



## The Impact of e-HRM Practices on Social Performance through HRM Practices: Case of Al Rajhi Bank

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### **Abstract:**

*The growing use of modern technology and computer's application makes electronic management an essential requirement in human resources departments among others functions because of its positive achievement in improving the performance of workers in organizations and institutions of all kinds.*

*This research aims to identify the effects of electronic human resource management (e-HRM) on social performance through the use of two types of HRM practices: administrative and strategic.*

*This study was conducted in the Saudi banking sector and more specifically at Al Rajhi Bank. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire survey of the bank's staff.*

*The results show that three dimensions of e-HRM (relational, transformational and operational) affect HRM practices at both administrative and strategic which in turn influence social performance.*

*The outcomes of this analysis provide a critical path of the different effects among these three concepts. First, a complementarity was identified between the transformational dimension of e-HRM, with a positive effect on organizational commitment. Second, an effect was demonstrated between administrative HRM practices and the operational role of e-HRM, in addition to its impact on social satisfaction.*

*Finally, the relational role of e-HRM has a double effect on the HRM practices in general with a different relative importance.*

*The main conclusion of this study is the interdependence between different levels of HRM practices and the roles of e-HRM which allows us to argue that HRM is an exhaustive concept with a positive and important effect on social performance.*

**Keywords:** Roles of e-HRM, Practices of HRM, Social performance

### **1. Introduction**

One of the most important developments in recent years has been the widespread use of information and communication technology (ICT) by enterprises (Kalika et al., 2003) to inform, communicate and coordinate (Breton, Proulx, 2002). All sectors, all professions and all organizations are affected by this technology. Thus, all functions of the organization, including human resources (HR) are concerned with the developing use of ICT. These developments are represented by the concept of electronic HR, which has become an essential requirement in the HR departments in all sectors and has had a positive effect on the performance of workers (Laval, 2000). In this context, many tools are available to organizations to manage basic HR activities at the administrative and supporting levels, within HR tools specializing in activities and managerial processes (including recruitment, training, evaluation, and compensation) "(Laval and Thierno Diallo, 2007)

According to this, the electronic management of human resources (e-HR) as representing a strong response to the challenges of the twenty-first century in a world characterized by digital space, knowledge and the internet revolution.

In general, e-HRM supports traditional functions such as recruitment, training, personnel management and administration offering managers and executives a system of extensive information on their employees. It also facilitates self-service via the company intranet, allowing staff to manage their leave, their expenses, the management of their skills evaluation, career development knowledge management and e-learning modules (van Leemput and Amiel, 2010).

According to Lepak et Snell (1998), HRM is moving towards another stage marked by “a creative function value, emphasizing its strategic contribution and development benefits with added value for operational managers”.

In the same field, Guérin and Wils (1992, 1993) argue that HRM practices will change from a traditional, mainly operational vision, to one characterized by strategic HR activities, moving towards a new paradigm where HRM become more strategic, cultural, participatory, evaluative, computerized and international (Long, 2004).

The impact of this new strategic HRM paradigm on performance has become an important field of research (Truss and Gratton, 1994; Wright and McMahan, 1992; Youndt et al., 1996; Wright and Snell, 1998).

From this brief analysis of the different relationships between e-HRM, HRM practices and performance, we can conclude that e-HRM and its use of ICT must affect HRM practices at two levels: administrative and strategic. It is also clear that the revolution in practices makes HRM as a strategic partner and stimulator of performance. In this study, performance will be represented by its social dimension.

Thus, we will try to identify and understand the impact of electronic human resources management on social performance through HRM practices.

This aim is addressed by pursuing three objectives:

1. To determine the impact of e-HRM on social performance
  2. To identify the relevant HRM practices
  3. To determine a critical path for better social performance based on three concepts: e-HRM, HRM practices and social performance.
- First, we must define the concepts of (HRM practices, e-HRM and social performance). The theoretical framework and methodology can then be detailed and the discussed with reference to the literature review, allowing conclusions to be drawn. The following section therefore begins by considering definitions of HRM practices and its two dimensions.

## 2. Human Resource Management Practices

Marciano (1995) describes the function of HRM as to understand, maintain, develop, use and integrate individuals in the workplace. It is a specific category of management, charged with managing a specific category of corporate resources. Alternatively, "HRM denotes the part of an organization's activities associated with the recruitment, development and management of its employees" (Wall and Wood 2005)

According to Mahé (1998), HRM is the sum of those practices which aim to build and develop human potential able to produce, to enrich themselves and to adapt to changes.

