and performance at all hierarchical levels through education, career management, and work structure (Berthel and Becker, 2003). Effective training and development can increase the motivation of employees, productivity (Leede et al., 2002), and competitive advantage (De Saa-Perez and Garcia-Falcon, 2002). The Professional configuration includes hard work structures, result-based initiatives, and trans-specialist development. Employees' succession planning is a crucial issue (Wasin et al., 2018). In the Professional configuration, people management grounds on control and measurements, evidencing advanced compensation and benefits policies, and devoting a great effort to designing job positions and profiles. Job design activities are becoming very interesting (Parker et al., 2017; Spreitzer et al., 2017; Bakker et al., 2012; Grant and Parker, 2009; Grant and Ashford, 2008; Grant, 2007) since only a professional management can find a fit between the task and the individual needs of employees and ensure higher organizational performances. Similarly, family firms have professional management of job evaluation, performance appraisal, and job design. These practices are formal and structured ones. They present a clear communication of business objectives, a specific definition of skills and competencies, benefit systems based on the role, the task, and the individual performances. Moreover, reward systems rely on organizational performances and the performance management grounds on a scientific comparison between the expected performance and the one achieved by employees. The set of formalized procedures manage standardized processes in a transparent, efficient, and effective way to contribute to the firm's

growth and performance (Kaya, 2006; Bae et al., 2003). Such systems should integrate well with other areas of the business and should create synergistic effects to enhance the total value of the family firm.

The Integrated configuration presents a high level of the need both for implicit and explicit coordination mechanisms. It refers to complex and highly dynamic environmental dimensions. The management of the personnel function strives for family firm orientation, consistently with the strategic business direction. HRM practices aim at developing a high environmental and cultural scanning and a long-range planning tension. The emphasis is on both efficiency and effectiveness in direct response to business needs. In the Integrated configuration, family firms adopt all the HRM practices, that is recruiting and selection, compensation, training and development, internal communication, performance appraisal, workforce planning, career planning management, job design. In the Integrated configuration, HRM practices like training and development are characterized by a continuous interaction between professional managers and employees for promoting entrepreneurial behavior and encouraging employees' participation (Schuler, 1986). The continuous evolution of technologies develops a need for training people on a less standardized base, focusing on individual knowledge requirements (Schafer and Graham, 2002; Kuratko et al., 1990; Hambrick and Crozier, 1985; Campbell et al., 1970). This training approach enables employees to react distinctively to new challenges, adapt to dynamic environmental conditions, and feel comfortable with ambiguity, encouraging creativity by enabling employees to gain various experiences (Amabile, 1988; McGinnis and Ackelsberg, 1983). In the Integrated configuration, family firms search the fit between company's strategy, work processes, and family values. To implement effective training and development, family firms develop social competence, creativity, and internal communication. In the Integrated configuration, family firms should, at the same time, be structured and flexible to avoid that uncertainty can threaten the survival of the firm and, therefore, they need a configuration of HRM practices that are both commitment and control based. They should enhance the emotional attachment and affective commitment of employees and, at the same time, they should look for control and performances. In the Integrated configuration, family firms present an extensive implementation of internal communication practices to support organizational performances. Internal communication creates strong relationships not only between family members (Marett, et al., 2018) but also between managers and employees. Internal communication develops shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect. Shared goals refer to a holistic understanding of both the individual and collective work translated into a goals' fit (Gittell, 2006), as the fit among family goals and employees' goals. Shared knowledge means the common understanding of the different roles that employees, managers, family and non-family members cover in the organization. Family members and non-family members covering distinct roles are likely to have different mental models about the workflow and context, owing to different training and expertise, and may show difficulty in communicating and coordinating (Dougherty, 1992). Nevertheless, high levels of shared knowledge about roles and the importance that each individual has in the organization smooth those difficulties. Mutual respect refers to the recognition of the value of each other's roles, knowledge, skills, and unique contributions in workflow tasks (Vandekerckhof et al., 2018). Mutual respect represents the appreciation for the contribution that each individual provides to organizational

performances. In the Integrated configuration, family firms strive for shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect fostering internal communication and leveraging a deep awareness of the organization itself. In the Integrated configuration, all the HRM practices combine in an equilibrium between two different goals: adopting professional and expert knowledge to meet the demands of an increasingly complex and dynamic environment and being flexible and emotional inclusive to capture the benefit of being a family firm.

## **Development of hypotheses**

We consider the primary role of HRM practices' configurations in family firms is to enhance a fit with their environment. In a stable, predictable environment, family firms may realize the fit by adopting the Administrative or the Professional configurations that focus on developing a human capital with a limited range of skills, eliciting a small set of employees' behaviors. In a dynamic, unpredictable environment, family firms achieve the fit by implementing the Shared or the Integrated configurations that stimulate the development of a human capital presenting a broad range of skills and able to engage in a wide range of behaviors. In the former case, once family firms achieve the fit, flexibility is less critical due to the stable environment. Nonetheless, most family firms face dynamic environments. In such a case, family firms can achieve a sustainable fit only by developing a flexible organization. Thus, consistent configurations of HRM practices must progressively promote organizational flexibility in order to attain a dynamic fit. In family firms, the proposed configurational approach claims that positive performance evolves from a configuration of interrelated HRM practices (Meuer, 2016), which together form an internally consistent whole set (Colbert, 2004). Finally, in order to satisfy their needs for coordination, the choice of the HRMP follows a best-fit rule in which family firms can pick their practices (Datta et al., 2005; Lepak and Snell; 1999; Arthur, 1994).

The concept of best-fit (Guest, 1997) is central to theorize about HRM practices' configurations in family firms and implies the existence of distinctive configurations of practices, as the four presented above. In principle, there may be a considerable number of possible configurations of practices, which will lead to high performance; for example, some family firms may emphasize job security as the building block; others prefer training and development. The other practices fit around these. Within each configuration, some substitutability between different HRM practices may exist. Although in principle this approach allows for equifinality or some substitution, in practice certain clusters may consistently emerge, indicating the limited range of effective combinations.

Based on the above, we propose (first hypothesis) that, in family firms, there is a positive relationship between the adoption of the four proposed HRMP configurations and the perceived need for coordination.

*Hypothesis 1: Family firms present one of the four HRMP configurations.*

We argue that the four proposed HRMP configurations present different functional goals related to specific practices that can be combined to attain higher organizational performances. The synergistic effect of the combination leads to a fit promoting similar effects on organizational performances. Based on the above, we distinguish between functional goals of HRMP that result combined in the four configurations of practices

and reveal an equifinality regarding organizational performances. The relationships among HRM practices within a single organizational performance domain are likely to be multiplicative. Unlike the fit with the environment of HRMP configurations that can be achieved only when the supposed practices are combined, the goals of specific configurations of HRMP are functionally concerned with one or more organizational performance domains. As a result, HRMP configurations result in independent attempts to pursue the same organizational performance from different configurations of practices. Each HRM practice alone would exert a specific effect on the functional goal of the practice domain. This impact is not contingent on the existence of other practices in the same performance domain. In contrast, the absence of one practice will not necessarily decrease the effect of another practice, although it certainly may reduce the net effect of the entire performance domain. For instance, family firms can improve employees' competencies through training as well as through recruiting and selecting employees with high competence. Recruitment and selection practices affect employees' initial level of knowledge and skills, while the training practice further promotes firm-specific knowledge and skills to perform assigned tasks (Ostroff and Bowen, 2000; Delery, 1998). In this case, the absence of training will not remove the impact of recruitment or selection on employee's competencies, but the presence of training may help develop them, which further increase organizational performance.

