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An International Comparison of the Effects of HRM Practices and Organizational Commitment on Quality of Job Performances among European University Employees

Sanne Smeenk[a], Christine Teelken[b], Rob Eisinga[c] and Hans Doorewaard[b]

[a]Institute for Policy Research, University of Tilburg, Tilburg, The Netherlands.
[b]Radboud University Nijmegen, Institute for Management Research, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.
[c]Radboud University Nijmegen, Institute for Social Cultural Research, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

Societal developments have forced universities all over Europe to replace their 'professional' strategies, structures, and values by organizational characteristics that could be stereotyped as 'private sector' features. This trend is known as 'managerialism'. Since university employees generally stick to professional values, a conflict may emerge between professional employee values and managerial organization values. This conflict can result in lower organizational commitment and, consequently, lower quality of job performances. Since managerialism is, however, aimed at efficient and effective quality improvement, this situation is what we regard as a *managerialism contradiction*. Affecting university employees' performances may solve or reduce such a contradiction. Since levels of managerialism differ among countries, this paper examines which factors affect the quality of job performances of 1,700 university employees in low-, middle- and high-managerialism countries. The analyses reveal that there are large differences and some similarities between the countries regarding *which* human resource management (HRM) practices affect the quality of employees' job performances. Furthermore, it appears that there are clear differences among the countries regarding *how* the HRM practices affect the quality of their job performances. The theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.
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Introduction

Since the early 1980s, various social, economic, and political changes have taken place in the context of European universities, such as democratization of access to higher education, decentralization, and budget constraints (Bleiklie, 2001).

Owing to these changes, the universities in Europe have been challenged by social demands such as accountability, quality improvement, efficiency, and effectiveness (Deem, 1998; Chan, 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). To be able to cope with these developments and the accompanying societal demands, a private sector way of organizing has been considered appropriate including 'greater managerial power, structural reorganization, more emphasis on marketing and business generation, moves towards performance-related pay and a rationalization and computerization of administrative structures' (Parker and Jary, 1995, 320). Many academic institutions have adopted organizational forms, technologies, management instruments, and values that are commonly found in the private business sector (Deem, 1998). This wave of reforms, which has swept through universities and other public organizations all over Europe, is known as *managerialism* (Hood, 1995; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004).

The consequences of managerialism in universities are a subject of debate. Some researchers suggest that '"some dose" of "managerialism" in the right proportion and in the right context' may be useful in universities (Chan, 2001, 109; see also Research Assessment Exercise, 2001). As managerialism results in higher efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness, it is thought to positively affect the quality of job performances. Others, however, argue that 'managerial' characteristics in universities impede employees from achieving a higher quality of job performances (e.g., Trow, 1994a; Henkel and Kogan, 1996; Ylijoki, 2003; Bryson, 2004). For instance, due to the managerial accountability aim (Chan, 2001), it has increasingly become mandatory for employees to report activities and progress. As a result of the increase of these and other bureaucratic procedures, university employees are being urged to spend more time on such 'secondary' activities; time that could otherwise have been invested in doing research, writing articles, or improving teaching programmes. In addition, employees adapt their activities to 'the simplifying tendencies of the quantification of outputs' (Trow, 1994a, 41), which may lead to lower-quality performances and make the university a less attractive employer for for example, junior researchers, who prefer 'less conflictual environments' (Enders, 2005, 129). In other words, opponents of managerialism argue that it works against its own intentions of efficient and effective quality improvement (e.g., Trow, 1994a; Davies and Thomas, 2002; Bryson, 2004) This unintentional situation is what we label a *managerialism contradiction*.

To be able to solve, or at least to reduce, such a managerialism contradiction, it is important to know how to increase the quality of university employees' performances. Since the timing, pace, and extent of managerialism differ among countries (Hood, 1995; Bleiklie, 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004), it is also important to know whether the processes affecting the quality of job performances differ among countries. Empirical research into the development of the quality of university employees' job performances in

countries with different levels of managerialism is scarce. Therefore, this article examines which factors affect the quality of job performances of university employees in countries that are characterized by different levels of managerialism. These managerial developments in higher education can be considered as part of a broader, more general movement, which we call here public sector governance. This new mode of governance, which evolved out of New Public Management, is more engaged with regulatory frameworks, delegation, and networks than the actual role of the market (Dent *et al*., 2007).