Dolan et al., (2002), describe HRM practices as the management of talents and energies in order to contribute to the achievement of the mission, vision, strategy and goals of the organization.

Anyway, the expression of practices underlies the manner of operating specific to an organization or set of organizations adopting them (in the view of Guérin and Wils, 1990). They argue that while the number of these practices is unlimited, it is possible to identify some fields of practices among many activities related to HRM.

The majority of authors classify HRM practices according to the type of skills or knowledge required by the specialist who assumes the different tasks related to the HRM – related tasks, while others choose organizational objectives as a reference to identify types of HRM practices. More recently, some researchers have used one of these approaches to emphasize the strategic dimension in the development of the organization as reflected in its HRM practices (Ulrich, 1987; Schuler, 1987).

The approach adopted by the present research, is to define HRM practices in terms of their relation to the strategic and operational levels.

### 2.1. Administrative HRM

This typology corresponds to the main HRM activities which are outlined in the great majority of academic references. This approach can be considered useful and accessible when oriented to the five practices of: recruitment, training, information, salary and career management which are usually treated as applications of the HR function in pursuit of operational objectives.

The purpose, here, is to manage employees within the enterprise so as to achieve two apparently contradictory goals, i.e. to serve the organization's economic ends and to fulfill its social role, which is to motivate and to value its human resources (Dietrich and Pigeyre, 2011)

In practical terms, then, HRM has a considerable interest in organizational practices through its managerial implications. It initially invests in the individual as a social actor. This is a definition whereby the individual can be confronted with many situations and HRM must manage the diversity related to individual and collective problems. Here HRM, inspired by individualized practices, tries to maintain a social climate essential to the achievement of organizational objectives.

This approach to HR practices can be viewed from an instrumental point of view, where the actors operate in order to perform the practices best able to limit human problems and to deliver technical satisfaction work.

## 2.2. Strategic HRM

The study of HRM in terms of its operational or strategic nature is particularly developed in the work of Guérin and Wils (1992; 1993; 2002). The perspective of these researchers is interesting because it shows strategic human resource management (SHRM) as a system composed of three parts: planning, implementation and evaluation (Guérin and Wils, 1993, p. 23)

The first step is to develop strategies to enable the organization to meet its HR challenges (planning). The second is to ensure the practical application of the HR strategy as action plans (implementation). The final step concerns the assessment of the contribution of HRM to the organization (evaluation). These three components constitute the strategic management of human resources in the organizations studied.

Some researchers consider HR a central resource in decision-making (Dyer, 1985; Devanna et al., 1981; Peretti, 2006; Tichy et al., 1982).

This idea has been adopted in SHRM who have made considerable efforts to demonstrate that the way in which human resources are managed, in particular through the HR function, has strong empirical inputs in terms of organizational effectiveness (Delery and Doty 1996; Huselid 1995). Researchers such as Snell et al. (1998) and Ulrich et al. (1990) have linked this contribution to the building of competitive advantage.

Ferris et al. (1999) argued that human resources have the value required to help the organization to achieve competitive sustainable development, so HRM can be considered as strategic.

Whatever the determinant of the strategic character of HR, the strategic importance of human resources has been widely acknowledged (Huselid, 1995; Pfeffer and Veiga, 1999). More specifically, HRM has been found to be linked to increased productivity (MacDuffie, 1995; Ichniowski; Shaw and Prenzushi, 1997; Fox et al., 1999), improved customer service (Fox et al., 1999), improved efficiency (Becker and Gerhart, 1996), increased corporate value (Huselid, 1995), greater profitability or financial returns (Delery and Doty, 1996; Becker and al. 1996; Fox and al. 1999) and organizational survival (Welbourne and Andrews 1995).

Snell, Youndt, and Wright (1996) define SHRM as "organizational systems designed to achieve the competitive advantage of individuals".

Competitive advantage is perceived as a set of capacities or resources allowing the organization to be different from its competitors (Porter, 1980; 1985). In this regard, the value of strategic management appears to derive from HRM practices in organizations which should create a competitive advantage rather than a simple accommodation (Snell and all, 1996).

This research therefore distinguishes between two fields of HRM strategic and administrative. SHRM is essentially composed of HRM activities that the literature classifies as important to mobilization whereas "administrative HRM," as its name indicates, brings together a set of HR activities recognized by traditional theoreticians of management sciences.