### **Functional goals of HRMP**

The research proposes the concept of strategic HRM to those studies that demonstrate how HRM practices impact on strategic goals of an organization (Chadwick and Cappelli, 1999). Each HRM practice presents a particular goal that helps an organization to be competitive and to survive (Farndale and Paauwe, 2007). We consider five functional goals of HRMP: organizational fit, motivation of employees, development of competencies, productivity and efficiency, and reduction of labor costs.

#### *A) Organizational fit*

Many HRM practices may develop organizational identification and commitment (Ostroff, 2000) of the employee, e.g., organizational fit. Through recruiting and selection practices, family firms can increase feelings of congruence with the norms and values of the organization (Collins and Smith, 2006; Judge and Cable, 1997). As far as compensation, internal communication, training, and development practices (McClellan and Collins, 2011; Collins and Smith, 2006; Batt, 2002) are concerned, they all ground on values and cultural fit (Burton and Beckman, 2007; Baron et al., 2001; Hannan et al., 1996). A higher level of organizational fit enhances the establishment of exchange relationships and the willingness of employees to share their capabilities, thus increasing performance (Tsui et al., 1997). If an organization recruits and selects employees grounding on their fit with the values and norms of the organization itself, employees will experience a greater congruence between their own values and those of the organization, resulting in an increased willingness to engage within the organization (Gottschalg and Zollo, 2007; Baard et al., 2004). Employees feel that the work environment is supportive of their own goals and needs, creating psychological relationships whereby employees are willing to exchange positive behaviors with the opportunity of working in such a value-supportive environment, further increasing performance (Allen et al., 2013). Consequently,

the needs of the employees and those of the organization are further aligned, with higher employees' involvement (Keller, 1997).

#### *B) Motivation of employees*

Eliciting motivation of employees focus on a set of practices that facilitate skill development and provide opportunities and incentives for employees to apply their skills (Batt, 2002; Guthrie, 2001; Pil and MacDuffie, 1996). Some appropriate HRM practices tap the motivation of employees (Guest 1997). HRM practices that ensure motivation relate to performance appraisal and performance-based compensation, to an appropriate role structure and perception, as job design, and to extensive communication and feedbacks, as internal communication (Guest, 1997). These HRM practices aim to recognize employees' performance and to align their behaviors with those of the organization (Hiltrop, 1996).

#### *C) Development of competencies*

Many HRM practices present the goal to develop skill and abilities, e.g., competencies, in a way that individuals may grow personally and contribute towards organizational interests (Asfaw et al., 2015). To develop inimitable human resources (Becker and Huselid, 1998), organizations adopt HRM practices that emphasize employees' skills and abilities (Wright and Boswell, 2002; Ostroff, 2000). Practices that improve employees' skills and abilities are selection and recruitment, training and development (Guest, 1997), and performance appraisal (Roberts, 1995).

#### *D) Productivity and Efficiency*

Literature stresses the positive link between HRM practices and firm productivity and efficiency (Chen et al., 2003; Huselid et al., 1997), facilitating process innovation (Agarwala, 2003). HRMP, as training and development, compensation, workforce planning, career planning, internal communication, and performance appraisal, show a significant impact on productivity and efficiency (Richard and Johnson, 2001, Huselid, 1995; Terpstra and Rozell, 1993). Moreover, training and development may help to increase productivity and efficiency since they support the efficient development of high-quality products, meeting customers' expectations (Corbett and Harrison, 1992).

#### *E) Reduction of labor costs*

Compensation, internal communication, and career planning practices may support the reduction of labor costs by minimizing turnover and absenteeism of employees (Huselid, 1995). Other HRM practices, as recruiting and selection and job design, focusing on workflow tasks, ensure employees' compliance with regulations and minimize labor costs (Arthur, 1994).

#### *Organizational performance*

In the last three decades, HRM research revealed the positive relationship between HRM practices and organizational performance (Hamdia and Phadett, 2011). An exhaustive review of empirical studies (Combs et al., 2006) shows that effective HRM practices are associated with significantly higher organizational performance. Effective HRM practices increase employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, empower and raise their motivation (Santhanam et al., 2017; Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Rynes and Trank, 1996). Moreover,

effective HRM practices positively affect job satisfaction, the reduction of the employees' turnover, and productivity (Becker and Gerhart, 1996).

The four proposed configurations consider the need for a fit between performances of specific HRM practices (Meuer, 2016; Samnani and Singh, 2013; Jiang et al., 2012b; MacDuffie, 1995) and those of configurations of practices (MacDuffie, 1995), where, in different configurations, each practice mutually presents reinforcements of the effect of the other practices. The four configurations are consistent with the ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) framework (Meuer, 2016; Boxall and Purcell, 2011; Gerhart, 2007; Batt, 2002; Appelbaum et al., 2000), where configurations of practices of each configuration simultaneously nurture opportunities and foster employees behaviors in achieving performance (Kang and Snell, 2009; Batt, 2002; Huselid, 1995). When organizations aggregate HRM practices in a coherent configuration, they show a higher overall effect than the mere sum of effects of each of them (Shaw et al., 2009; Batt et al., 2002; Appelbaum et al., 2000; Shaw et al., 1998) and have powerful effects (Rynes et al., 2005) on different organizational performances. Organizational performances refer to lower the turnover rate, to reduce labor costs, to increase productivity, to foster revenues for employees.

Turnover refers to the "individual movement across the membership boundary of an organization" (Thwala et al., 2012; Price, 2001) and the turnover rate is the percentage of workers who either quit or were dismissed in the past year (Batt and Colvin, 2011). High turnover rates have deleterious effects on outcomes such as productivity and safety (Shaw et al., 2005a), sales performance (Batt, 2002; Kacmar et al., 2006; Shaw et al., 2005b), and efficiency. HRM practices such as recruiting and selection, training and development (Santhanam et al. 2017; Bradley et al., 2004; Shaw et al., 1998), compensation (Santhanam et al. 2017; Droussiotis and Austin, 2007; Shaw et al., 1998), workforce planning, career planning (Santhanam et al. 2017; Maertz and Griffeth, 2004; Shaw et al., 1998; Huselid, 1995; Hom and Griffeth, 1995; Arthur, 1994; Doeringer and Piore, 1971), job design (Huselid, 1995; Arthur, 1994; Doeringer and Piore, 1971), performance appraisal (Shaw et al., 1998) internal communication (Santhanam et al. 2017; Bradley et al., 2004) aim at reducing the turnover rate.

Labor costs reductions ask for control-based HRM practices (Eisenhardt, 1985). By enforcing employee compliance with rules and procedures and basing employee rewards on some measurable output criteria, control-based HRM practices aim to reduce direct labor costs and improve efficiency (Eisenhardt, 1985; Walton, 1985). Firms tend to minimize labor costs, as opposed to minimizing total costs per unit of output. A shift toward a more-skilled workforce boosts labor costs, where unit labor costs need not to fall and may rise, with ambiguous implications for profitability (Jiang et al., 2012a; Wright and Boswell, 2002).

Productivity represents a significant goal for organizations (Cappelli and Neumark, 2001). HRM practices, as training and development, compensation, workforce planning, and performance appraisal foster employees' productivity (Lee and Lee, 2007; Chang and Chen, 2002; Guthrie, 2001; Pawan, 2000; Koch and McGrath, 1996; Huselid, 1995). Productivity bridges soft HRM outcomes, such as motivation, and hard firm outcomes, like revenues (Boselie and Dietz, 2003).