The next section describes the main concepts of this study and presents a conceptual model showing their relationships. In the succeeding sections, we discuss the methods used for our study, followed by the presentation of the empirical analyses and results. The article closes with points of discussion and conclusions in the final section.

Conceptual Model

The rational-economic managerial organization values, adopted to cope with societal developments, include those emphasizing budget transparency, administrative effectiveness, increased competition, output measurement, and financial reward (Stiles, 2004). These values are likely to be in conflict with professional employee values that generally focus on individual autonomy, collegiality, and professionalism (Bryson, 2004). As a consequence, a conflict may emerge between organization values and employee values. Since organizational commitment is only expected to occur when employee values match organization values (Kanter, 1968; Allen and Meyer, 1990), this value conflict may lead to a loss of organizational commitment (Trow, 1994b; Chan, 2001; Bryson, 2004). Empirical research supports this expectation by suggesting that university employees have a reduced morale and negative feelings, are reluctant to work, resist changes strongly, and even demonstrate unproductive behaviour (e.g., Trow, 1994b; Henkel and Kogan, 1996; Chan, 2001; Ylijoki, 2003). In addition, the study of Bryson reveals that some academic employees 'no longer enjoy any part of the job, apart from the vacations' (2004, 45). Bocock and Watson note that 'many academics have felt dispirited, undervalued, diminished in their autonomy and have suffered an increasing lack of empathy for the goals of institutions' (1994, 124–125).

Organizational commitment is usually divided into three components or constructs, that is, affective, continuance, and normative organizational commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1997). These constructs are expected to be important for affecting the quality of job performances (Mowday *et al*., 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Porter, 1985; Meyer *et al*., 1989). Firstly, the effect of affective commitment on job performances is found to be positive by most

studies (e.g., Meyer *et al*., 1989; Iles *et al*., 1990; Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Meyer *et al*., 2002), albeit that some report a weak or statistically insignificant relationship (e.g., Keller, 1997). Secondly, earlier attempts at empirically tracing the link between continuance commitment and the quality of job performances report statistically insignificant relationships (e.g., Meyer and Allen, 1991; Mayer and Schoorman, 1992; Hackett *et al*., 1994; Somers and Birnbaum, 1998). These results are, however, not always supported by the work of others, who have found clear negative associations (e.g., Meyer *et al*., 1989; Meyer and Allen, 1997). They argue that employees with strong continuance commitment behave negatively in reaction to the 'no choice' situation (i.e., they have to stay with the organization in any circumstances) (Meyer and Allen, 1997) or perform passively in reaction to the learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975) that is promoted by a strong continuance commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Finally, normative commitment appears to be either positively, negatively, or not related at all to job performances in different studies (e.g., Allen and Meyer, 1996). Most of the studies, however, reveal a positive relationship with performances (e.g., Meyer *et al*., 2002), although often less strong than the relationship between affective commitment and performances (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Marchiori and Henkin, 2004).

Since organizational commitment plays an important role in influencing the quality of job performances (Mowday *et al*., 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Porter, 1985; Meyer *et al*., 1989), a possible way to increase the quality of performances and, consequently, solve or reduce a managerialism contradiction in contemporary European universities, is to influence organizational commitment. A commonly known instrument in literature for influencing organizational commitment is the use of human resource management (HRM) practices (e.g., Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Pfeffer and Veiga, 1999). Recently, Buck and Watson (2002), based on Arthur (1994), measured the potential influences of a so-called commitment system consisting of seven HRM practices among higher education staff employees. We have adapted Buck and Watson's system (see Smeenk *et al*., 2004) resulting in the following nine HRM practices: decentralization, compensation, participation, training/development, employment security, social interactions, management style, communication, and performance appraisal.