## 3. e-HRM

In general terms, e-HRM is the internal application of e-business techniques to add value by facilitating a more efficient flow of information and more effective means within HRM (Ruel et al, 2004).

For Wyatt (2002), e-HRM is an application of technology allowing managers and employees to have direct access to HR and other services in the workplace for the purpose of communication, performance, reports, team management and training as well as application administration.

The term e-HRM, can be applied to functional HR, extranet applications, intranet, wireless communication and mobile applications of HR. According to the documentation available there are three types of e-HRM: operational, relational and transformational (Lepak & Snell, 1998 Wright & Dyer, 2000)

Operational e-HRM is related to asking employees to keep their personal data up to date through a website or HR system to maintain the value of that information for them and for the company.

Relational e-HRM supports staff by means of web-based tools and the use of manual procedures such recruitment and selection

Transformational e-HRM, finally, is a set of web-based integrated tools allowing workers to develop online strategic choices of the organization.

Radwan (2004) lists a number of necessary conditions for the transition e-HRM:

1. The commitment of senior management to support and build e-HRM projects
2. Strategic planning of the transition towards the digital world.  
The development of an integrated plan for comprehensive communication between all sides.
3. A focused on the study of the needs of workers and how to satisfy them.  
Inviting existing employees to submit ideas for e-HRM services.
4. An integrated study of procedures and performance scores,  
focusing on the interdependence of service systems  
and on technical capacity.

In light of the above requirements, it is clear that any organization wishing to switch to e-HRM must make intensive efforts to create a society which is based on knowledge and information (Shi, 2002). The organization can ensure that its HRM practices contribute to this by adopting some rules and guidelines according to its particular needs.

Given that the concept of HRM practices and e-HRM define the causal chain of our research model, it is essential to identify clearly the dependent variable to be measured. Our dependent variable being performance, this requires some scrutiny under a theoretical lens before putting it into our model.

#### 4. Social Performance

Many contributions to the literatures support the principle that human resource management affects financial results (Rogers and Wright, 1998). A preference for financial measures of performance is cited by Wright (1998).

A review of the literature by Rogers and Wright (1998) found that the majority of dependent variables used in studies of SHRM were financial indicators which were used in more than half of the research reviewed. However, despite the importance of the link between HRM practices and performance outcomes, the performance concept remains ambiguous and implicit (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Cook and Ferris, 1986; Devanna et al., 1984; Rogers and Wright, 1998; Tichy et al., 1982).

In the same vein, performance becomes a multidimensional rather than a one-dimensional concept. For example, the use of the stakeholder approach implies that some authors such as Truss (2001) advocates a multiple measure of performance in order to balance the process leading to it without creating conflicts between internal and external actors of the organization.

In this way, performance is considered a composite concept based on economic rationality, which highlights results such as labour productivity, innovation, quality, efficiency gains and flexibility (Boselie et al., 2005): on the other hand, one more social aspect of performance is related to legitimacy and equity (Paauwe, 2004). Here, the social aspect can be assessed by indicators such as commitment, trust, job security and perceived equity.

By extending the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), we can interpret performance according to the preferences of the different actors who have an interest in the organization, which brings us back to the social performance components of our research model. Lapenu et al. (2004) differentiate the social performance of an organization from its economic and financial performance. According to these researchers, social performance takes into account the nature of the internal relations between its employees, its relationships with customers and those with other stakeholders.

In the same perspective, Dyer and Reeves (1995) note different types of indicators which are most appropriate for SHRM research. In all, they propose four indicators:

- 1) Human resource outcomes such as absenteeism, turnover, job satisfaction and performance of the individual and group;
- 2) Organizational results such as productivity and quality of products and services
- 3) Financial performance such as return on assets and investment;
- 4) Market efficiency

For our part, we will adopt the approach which assesses the social performance in terms of commitment and satisfaction (Bayad et al., 2001)

#### 5. The Impact of e-HRM on Social Performance through HRM Practices

This part of the analysis establishes four hypotheses related to our theoretical framework: these are presented in section 4.3. The analysis operates at two levels: the first is related to the relationship between e-HRM and HRM practices, while the second concerns the link between HRM and social performance.