Revenues per employee is a crucial indicator of strategic workforce performance (Delery and Shaw, 2001). Revenues per employee have been frequently used as an organizational performance variable in a large body of work (Boselie and Dietz, 2003). The variable is a crucial indicator of the efficiency with which family firms produce revenue, and it allows comparability across industries and with previous studies.

In the Administrative configuration, family firms focus on standardization of processes, efficiency and adopt selection and recruiting and compensation practices. The Administrative configuration presents an informal selection and recruiting system and focuses on hiring employees with friendly relationships outside the business network. At the same time, compensation practices rely on relationships with the family. Employees present a strong emotional relationship with the family, characterized by mutual trust and friendship, and are less likely to quit early (Weller et al., 2009).

In the Shared configuration, family firms focus on employees' motivation and flexibility to generate a sustainable competitive advantage. The combined HRM practices tend to motivate employees through the family atmosphere (Wilkinson, 1999), where easier communication, greater flexibility, and lower levels of conflict emerge, facilitating the understanding of employees' needs, characteristics, and financial necessity. Moreover, the Shared configuration motivates their employees with the social support (Van Yperen and Hagedoorn, 2003) fostering collaborative behaviours (Bedwell et al., 2012), grounding on strong internal relationships (Arregle et al., 2007; Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2005) that enable the enlargement of social norms and trustworthiness among family and non-family members. The advantages of the Shred configuration insist on creating a pleasant work environment (Tsai et al., 2007) where employees have a less turnover rate, more productivity.

In the Professional configuration, family firms look for managing human resources through rules, complex procedures, and articulated plans, pursuing standardization and efficiency. In a Professional configuration, family firms aim to increase the revenues and productivity per employees providing professional HRM that achieve a fit between tasks and individual needs of employees and ensure higher organizational performances. In this configuration, employees feel that the family firm contributes to their professional development and they can understand their role strengthening a negative relationship with turnover (Huselid, 1995) and a positive relationship with productivity (Heneman and Milanowski, 2011; Boxall and Macky, 2009). Employees interpret each professional practice as a retention inducement and a long-term outlook on the employment relationship.

In the Integrated configuration, developing a high environmental and cultural scanning, family firms aim at stimulating a long-range planning tension. Family firms demonstrate to take emphasis on both efficiency and effectiveness in direct response to business needs searching a fit between the company's strategy, work processes, and family values. In this configuration, employees obtain economic and socio-emotional resources from the family firm and tend to be obliged to reward the organization through positive job and organizational performances (Karatepe, 2013; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In this configuration, the family firm invests on improving service capacity of employees to perform their tasks successfully (Santhanam et al., 2017).

Based on the above discussion, we developed five hypotheses to test the relationship between the HRMP configurations and their functional goals:

*Hypothesis 2: The Administrative configuration presents lower HRMP functional goals than the other HRMP configurations.*

*Hypothesis 3: The Integrated configuration presents a higher Organizational fit, Motivation of employees, and Development of competencies than the other HRMP configurations.*

*Hypothesis 4: The Integrated configuration presents a higher Productivity and efficiency than the Professional configuration.*

*Hypothesis 5: The Integrated configuration presents a higher Reduction of labor costs than the Shared configuration.*

*Hypothesis 6: The Shared configuration presents a higher Organizational fit than the Professional configuration.*

Based on the above-presented equifinality regarding organizational performances of different HRMP configurations, in the second stage of our analysis, we attempt to ascertain the combined effect of the HRM practices on the organizational performances of family firms within the context of the four proposed configurations. Accordingly, we finally present two competing hypotheses to test the relationship between the HRMP configurations and organizational performances:

*Hypothesis 7a: According to a configurational fit logic, the four configurations do not differ in term of organizational performances.*

*Hypothesis 7b: The four configurations significantly differ in term of organizational performances.*

## **Methods**

Herewith we describe the methodological approach we adopted in term of research design and definition of the family firm, sampling frame, and primary data collection procedure, achieved sample, and variables and measures.

### **Research Design and definition of family firm**

Adopting a deductive approach applying a quantitative research design, we run statistical tests on hypotheses over data collected with a questionnaire survey consisting of 849 family firms in Italy. The deductive perspective and the size of the sample facilitated us in inferencing further than the context of Italian family firms.

We consider family firms those companies matching at least one of the following requisites: (1) the family own the majority of the equity (Gnan et al., 2015; Astrachan and Shanker, 2003; Sharma, 2004); (2) one or more family members sit on the board of directors (Gnan et al., 2015; Anderson and Reeb 2003); and (3) the CEO belongs to the family (Gnan et al., 2015; Villalonga and Amit, 2006).

The sample was drawn from the AIDA database (by Bureau Van Dijk Electronic Publishing), which contains: (1) data from incorporated companies, representative of the Italian population of manufacturing and nonmanufacturing firms; and (2) data about the ownership structure (shareholders), the governance system (chair and board members) and some information about management (CEO). We used both primary (from



questionnaires) and secondary data (from the AIDA database). Unfortunately, AIDA data were not available for all of the firms in the sample. Therefore, we decided to collect data via a questionnaire on ownership, governance, strategy, and management, and to check them against the reports available in the AIDA database. This approach helped us to avoid the common methods bias relating to survey studies from the outset.

### **Sampling Frame and Primary Data Collection Procedure**

The initial sample consisted of 7,500 companies of Italy, at the six-digit level of the Ateco 2007 Classification System. The initial sample randomly extracted to be representative of the population by turnover, range of employees, and industries. The Ateco 2007 represents the Italian version of the European classification system (Nace Rev. 2), approved by the European Commission (n. 1893/2006) and published on the Official Journal (2006, 12/30). The Nace classification system is compliant with the one adopted by UNO (Isic Rev. 4).

The primary data collection procedure consisted of four phases. First, we developed measurement scales through ten on-site interviews with family firms' CEOs, academics and consultants, and testing the resulting measures with a group of academics and consultants. Next, a single scholar tested the version of the resulting questionnaire with some senior executives of family firms. These tests asked to revise some items to improve their clarity, as well as the addition of several new ones. The third stage consisted of on-site interviews with CEOs or executives from 50 family firms, resulting in the final version of the questionnaire. In the final stage, we mailed the survey to the 7,500 companies included in the sampling frame. Following the suggestion of Dillman (1978), we mailed two follow-up letters and one replacement questionnaire after the initial mailing.

Due to the difficulty of collecting data on the adoption of HRM practices, studies using primary survey data often ground on a single respondent (Minichilli et al., 2012; Pearce and Zahra, 1991). Consequently, we used a single informant for each firm. Although multiple respondents would have reduced potential response biases, the respondents had to be well informed about the firm and its organizational environment (Campbell, 1955). The main methodological answer to the concerns related to a single-respondent approach is to find the most appropriate one. In the covering letter, we asked to fill the questionnaire either by the CEO or by a senior executive (co-CEO) with overall responsibility for managerial issues (Alvarez and Svejnova, 2005). We checked the adherence to the suggestion. In most cases, the company CEO was the respondent. We considered the CEOs and co-CEOs to be the best possible key informants because they are knowledgeable about the adoption of HRM practices, while at the same time being in a better position to report on both strategy and management (Zahra et al., 2000). The self-report method is a primary data collection tool in management studies (e.g., Boone and de Brabander, 1997; Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). We adopted some procedural remedies to reduce potential common method biases: (1) our cover letter guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality (Podsakoff et al., 2003); (2) in the questionnaire, we kept dependent and independent variables separated (Parkhe, 1993); (3) we devoted attention to the wording of questions to avoid vague concepts and to reduce item ambiguity (Tourangeau et al., 2000); (4) we stated clearly that there were no

right or wrong answers, and that respondents should answer questions as honestly as possible (Podsakoff et al., 2003); and (5) we worded questions carefully in order to minimize the likelihood of social desirability bias, using inputs from the pilot interviews.