While some studies consider organizational commitment as a mediating variable between HRM practices and quality of performances, others do not provide much insight into how HRM practices contribute to job performances. They suggest that 'when various sub-systems including the HRM-system are aligned and supporting each other, superior performance is likely' (Guest, 1997, 268) and they are merely concerned with the relationships between HRM practices and quality of job performances (e.g., Huselid, 1995; Paauwe and Richardson, 1997; Marchington and Zagelmeyer, 2005; Wright *et al*., 2005). Although these relationships are often statistically weak and the results are

ambiguous (Paauwe and Boselie, 2005), various empirical studies demonstrate that HRM practices do have an effect on the quality of job performances. In this study, we will refer to an indirect effect of HRM practices on performances when this relationship is mediated by organizational commitment.

Since the levels of managerialism differ among countries (Hood, 1995; Bleiklie, 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004), the direct and indirect effects of HRM practices may also differ among countries. This article focuses on the effects of HRM practices among university employees in countries with different levels of managerialism. The countries in this study (Belgium, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) reflect different levels of managerialism and can roughly be divided into two groups: the core NPM group and the Continental European modernizers (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). The United Kingdom fits perfectly into the core NPM group. This country is, like other countries in the core NPM group (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, and the USA), characterized by 'a large role for private sector forms and techniques in the process of restructuring the public sector' (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, 98; see also Bryson, 2004). Although the Netherlands is generally considered as a Continental European modernizer (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004), we have reasons to believe that recent developments, such as the implementation of a rigorous accreditation system, legitimate the categorization of this country within the group of core NPM countries (Jongbloed *et al*., 2005; Van Gestel and Teelken, 2006).

The other four countries (Belgium, Finland, Germany, and Sweden) are usually labelled as Continental European modernizers. Belgium and Germany are members of the former group of central Europeans, whereas Finland and Sweden are northern Europeans. The main difference between the two groups lies in the pace of the reforms and the citizen-orientation. The central Europeans are more often portrayed as laggards with less participation for citizens as compared to their northern counterparts (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004).

The concepts of HRM practices, organizational commitment, quality of job performances, level of managerialism, and the relationships between them are visualized in the conceptual model displayed in Figure 1.

The following section will discuss the methods used for the study on direct and indirect effects of HRM practices on the quality of job performances across countries with different levels of managerialism.

Methods

Data and sample

The study draws on a web survey conducted from November 2004 to January 2005 among university employees (all associated with teaching, research, and

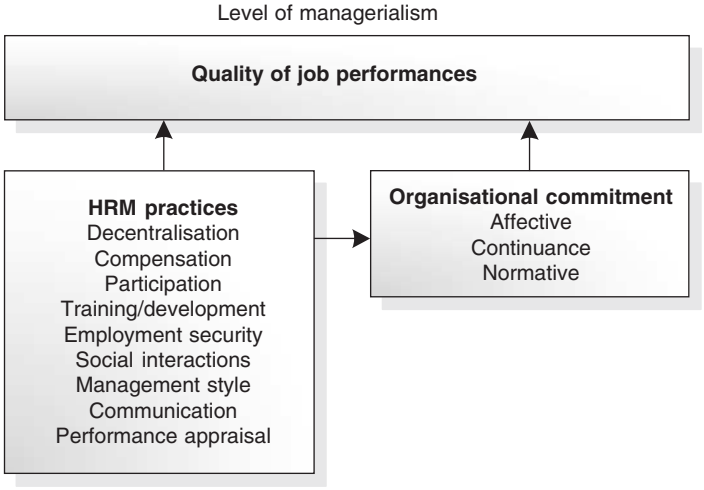

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

support) from 36 faculties and 18 universities (two faculties per university) in six European countries (Belgium, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom). We chose these countries because they are expected to reflect different levels of managerialism (Hood, 1995; Bleiklie, 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004) but are reasonably comparable in socio-economic terms. In addition, the knowledge of the English language is generally high in these countries (we used a questionnaire formulated in English only). Within these countries we selected all universities that have both a business/economics faculty and a social sciences faculty or equivalents thereof. We chose two gamma faculties because they provide variation in the independent variables while at the same time being reasonably comparable. Subsequently, we randomly picked three universities (and consequently six faculties) per country, and searched for the e-mail addresses of the employees of these selected faculties on the internet.