In their attempt to explore empirically the link between HRM and performance researchers have identified HRM practices which contribute to competitive advantage (Pfeffer and Veiga, 1999; Ferris et al., 1999). However, there is no consensus regarding the practices to be used (Ferris et al., 1999). In addition, the methodology for assessing the effect of these performance practices differ between the use of individual practices (Pfeffer, 1998) and 'bundles' or 'systems' of coherent practices (Becker and Huselid, 1998; MacDuffie, 1995; Ichniowski and Shaw and Prenzushi, 1997). While the first of these methodologies has been empirically verified despite its contested results, studies on the second are rather rare. The reason for this paucity of contributions to research into a link between HRM systems and organizational outcomes is simply the complexity of the approach.

Nevertheless, many studies have shown the positive effects of HRM on organizational performance (Baron and Kreps, 1999; Delery and Doty, 1996; Lepak and Snell, 1999: 2002).

The main idea behind this research is the assumption that if HRM does have an impact on social performance and if e-HRM affects HRM practices we can produce guide lines for better social performance within the framework of the enterprise's existing ICT use and determine which roles correspond to which practice and to which level of social performance according to our needs.

##### 5.1. The link between e-HRM and HRM practices

Laval (2000) outlines the important effect of 'technological changes which have a strong impact on organizational management, coordination and control'.

According to the analysis of Tsui (1987), technology enables the HR function to develop relations with its base and provides the opportunity for greater efficiency, to the satisfaction of both parties. There is written evidence that ICT can be used effectively in HRM to reduce costs, improve services, redefine responsibilities within the organization and improve the strategic direction of HRM. Thus, e-HRM enables HRM practices to achieve its objectives and both of them must be in agreement (Kalika, 2005).

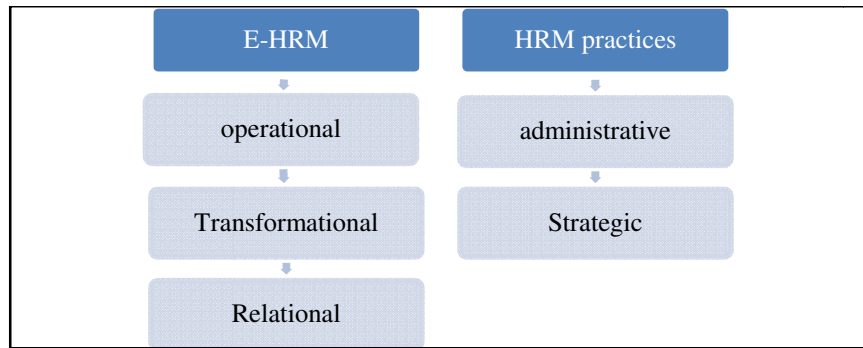


Figure 1

It may have concluded that the impact is operational with the implementation of ICT related to HR (databases, automation of administrative activities, etc.), and relational (or transactional) with the development of e-HRM. In this case, it is related to more sophisticated and interactive HRM activities. The focus is no longer on the administrative but on HR tools to support specialized business and managerial processes (recruitment, training, evaluation, compensation). The final impact is transformational. This is to reorganize the virtual HR team to give it a role and more strategic activities.

5.2. The Link between HRM Practices and Social Performance

The transformation from an operational to a strategic approach to HRM, presented at the beginning of this research, has achieved consensus in the scientific community (Meignant, 2000; Chen, Liaw et Lee, 2003; Career and Barrette, 2005). Research into the link between HRM and performance activities (Ulrich and Smallwood, 2005; YoundtandSnell, 2004; SheppeccandMilitello, 2000) also demonstrate the interest of researchers in the strategic dimension of HRM.

An analysis the evolution of the HR function indicates that most researchers concur that it has to operate as an operational adjunct to SHRM, where the employee, considered the main actor in performance, would be the most important element of the organization (Ulrich, 1996:1997; Beer, 1997; Besseyre des Horts, 1988; Peretti, 1999).

Several authors have demonstrated that human resources are an essential factor in competitiveness and organizational performance (Flamholz, 1971; Walker, 1992; Fombrun et al., 1984; Hendry and Pettigrew, 1990; Arthur, 1992; Huselid, 1995; Pfeffer, 1994; Becker and Gerhart, 1996). This finding shows the importance of taking strategic perspective on HRM, which drives organizations.