#### *Achieved Sample*

890 completed questionnaires were returned. The 11.9 percent response rate is comparable with those of large-scale surveys involving executives but higher than those typically obtained in Italy (Giacomelli and Trento, 2005). The result is a reasonable one given the setting of the survey concerning the diversity of the firms, the positions of the respondents (CEO or equivalent position) and the sensitivity of the information. After checking to ensure that all of the responding firms were family firms, we eliminated 41 questionnaires. The final dataset included 849 family firms. We evaluated nonresponse biases by conducting chi-square tests between our sample and the initial sample used, finding no significant differences in the industry ( $\chi^2=.017571$ ,  $df = 5$ ), sales ( $\chi^2=.041679$ ,  $df = 4$ ) or employees ( $\chi^2=.087307$ ,  $df = 3$ ). We also made a comparison between early respondents (first half) with late respondents (second half; Armstrong and Overton, 1977), finding no significant differences in the age of the firm, firm size (employees and sales), industry characteristics, suggesting that nonresponse bias might not be a problem. The median number of employees was 20. The mean number was 43.7 with a standard deviation of 123. The median number of sales was €4.5 million. More than two third of the firms in the sample belonged to the manufacturing industry. The median year of the foundation was 1977.

#### **Variables and Measures**

We used three groups of variables for testing our hypotheses. First, the variables representing the adoption of HRM practices, the dependent variables related to both the goals that different HRM practice could help to achieve and the organizational performances of HRMP' configurations, and the control variables.

#### ***The classification procedure for identifying the four HRMP configurations***

To identify the four HRMP configurations, we used eight items, referring to the adoption of different HRM practices in family firms:

- 1) Recruitment and selection (Khan, 2010; Katuo and Budhwar, 2006; Kulik, 2004; Ahmad and Schroeder, 2003; Chiu et al., 2002; Lam and White, 1998),
- 2) Compensation (Ahmad and Schroeder, 2003; Chiu et al., 2002; Lam and White, 1998; Ngo et al., 1998),
- 3) Training and development (Khan, 2010; Katuo and Budhwar, 2006; Ahmad and Schroeder, 2003; Kundu, 2003; Chang and Chen, 2002; Lam and White, 1998; Ngo et al., 1998),
- 4) Internal communication (Oladipo and Abdulkadir, 2011; Osman et al., 2011; Geringer et al., 2002; Richard and Johnson, 2001; Ulrich, 1997),
- 5) Performance appraisal (Khan, 2010; Chang and Chen, 2002; Bernardin and Russel, 1993),
- 6) Workforce planning (Mathis and Jackson, 2004; Chang and Chen, 2002),
- 7) Career planning management (Schein, 1996),
- 8) Job design (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006; Champion, 1988).

All of these items were measured using dummy coding: their presence was coded as 1. Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics for the adoption of the practices within the entire sample of 849 family firms.

Table 1: HRM practices adoption.

HRM practice	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Recruiting and Selection	0.94	1.00	0.23
Compensation	0.93	1.00	0.25
Training and Development	0.85	1.00	0.36
Internal Communication	0.82	1.00	0.39
Performance Appraisal	0.79	1.00	0.41
Workforce Planning	0.85	1.00	0.35
Carrier Planning	0.11	0.00	0.32
Job Design	0.51	1.00	0.50

The four proposed configurations present their pure definition regarding adopted HMR practices as follows:

- 1) Shared configuration: Recruiting and selection, Compensation, Training and development, and Internal communication;
- 2) Administrative configuration: Recruiting and selection, and Compensation;
- 3) Integrated configuration: Recruiting and selection, Compensation, Training and development, Internal communication, Performance appraisal, Workforce planning, Career planning management, and Job design;
- 4) Professional configuration: Recruiting and selection, Compensation, Training and development, Performance appraisal, Workforce planning, and Job design.

We allowed one degree of freedom in term of the classification procedure for the four HRMP configurations. That is, we allowed that a family firm could show one of the proposed HRMP configurations with maximum a missing or an extra HRM practice from the pure definition. Accordingly, we identified 107 family firms showing a Shared configuration (12.6%), 35 an Administrative configuration (4.1%), 353 an Integrated configuration (41.6%), and 284 a professional one (33.5%). Only 70 (8.2%) family firms do not show any of the proposed HRMP configurations. In conclusion, 91.8% of the sampled family firms presents one of the four HMRP configurations. Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics about the HMRP configurations.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the HMRP configurations.

HRMP configuration	Variables	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Not classified	Recruiting and Selection	0.57	1.00	0.50
	Compensation	0.54	1.00	0.50

HRMP configuration	Variables	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
	Training and Development	0.29	0.00	0.46
	Internal Communication	0.84	1.00	0.37
	Performance Appraisal	0.29	0.00	0.46
	Workforce Planning	0.54	1.00	0.50
	Carrier Planning	0.10	0.00	0.30
	Job Design	0.39	0.00	0.49
	Sales (millions of Euro)	9.98	5.00	12.17
	Employees	31.83	17.00	37.93
	Recruiting and Selection	1.00	1.00	0.00
	Compensation	0.93	1.00	0.25
	Training and Development	0.60	1.00	0.49
	Internal Communication	0.92	1.00	0.28
	Performance Appraisal	0.21	0.00	0.41
	Workforce Planning	0.64	1.00	0.48
	Carrier Planning	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Job Design	0.02	0.00	0.14
	Sales (millions of Euro)	11.03	6.00	13.21
	Employees	35.02	23.00	34.39
	Recruiting and Selection	0.49	0.00	0.51
	Compensation	0.60	1.00	0.50
	Training and Development	0.11	0.00	0.32
	Internal Communication	0.26	0.00	0.44
	Performance Appraisal	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Workforce Planning	0.03	0.00	0.17
	Carrier Planning	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Job Design	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Sales (millions of Euro)	8.36	4.63	10.23
	Employees	33.58	22.00	31.65
	Recruiting and Selection	1.00	1.00	0.00
	Compensation	1.00	1.00	0.00
	Training and Development	1.00	1.00	0.05
	Internal Communication	0.99	1.00	0.11
	Performance Appraisal	1.00	1.00	0.00

HRMP configuration	Variables	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
	Workforce Planning	1.00	1.00	0.00
	Carrier Planning	0.24	0.00	0.42
	Job Design	0.95	1.00	0.21
	Sales (millions of Euro)	18.67	4.51	69,08
	Employees	51.29	21.00	165.36
	Recruiting and Selection	1.00	1.00	0.00
	Compensation	0.98	1.00	0.13
	Training and Development	0.99	1.00	0.12
	Internal Communication	0.63	1.00	0.48
	Performance Appraisal	0.97	1.00	0.18
Professional configuration	Workforce Planning	0.93	1.00	0.25
	Carrier Planning	0.02	0.00	0.13
	Job Design	0.24	0.00	0.43
	Sales (millions of Euro)	9.27	3.98	20.22
	Employees	41.33	19.50	99.60

### *Dependent variables*

We considered two different sets of dependent variables. One set relates to the goals that HRM practices intend to pursue, and the other one connects to the organizational performances that the four HRMP configurations show.

### *Functional goals of HRMP*

We considered four different HRMP functional goals: Organizational fit (Wright and Snell, 1998), Motivation of employees (Lee et al., 2010; Wright and Boswell, 2002; Guest, 1997; Hiltrop, 1996), Development of competencies (Jiang et al., 2012a; de Pablos and Lytras, 2008; Wright and Boswell, 2002; Wright and Snell, 1998; Hiltrop, 1996), Productivity and Efficiency (Jiang et al., 2012a; Wright and Boswell, 2002; Guest, 1997; Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Huselid, 1995), and Reduction of labor costs (Jiang et al., 2012a; Wright and Boswell, 2002). Consequentially, we used four dummy items. Using dummy coded questions, we asked the respondents to indicate whether they considered or not each HRMP goal in building the HMRP configuration. Every considered goal was coded as 1 and every not considered goal was coded as 0. Tables 3 and 4 report the descriptive statistics and correlations about the HMRP goals.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the HMRP functional goals.**

HRMP configuration	Statistics	Organizational fit	Motivation of employees	Development of competencies	Productivity and Efficiency	Reduction of labor costs
Not classified	Mean	0.39	0.36	0.30	0.24	0.12
	Median	0.33	0.33	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Std. Dev.	0.38	0.40	0.38	0.36	0.23
Shared	Mean	0.51	0.34	0.34	0.30	0.14
	Median	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.00	0.00
	Std. Dev.	0.38	0.36	0.38	0.38	0.26
Administrative	Mean	0.15	0.09	0.12	0.06	0.02
	Median	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Std. Dev.	0.31	0.25	0.26	0.19	0.08
Integrated	Mean	0.57	0.46	0.49	0.35	0.20
	Median	0.67	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.00
	Std. Dev.	0.39	0.39	0.38	0.37	0.31
Professional	Mean	0.40	0.29	0.35	0.26	0.18
	Median	0.33	0.00	0.33	0.00	0.00
	Std. Dev.	0.38	0.38	0.37	0.33	0.28

**Table 4: Correlations between the HMRP functional goals.**

HRMP configuration	HMRP functional goals	1	2	3	4	5
Not classified	1 Organizational fit	1	.610**	.442**	.379**	0
	2 Motivation of employees	.610**	1	.541**	.398**	.304*
	3 Development of competencies	.442**	.541**	1	.402**	0
	4 Productivity and Efficiency	.379**	.398**	.402**	1	.552**
	5 Reduction of labor costs	0	.304*	0	.552**	1
Shared configuration	1 Organizational fit	1	.402**	.332**	.312**	.281**
	2 Motivation of employees	.402**	1	.435**	.360**	0
	3 Development of competencies	.332**	.435**	1	.258**	0
	4 Productivity and Efficiency	.312**	.360**	.258**	1	0
	5 Reduction of labor costs	.281**	0	0	0	1
Administrative configuration	1 Organizational fit	1	.427*	.584**	0	0
	2 Motivation of employees	.427*	1	0	0	0
	3 Development of competencies	.584**	0	1	0	0
	4 Productivity and Efficiency	0	0	0	1	0
	5 Reduction of labor costs	0	0	0	0	1
Integrated configuration	1 Organizational fit	1	.498**	.436**	.228**	.216**
	2 Motivation of employees	.498**	1	.421**	.249**	.117*
	3 Development of competencies	.436**	.421**	1	.391**	.151**
	4 Productivity and Efficiency	.228**	.249**	.391**	1	.297**
	5 Reduction of labor costs	.216**	.117*	.151**	.297**	1
Professional configuration	1 Organizational fit	1	.438**	.340**	.155**	0
	2 Motivation of employees	.438**	1	.407**	0	.152*
	3 Development of competencies	.340**	.407**	1	.156**	.190**
	4 Productivity and Efficiency	.155**	0	.156**	1	.289**
	5 Reduction of labor costs	0	.152*	.190**	.289**	1

\*\* . Two-tailed  $p < 0.01$

\* . Two-tailed  $p < 0.05$ .

### *Organizational performances of HRMP configurations*

We considered four different organizational performances measures: Turnover rate (Batt and Colvin, 2011; Hamdia and Phadett, 2011; Shaw et al., 2009; Allen et al., 2003; Guest, 1997; Huselid, 1995), Labor cost per employee (Jiang et al., 2012a; Wright and Boswell, 2002), Productivity per employee (Jiang et al., 2012a; Wright and Boswell, 2002; Guest, 1997; Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Huselid, 1995), and Revenues per employee (Datta et al., 2005; Ulrich, 1997).

The turnover rate (Batt and Colvin, 2011) is the percentage of workers who either quit or were dismissed in the past year. These measures exclude promotions, retirements, buyouts, and layoffs. The labor cost per employee is the ratio between the total labor costs and the number of employees. The productivity per

employee is the ratio between the turnover and the total labor costs. The revenues per employee is the ratio between the turnover and the number of employees. Tables 5 and 6 report the descriptive statistics and correlations about the organizational performances of HRMP' configurations.

**Table 5: Descriptive statistics of the organizational performances of HRMP' configurations.**

HRMP configuration		Turnover rate	Labor cost per employee	Productivity per employee	Revenues per employee
Not classified	Mean	0.08	43,255.00	8.46	440,782.62
	Median	0.00	40,605.00	6.56	252,272.73
	Std. Dev.	0.19	15,221.35	6.26	623,316.15
Shared configuration	Mean	0.02	42,724.81	9.14	356,627.11
	Median	0.00	41,220.00	6.22	250,000.00
	Std. Dev.	0.08	13,790.34	8.49	339,928.28
Administrative configuration	Mean	0.02	38,676.43	9.81	407,739.37
	Median	0.00	40,525.00	7.09	230,933.70
	Std. Dev.	0.04	15,689.74	8.79	806,358.47
Integrated configuration	Mean	0.03	39,304.55	8.58	737,415.66
	Median	0.00	38,270.00	6.09	185,902.72
	Std. Dev.	0.08	14,973.82	8.93	5,435,641.39
Professional configuration	Mean	0.04	38,803.90	8.66	313,608.11
	Median	0.00	38,985.00	5.25	171,338.70
	Std. Dev.	0.11	13,339.61	10.54	446,799.51



**Table 6: Correlations between the organizational performances of HRMP' configurations.**

HRMP configuration	Organizational performances	1	2	3	4
Not classified	1 Turnover rate	1	0,046	-0,016	-0,085
	2 Labor cost per employee	0,046	1	-0,049	,366*
	3 Productivity per employee	-0,016	-0,049	1	,564**
	4 Revenues per employee	-0,085	,366*	,564**	1
Shared configuration	1 Turnover rate	1	-0,010	-0,062	-0,099
	2 Labor cost per employee	-0,010	1	-0,215	,314**
	3 Productivity per employee	-0,062	-0,215	1	,609**
	4 Revenues per employee	-0,099	,314**	,609**	1
Administrative configuration	1 Turnover rate	1	-0,100	0,045	-0,090
	2 Labor cost per employee	-0,100	1	-,385*	-0,147
	3 Productivity per employee	0,045	-,385*	1	,835**
	4 Revenues per employee	-0,090	-0,147	,835**	1
Integrated configuration	1 Turnover rate	1	0,056	-0,025	-0,036
	2 Labor cost per employee	0,056	1	-,227**	,164**
	3 Productivity per employee	-0,025	-,227**	1	0,011
	4 Revenues per employee	-0,036	,164**	0,011	1
Professional configuration	1 Turnover rate	1	,244**	-0,073	-0,103
	2 Labor cost per employee	,244**	1	-,135*	0,090
	3 Productivity per employee	-0,073	-,135*	1	,830**
	4 Revenues per employee	-0,103	0,090	,830**	1

\*\* . Two-tailed  $p < 0.01$

\* . Two-tailed  $p < 0.05$ .