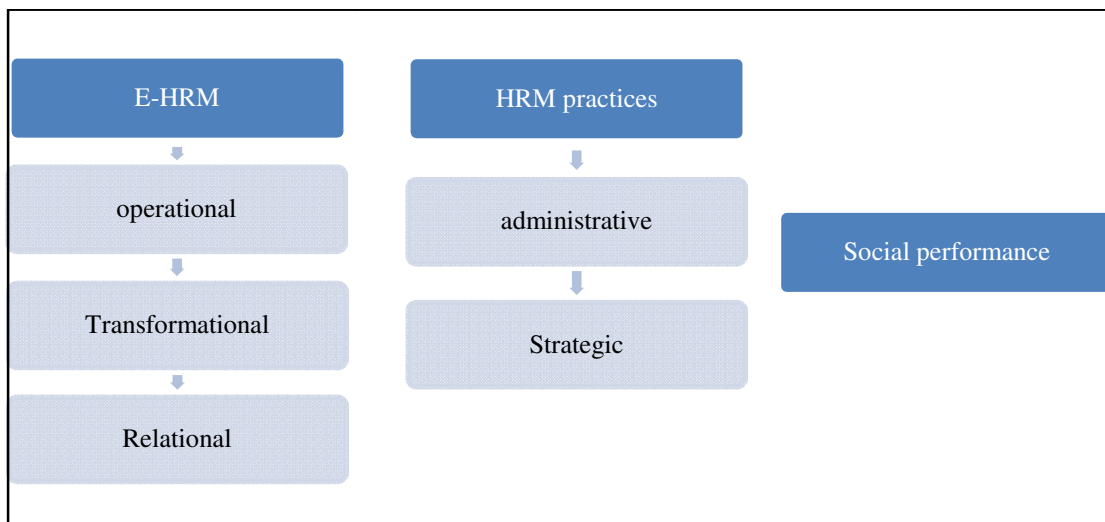


Figure 2

Lawler (1986) presents a qualified model of ‘high-Involvement management’, according to which a number of HRM practices would impact favorably on organizations in terms of output variables such as productivity, engagement and mobilization (Lapalme, Simard and Sablonnière 2002; Lawler, Mohrman and Ledford, 1992; Tremblay and Simard, 2000).

Guest (1990) includes HRM as a set of policies to maximize organizational integration, employee engagement, flexibility and quality of work.

Louan and Wils (2001) argue that human resources produce ‘natural’ value through the inherent qualities possessed by each individual and ‘indirect’ value through the establishment of an HRM policy which helps the company to gain a competitive advantage and allows it achieve a high level of organizational performance. For them, HRM practices are implemented to achieve better organizational performance.



Based on the analysis of the different relations that can be assumed between variables, four hypotheses can be elaborated:

- H1. e-HRM with an operational role stimulates administrative HRM practices, which affect social satisfaction.
- H2. e-HRM with a transformational role stimulates strategic HRM practices, which affect organizational commitment.
- H3. e-HRM with a relational role stimulates administrative HRM practices, which affect social satisfaction.
- H4. e-HRM with a relational role stimulates strategic HRM practices, which affect organizational commitment.

Having detailed the constituents of our research model and the various links which can be hypothesized between them, we summarize our proposal in Figure 3:



Figure 3: Proposed model of the impact of e-HRM on social performance

This section has established the research model and hypotheses: the next is devoted to a detailed presentation of methodology used for testing the hypotheses.

### 6. Methodology

The research sample was 30 employees of Al Rajhi Bank, from whom we collected quantitative data by means of a questionnaire. Once the questionnaire had been administered, the data were analyzed to test the hypotheses by the multiple regressions method. This allows us to quantify the relationship between e-HRM and HRM practices in stimulating social performance.

$$\text{Social performance} = \alpha \text{ e-HRM} + \beta \text{ HRM practices} + \text{error}$$

The first step was to conduct an exploratory factor analysis of the data, where all items were subjected to a principal component analysis to detect the composition theoretically defined. For each selected axis, we calculated the internal consistency of items represented by Cronbach's alphas detailed later.

The second step was to perform the multiple regression test for each hypothesis, according to the relations examined in this research.

### 7. Data analysis

The survey data were analyzed using SPSS 16. This section details and explains the results for each of the variables, in the order in which they were addressed by the questionnaire.

The social performance factor was the first to be examined, confirming the division into the two dimensions of organizational commitment and job satisfaction suggested by the literature review; these two dimensions were found to explain 63 % of the variance in the study data. The reliability of items in the organizational commitment dimension was 0.85, compared with 0.61 for the job satisfaction dimension.