### Control Variables

We controlled for several variables that might account for the relationships between our independent and dependent variables. We included organization size (Revenues and Employees) because it might influence the adoption of HRM practices (Nguyen and Bryant, 2004; Rutherford et al., 2003; Osterman, 1994). We assume that smaller family firms might face little complexity in the family and company and so might devote less attention to their managerial approaches (Melin and Nordqvist, 2000). We also checked for the generation involved, as a proxy for governance and managerial experience (Gersick et al. 1997; Lansberg, 1999; Ward, 2004).

### Analysis and results

We tested our hypotheses adopting a three-phase process. In the first phase, we investigated the relevance of the four HRMP configurations in family firms (Hypothesis 1). In the second phase, we verified the orientation of the four HRMP configurations toward specific HRMP functional goals (Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 5,

and 6). In the last phase, we studied the organizational performances of the four HRMP configurations (Hypotheses 7a and 7b).

### *The relevance of the four HRMP configurations in family firms*

As stated before, we identified 779 (91.8%) family firms showing one of the four proposed HRMP configurations, while only 70 (8.2%) of them do not show any of the proposed HRMP configurations. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

### *Orientation toward specific HRMP functional goals*

We conducted a series of multivariate ANOVA (MANOVA, with Wilks's lambda test) to test hypotheses about HRMP functional goals. We used the five HRMP functional goals as independent variables (Organizational fit, Motivation of employees, Development of competencies, Productivity and Efficiency, and Reduction of labor costs), the HRMP configurations as the dependent variable, and the control variables as covariates (Generation involved, Employees, and Revenues).

There is a statistically significant difference in Functional goals based on a HRMP configuration,  $F(15, 1977) = 5.418, p < .0005$ ; Wilk's  $\Lambda = 0.095$  (see Table 7 and 8).

**Table 7: MANOVA descriptive statistics about HRMP functional goals.**

Functional HRMP goals	HRMP configuration	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Organizational fit	Shared	0.51	0.38	103
	Administrative	0.17	0.32	31
	Integrated	0.57	0.39	331
	Professional	0.40	0.38	262
	Total	0.48	0.40	727
Motivation of employees	Shared	0.34	0.36	103
	Administrative	0.10	0.26	31
	Integrated	0.45	0.39	331
	Professional	0.30	0.39	262
	Total	0.37	0.39	727
Development of competencies	Shared	0.36	0.38	103
	Administrative	0.14	0.27	31
	Integrated	0.48	0.38	331
	Professional	0.35	0.37	262
	Total	0.40	0.38	727
Productivity and Efficiency	Shared	0.31	0.38	103
	Administrative	0.05	0.19	31
	Integrated	0.34	0.36	331
	Professional	0.27	0.33	262
	Total	0.30	0.36	727
Reduction of labor costs	Shared	0.14	0.26	103
	Administrative	0.02	0.08	31

Integrated	0.20	0.30	331
Professional	0.18	0.29	262
Total	0.18	0.29	727

We can see from Table 8 that the four HRMP configurations present statistically significant differences on all the functional goals. Precisely, they are Organizational fit: ( $F(3, 720) = 15.87$ ;  $p < .000$ ); Motivational of employees: ( $F(3, 720) = 13.99$ ;  $p < .0005$ ); Development of competencies: ( $F(3, 720) = 11.97$ ;  $p < .0005$ ); Productivity and Efficiency: ( $F(3, 720) = 7.09$ ;  $p < .0005$ ); Reduction of labor costs: ( $F(3, 720) = 4.13$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The four HRMP configurations do not present significant differences with respect control variables, e.g. Generation involved, Employees, and Revenues.

We can see from Table 9 that, since no one of the related confidence intervals includes the 0 value, the Integrated HRMP configuration presents statistically significant differences on the following two functional goals, Motivation of employees and Development of competencies, with respect all the other three configurations. As far as Productivity and Efficiency goal is concerned, the Integrated configuration shows a significant difference with respect the Professional configuration. As far as Reduction of labor costs goal is concerned, the Integrated configuration shows a significant difference with respect the Shared configuration. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is partially supported, Hypothesis 4 is supported, and, finally, Hypothesis 5 is not supported.

**Table 8: Multivariate tests about HRMP functional goals.**

	Wilks' Lambda	F	Hyp. df.	Error df.	Organizational fit			Motivation of employees			Development of competencies			Productivity and Efficiency			Reduction of labor costs								
					Type III Sum of Squares	F	Sig.	Type III Sum of Squares	F	Sig.	Type III Sum of Squares	F	Sig.	Type III Sum of Squares	F	Sig.	Type III Sum of Squares	F	Sig.						
Corrected model					7.27	8.22	0.000	***	6.30	7.28	0.000	***	5.61	6.80	0.000	***	3.54	4.82	0.000	***	1.05	2.13	0.048	*	
Intercept	0.82	30.72	***	5	716	17.45	118.46	0.000	***	9.39	65.07	0.000	***	10.42	75.75	0.000	***	4.64	37.93	0.000	***	1.71	20.74	0.000	***
Generation involved	1.00	0.44		5	716	0.08	0.56	0.455		0.01	0.06	0.814		0.10	0.70	0.404		0.20	1.65	0.200		0.03	0.40	0.525	
Employees	1.00	0.67		5	716	0.12	0.80	0.372		0.16	1.08	0.298		0.26	1.86	0.173		0.22	1.79	0.182		0.00	0.01	0.932	
Revenues	1.00	0.63		5	716	0.09	0.60	0.438		0.03	0.21	0.645		0.02	0.16	0.693		0.19	1.56	0.212		0.00	0.02	0.901	
HRMP configuration	0.89	5.42	***	15	1977	7.01	15.87	0.000	***	6.06	13.99	0.000	***	4.94	11.97	0.000	***	2.60	7.09	0.000	***	1.02	4.13	0.006	**
Error						106.05				103.93				99.01				88.07				59.29			
Total						282.78				207.56				222.44				156.78				83.00			
Corrected Total						113.31				110.23				104.63				91.61				60.35			

**Table 9: Integrated configuration as a contrast.**

Contrast's results - K-Matrix - Integrated configuration as contrast						
Functional HRMP goals	Comparisons	Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% CI	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
Organizational fit	Shared versus Integrated	-0.05	0.04	0.215	-0.14	0.03
	Administrative versus Integrated	-0.40	0.07	0.000	-0.54	-0.25
	Professional versus Integrated	-0.16	0.03	0.000	-0.23	-0.10
Motivation of employees	Shared versus Integrated	-0.12	0.04	0.007	-0.20	-0.03
	Administrative versus Integrated	-0.36	0.07	0.000	-0.50	-0.22
	Professional versus Integrated	-0.16	0.03	0.000	-0.22	-0.09
Development of competencies	Shared versus Integrated	-0.12	0.04	0.004	-0.20	-0.04
	Administrative versus Integrated	-0.34	0.07	0.000	-0.48	-0.20
	Professional versus Integrated	-0.13	0.03	0.000	-0.19	-0.07
Productivity and Efficiency	Shared versus Integrated	-0.02	0.04	0.577	-0.10	0.06
	Administrative versus Integrated	-0.28	0.07	0.000	-0.41	-0.16
	Professional versus Integrated	-0.07	0.03	0.021	-0.12	-0.01
Reduction of labor costs	Shared versus Integrated	-0.05	0.03	0.094	-0.12	0.01
	Administrative versus Integrated	-0.18	0.05	0.001	-0.28	-0.07
	Professional versus Integrated	-0.01	0.02	0.546	-0.06	0.03

We can see from Table 10 that the Shared HRMP configuration presents a statistically significant difference in the Organizational fit goal with respect the Professional configuration. Thus, Hypothesis 6 is supported.

**Table 10: Shared configuration as a contrast.**

Contrast's results - K-Matrix - Shared configuration as contrast						
Functional HRMP goal	Comparisons	Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% CI	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
Organizational fit	Administrative versus Shared	-0.34	0.08	0.000	-0.50	-0.19
	Integrated versus Shared	0.05	0.04	0.215	-0.03	0.14
	Professional versus Shared	-0.11	0.04	0.015	-0.20	-0.02

### ***Organizational performances of the four HRMP configurations***

Also in the third phase of the analysis, we conducted a series of multivariate ANOVA (MANOVA, with Wilks's lambda test) to test hypotheses about organizational performances of the four proposed HRMP configurations. We used the four organizational performance measures as independent variables (Turnover rate, Labor cost per employee, Productivity per employee, and Revenues per employee), the HRMP configurations as the dependent variable, and the control variables as covariates (Generation involved, Employees, and Revenues).

There is not a statistically significant difference with respect the four Organizational performances measures in the four proposed HRMP configurations,  $F(12, 1452) = 0.761$ ,  $p = 0.692$ ; Wilk's  $\Lambda = 0.984$  (see Table 11 and 12).

**Table 11: MANOVA descriptive statistics about Organizational performances.**

Organizational performances	HRMP configuration	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Turnover rate	Shared	0.02	0.08	80
	Administrative	0.02	0.04	28
	Integrated	0.03	0.07	243
	Professional	0.04	0.11	208
	Total	0.03	0.09	559
Labor cost per employee	Shared	42,922.13	13,761.81	80
	Administrative	38,676.43	15,689.74	28
	Integrated	40,233.54	14,070.41	243
	Professional	40,112.88	11,972.75	208
	Total	40,495.42	13,373.74	559
Productivity per employee	Shared	8.80	8.03	80
	Administrative	9.81	8.79	28
	Integrated	8.38	8.48	243
	Professional	8.45	10.16	208
	Total	8.54	9.08	559
Revenues per employee	Shared	357,364.95	343,643.52	80
	Administrative	434,034.94	845,543.40	28
	Integrated	554,150.72	2,819,547.34	243
	Professional	315,058.07	424,332.53	208
	Total	431,006.93	1,891,635.59	559

**Table 12: Multivariate tests about Organizational performances.**

	Wilks' Lambda	F	Hyp. df.	Error df.	Turnover rate			Labor cost per employees			Productivity per employee			Revenues per employee							
					Type III Sum of Squares	F	Sig.	Type III Sum of Squares	F	Sig.	Type III Sum of Squares	F	Sig.	Type III Sum of Squares	F	Sig.					
Corrected model					0.05	1.09	0.367	5,937,167,735.09	5.82	0.000	***	1,173.13	2.41	0.026	**	628,937,053,691,230.00	42.31	0.000	***		
Intercept	0.39	216.44	***	4	549	0.09	12.05	0.001	***	114,565,937,854.90	673.74	0.000	***	6,222.49	76.59	0.000	***	440,092,612,405.78	0.18	0.674	
Generation involved	0.66	71.91	***	4	549	0.02	2.20	0.139		4,638,791,568.52	27.28	0.000	***	756.49	9.31	0.002	**	616,374,353,582,741.00	248.76	0.000	***
Employees	0.99	0.69		4	549	0.00	0.17	0.679		370,071,960.69	2.18	0.141		0.00	0.00	0.997		43,874,2443,480.34	0.18	0.674	
Revenues	0.92	11.61	***	4	549	0.00	0.20	0.653		113,622,788.62	0.67	0.414		729.29	8.98	0.003	**	93,641,822,629,149.40	37.79	0.000	***
HRMP configuration	0.98	0.76		12	1453	0.03	1.20	0.309		662,221,659.12	1.30	0.274		65.04	0.27	0.849		789,574,961,789.57	0.11	0.956	
Error						4.11				93,864,939,741.12				44,849.05				1,367,746,091,940,660.00			
Total						4.71				1,016,494,509,200.00				86,762.09				2,100,526,885,531,960.00			
Corrected Total						4.16				99,802,107,476.21				46,022.18				1,996,683,145,631,890.00			

We can see from Table 12 that HRMP configurations do not present any statistically significant difference in all the Organizational performances. HRMP configurations present significant differences concerning the control variables, e.g., Generation involved, Employees, and Revenues. Thus, Hypothesis 7a is supported, and Hypothesis 7b is not supported.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The paper aimed to develop and test a configurational model of HRM practices in family firms. Here, we discuss our findings as well as the theoretical and methodological challenges researchers face when adopting such an approach. The typology of the four proposed HRM configurations we developed was based on two needs for coordination, the implicit and explicit ones. We combined these results in four configurations of HRM practices (the Shared, Administrative, Integrated, and Professional configuration). Family firms tend to form HRMP configurations based on their task environment, perceived needs for coordination mechanisms, and HRM practices. Moreover, the four proposed HRMP configurations seem to be stable and present a similar impact on organizational performances, notwithstanding aiming at different functional goals. The investigation of configurations as "any multidimensional constellation of conceptually distinct characteristics that commonly occur together" (Meyer et al. 1993: 1175) defines a relevant and critical role in both organization theory and research (Fiss, 2007; Bensaou and Venkatraman, 1995; Doty and Glick, 1994). A configurational approach reveals that firms may best interpret as configurations of interconnected practices, rather than as linked or inaccurately tied objects studied in isolation. We propose to adopt a systemic and holistic view of family firms with respect their HRM practices, where configurations rather than specific independent practices connect to an outcome such as organizational performance (Delery and Doty, 1996). The configurational perspective proposed in the paper stresses the concept of equifinality, which refers to a situation where "a system can reach the same final state, from different initial conditions and by a variety of different paths" (Katz and Kahn, 1978: 30). In other words, through the adoption of a specific configuration of HRM practices, a family firm can reach maximal organizational performances considering different needs for coordination mechanisms and pursuing different functional goals. Through observation, we identified four high-frequency HRMP configurations in family firms. These configurations denote typical organizational choices in which family firms framed their task environment and internal behaviors to compete in their businesses. We also discovered several interesting features of these HRMP configurations. They are not planned for achieving specific organizational performances. They do not differ in term of outcomes. Instead they emerged over time as family and non-family managers made decisions about posturing their family firms within the environment. As managers' knowledge and experience with a specific HRMP configuration grew, so did their awareness of its functional goals and their ability to make short-term adjustments to the relationships among the configuration of practices and the need for coordination of task, resource, and people. The four



proposed HRMP configurations show an internal organizational consistency in that as they are recognized by managers, they provide a supporting frame for operating the family firm to obtain the best organizational outcome. We found that there is no one single HRMP configuration that is sufficient for high organizational performance but, preferably, that there are four different configurations of the HRM practices, the organizational aspects of managing tasks, resources, and people, and the management of buffers between work activities that resulted in similar levels of organizational performances. In comparing the organizational performances, for the four proposed HRMP configurations, we were also able to show that, while there is an overall equifinality, these configurations reveal different functional goals. In summary, family firms are complex systems impacted by both external and internal environmental dimensions. These dimensions interact over time resulting in realized HRMP configurations that have similar effects.

With an organizational awareness of low levels of both the need for implicit and explicit coordination mechanisms, the Administrative configuration refers to simple and not dynamic environmental dimensions. It asks for managing people through few rules and procedures (Kaman et al., 2001), aiming at the standardization of processes and efficiency. Family firms do not incorporate the environmental dimensions them into the development of the personnel management. An administrative role of HRMP emerges, realized through basic salary and benefits administration, basic record keeping via manual employee profiles, and non-exempt hiring (Baird and Meshoulam, 1988).