After this first step in the analysis, just one item was deleted because of its limited contribution to explaining the results, which allow us to confirm that the social performance variable is represented by the same indicators identified in the literature review.

Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	N of items
,547	,601	4

Table 1 : Reliability statistics

The second variable measured in the questionnaire was HRM practices. Result are presented in table 2, which shows that about 73% of variance was explained by four dimensions of the variable, the last of which was deleted because it related to just one item.

Component	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3,780	31,503	31,503	2,729	22,743	22,743
2	2,272	18,931	50,434	2,401	20,010	42,753
3	1,570	13,087	63,520	2,093	17,439	60,192
4	1,151	9,594	73,114	1,551	12,922	73,114
5						

Table 2 : Total Variance explained

As shown in Table 3, this result identifies the emergence of a third dimension of HRM practices. Given the nature of the items related to it, referring to practices developed by employees which were neither purely administrative nor strategic but related to both of these existing dimensions and explored when the need arose. This 'hybrid' dimension of HRM can be said to represent a combination of administrative and strategic HRM.

Reliability was  $\alpha = 0.54$  for administrative HRM and  $\alpha = 0.83$  for strategic HRM.

The final factor examined in this research was e-HRM, which was explained by three dimensions: operational, relational and transformational, as expected. These explained a total of 60% of variance in this sample. Average reliability coefficient values were .81, .71 and .76 respectively.

As a result of this series of tests, five items were deleted to improve the Cronbach's alpha score and one due to its limited contribution to the three dimensions selected.

Table 3 shows the outcome of first step of purification of the data allowing us to proceed to the second round of hypothesis testing using the method of multiple regressions

Factor	Axis	Contribution
Social performance	1. Satisfaction	42%
	2. Commitment	21%
HRM practices	1. Administrative	31 %
	2. Strategic	18 %
	3. Administrative and strategic	13 %
E- HRM	1. Operational	29%
	2. Relational	21%
	3. transformational	10%

Table 3: Factors, dimensions and contributions

After this first step, we performed a multiple linear regression test according to the dimensions identified, giving the following results.

$\text{Satisfaction} = 2.4 - 0.27 \text{ operational role} + 0.5 \text{ Administrative practices} \quad R^2 = 0.02$
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A negative correlation between satisfaction and the operational role of e-HRM instead of a positive and significant correlation between satisfaction and administrative HRM practices.

Commitment =  $1.1 + 0.18$  transformational role –  $0.26$  strategic practices  $R^2 = 0.33$

A positive correlation with the transformational role and a negative correlation with strategic practices. $\text{Satisfaction} = 2.6 - 0.26 \text{ relational role} + 0.19 \text{ Administrative practices} \quad R^2 = 0.43$
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A negative correlation with relational role and a positive correlation with administrative practices.

Commitment =  $1.55 + 0.21$  relational role +  $0.10$  strategic practices  $R^2 = 0.23$

A positive correlation with relational role and strategic practices
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### 8. Discussion and Conclusion

Results of the principal component analysis demonstrate that within our sample, social performance depend mainly on satisfaction, while commitment is less important. However, both together determine social performance: therefore, managers must find ways to consolidate the contribution of commitment.

The analysis of HRM practices highlights a new dimension which is both strategic and administrative at the same time. For this reason, it would be useful to prepare programs to help employees to understand the difference between them and to apply each of them according to the needs of the organization.

Another important result related to e-HRM that must be discussed, is the finding that this factor was dominated by the operational role to almost the same extent that the HRM practices factor was dominated by the administrative dimension. But the most important finding is the low contribution of the transformational dimension which is important to maintain and to reinforce the strategic aspect of HRM pursued by specialists as the main axis of contemporary HRM.

In regard to performance, the most powerful influence in the model is the positive relation of satisfaction to administrative HRM practices; at this level, the effect of e-HRM is neglected, regardless of the role with which it is associated.

The contribution of commitment, in contrast to that of satisfaction, is based on e -HRM roles, especially the relational role and a few strategic practices.

Although our results show a causal link between e-HRM and social performance the nature of this causality remains to be clarified. Social performance can free up financial resources that facilitate the development and implementation of innovative HRM practices which can then contribute to improving the performance of organizations (Schneider et al., 2003). This area of research requires further work; an aspect which would seem to be particular interest is the complementarity between HRM practices.

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