With an organizational awareness about a high level of the need for implicit coordination mechanisms and a low level the need for explicit coordination mechanisms, the Shared configuration refers to dynamic and complex environmental dimensions. Family firms aim at organizational identity and affective commitment through the adoption of commitment-based HRMP. The goal is to create an effective organizational environment where family firms manage people nurturing collaborative behaviors (Bedwell et al., 2012). It is critical to creating a culture and network of relationships that support effective strategy implementation. The shared configuration includes interdependent work practices, clan fostering initiatives, and broader skill development. Family firms adopt practices related to motivation, including results-oriented appraisal, and practices related to opportunity, such as employee participation programs. HRM policies foster internal communication, and new employees' programs are added to flexibly respond to business needs in compensation, benefits, and training. Shared configurations are unable to reach high degrees of formalization and, consequently, job descriptions are improvised. Performance appraisal is equally uncertain and of limited value when selecting people for future, different, ad hoc tasks. In the Shared configuration, selecting, developing, and retaining human capital represent critical steps in building the foundation for strategic capabilities and disciplines that create competitive advantage.

The Professional configuration presents an organizational awareness about a high level of the need for explicit coordination mechanisms and a low level of the need for implicit coordination mechanisms. It refers to relatively stable and complex environmental dimensions. The professional configuration looks for managing human resources through rules, complex procedures, articulated plans, by aiming at the highest standardization of processes and efficiency. Transaction-based HRMP are adopted, which emphasize individual short-term exchange relationships (Tsui et al., 1995; Arthur, 1992). The professional configuration includes hard work structures, result-based initiatives, and trans-specialist development. Employees' succession planning is a crucial issue. The Professional configuration provides professionalization in functions/divisions and tries to incorporate and develop managerial skills. People can be recruited, selected, compensated, and trained for and selected into them, though effective data collection. The implementation of formal HRMP should not aim at ensuring conformity with what family firms perceive as best practices, but rather at developing systems that increase net benefits associated with HRM.

The Integrated configuration presents an organizational awareness about a high level of the need both for implicit and explicit coordination mechanisms. It refers to complex and highly dynamic environmental dimensions. The management of the personnel function strives for family firm orientation, consistently with the strategic business direction. HRMP aim at developing a high environmental and cultural scanning, and long-range planning tension. Information and communication are consistent with the adoption of planning, research, and analysis tools. Long-range and "what if" questions connect to employees and organizational variables. Family firms search for organizational identity and affective commitment, creating an integrated organizational environment where they manage both the personal relationships of individuals' working together, showing collaborative behaviors, and the functions or the divisions of the organizational structure. HRM adopts both a resource-based and a control-based approach to the measurement of commitment-based HRMP (Batt, 2002; Tsui et al., 1997; Youndt et al., 1996; Huselid, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995; Arthur, 1994, 1992).

#### *Contributions and Implications*

The four HRMP configurations for family firms represent a managerial diagnostic and planning tool when used in HRM systems' designing to integrate environmental characteristics and people issues into a comprehensive schema. It provides a framework for family and non-family HR managers to define, interpret, and frame choices about how HRM practices influence organizational performances. By focusing on each specific HRM practice and describing its relationship to the others in a systemic representation, a whole picture emerges regarding how family firms may manage people in support of strategic behaviors and the role that family and non-family managers play in orchestrating the entire HRM system.

Family and non-family HR managers, however, must acquire expertise about the concepts and language describing their task environment, organizational performance's indices, and HR philosophy, in addition to specific aspects of HRM practices. The proposed HRMP configurational approach ask for an understanding of the relationships between different functional goals that sustain them toward organizational performances, which exist among the various HRM practices. Family and non-family managers HR managers uncomfortable with the equifinality principle that characterizes the proposed configuration model may result not able to support the family firm to be aware and manage the non-linear connections existing among different HRM practices. A family firm's organizational performance at HRM managerial level may be higher when HRM choices about explicit and implicit coordination mechanisms operate in complementary ways. The effectiveness of such complementarity is not always fully acknowledged in practice and literature. Literature tends to argue that the family firm's employees natural tendency for implicit coordination can be questioned by formal HRM practices aimed at aligning the spectrum of organizational behaviors and informal organizational mechanisms. In contrast, the practice reveals formally directed perspectives of the family firms social capital, organizational climate, and HRM policies place their reliance in the capacity of the HRM practices to set the organizational context on a desirable path.

A critical goal of any family and non-family HR manager is to make short-term decisions regarding trade-offs between policies of the HRMP configuration adopted. As the task environment changes, HR decisions should be made regarding HRM practices. The four HRMP configurations provide a framework for HR managers in family firms to frame the HRM practices' interactions and define how trade-offs among the policies should be made at any point in time. By using the four HRMP configurations, family and non-family HR managers may place in action this perspective, governing its long-term organizational performances on the family firm. By placing trade-offs within the context of a larger framework, their short-term outcomes are better understood regarding their contribution to the family firm's survival and continuity.

HRMP configurations emerge over time as choices are made regarding the specific practices and their interactions. The systems nature of the four proposed HRMP configurations warns the family and non-family HR manager that changes cannot be made in a vacuum. For a family firm to experience on the emergent features of an HRMP configuration a tight alignment among the HRM practices is necessary. At a micro level, this means that HRM practices must be developed and implemented with a shared vision and a full understanding of all line and HR people. Also, an HRM philosophy and strategy that takes little consideration of the task environment dynamics and the family culture regarding employees will not contribute to a tightly bound configuration with positive properties for organizational performance.

## **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

As far as the cross-sectional approach of the research is concerned, we should devote caution in interpreting the findings, since we assumed rather than tested the direction of relationships between HRMP configurations, functional goals, and organizational performances. Reversed causality may have a role, i.e., the situation that performing family firms present more resources to invest in HRM practices may show face validity as the idea that adopting HRM practices may support the achievement of higher organizational performances. Future research may assess such directions of relationships in a longitudinal manner. Another limitation of the paper refers to our functional HRMP goals measures as perceptual. Often, adopting perceptual measures is hard to elude when simultaneously investigating a heterogeneous sample of organizations as family firms are (Guest, 2001). This is the case of our sample, where family firms came from different industries. A strength of our research is the use of different data sources. The CEOs or by a senior executive (co-CEO) with overall responsibility for managerial issues provided the data about the adoption of HRMP practices and functional HRMP goals, while the AIDA database (by Bureau Van Dijk Electronic Publishing) provided the data for organizational performances. However, functional HRMP goals were measures that HR managers were better able to assess. Thus, a single source provided both data about HRM practices and functional goals. Nevertheless, results on organizational performances suggest single source did not play a significant role. A final limitation of our study is the assumption that the fit of different HRM practices in configurations matters and that we suppose equal weights of individual HRM practices within the configurations. HRM practices do not necessarily show synergistic systemic effects, but may also act as substitutes, additives or may even act against each other (Delery, 1998). However, assigning different weights to practices may affect the interpretative picture since we have no a clear idea on to proceed. The paper shows that complexity is already high with the actual assumption of equal weights. Weighting thwarts the investigation further, as the spectrum of possible configurations rises. The weighting asks for some strong theoretical bases. For example, in building theoretical HRMP configurations will then ask for assumptions about the predicted variations of organizational performances between individual HRM practices, their impact on one another as well as well as their overall synergistic effect. Future research developments might explore the weighting as well and its impact on substitution, additive, multiplicative effects involving different HRMP practices in family firms.

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