We conducted the survey across the internet as all university employees are generally provided with access to the net. Although web surveys are a relatively new means for collecting data, several researchers have found support for use of this medium (e.g., Cobanoglu *et al*., 2001; Sills and Song, 2002). After a deduction of 1,493 ineligible respondents, the response was 28.9% (n=2,325). The sample proportions with respect to sex, age, and employment were comparable to the population proportions. In other words, the sample did not differ significantly from the population with respect to these characteristics (Smeenk *et al*., 2006a).

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 84 items divided across 21 questions. The questionnaire was structured to encourage the respondents to reflect on their past and present experiences in the faculty. The questionnaire was pre-tested in the summer of 2004 through a pilot survey held in two Dutch faculties (a business/economics faculty and a social sciences faculty) of the same university (see Smeenk *et al*., 2006b). The results of this pilot study led to some minor adaptations being made to the formulation and sequence of the questions. For this study, we used the items concerning organizational commitment (18 items), HRM practices (20 items), quality of job performances (10 items), and three control variables that had been proven to be important for university employees in an earlier study that is, age, sex, and organizational tenure (three items).

Measurements

Standard and study-specific measures are provided for the HRM practices, the organizational commitment constructs, the quality of job performances, and the control variables.

HRM practices

We measured the university employees' perceptions of *decentralization* with a four-item scale based on the original instrument of Arthur (1994) including, for example, 'I monitor data on my productivity'. In order to measure how they feel about the level of *compensation*, the university employees were asked to rate their own salary on a scale from 1 to 5 (cf. Boyer *et al*., 1994). Following Gaertner and Nollen (1989), perceived *participation* was measured with a four-item scale including, for example, 'I am given the possibility to participate in decisions that affect my work'. To measure the level of *training and development*, we adapted Arthur's (1994) instrument to make it more appropriate for measuring training and development within the context of higher education. Employees were asked to indicate how many days per year they undertook off-the-job activities away from their immediate work area activities and on-the-job general skills training. We summed up the ratings on the items to generate a single composite score. Based on Gaertner and Nollen (1989), perceived *employment security* was measured by a single item asking the respondents to indicate whether the faculty does enough to avoid layoffs.

To measure the employees' perception of *social interactions*, we used Sheldon's (1971) instrument, including items like 'I frequently have off-the-job

contacts with my colleagues'. To measure the perceived *style of management*, the university employees were asked which management style best fits their manager or management team (cf. Blake and Mouton, 1985): (1) laissez-faire management (care neither for the employees nor for the organization), (2) management of people's need (full care for the employees, no care for the organization), (3) management of efficiency (no care for the employees, full care for the organization), (4) middle management (little care for the employees, little care for the organization), and (5) ideal management (full care for the employees, full care for the organization). We used the following items to measure the employees' perception of the *communication* level in the faculty: 'I am adequately informed about what is going on in the faculty' (cf. DeCotiis and Summers, 1987). Finally, the style of *performance appraisal* as experienced by the employees was measured by asking them to which of two styles the performance appraisal in their faculty tends (1=judgmental-oriented to 5=developmental-oriented).

Organizational commitment

Partly based on Buchanan (1974) and Quinn and Staines (1979), Allen and Meyer (1990) developed a 24-item scale to measure affective, continuance, and normative *organizational commitment*. It consists of three subscales: the Affective Commitment (AC), the Continuance Commitment (CC), and the Normative Commitment (NC) scales. We also used these scales and tried to improve the scale items by reducing item ambiguity and deleting equivalent and irrelevant items, and used six items for each subscale. Responses were made on a five-point continuum.

Quality of job performances

The data on quality of performances were acquired using two measures. Firstly, we asked the respondents how they thought their colleagues would rate the quality of the respondents overall performances and, if applicable, the quality of their research performances, the quality of their teaching performances, and the quality of their management performances (ranging from bottom 10% to highest 10%). Secondly, the actual performances of the university employees were measured by asking them to indicate how many articles they had published in refereed and non-refereed journals, how many chapters in edited volumes they had published, how many textbooks or other books they had disseminated, the number of research reports they had disseminated internally or to external clients, and the number of presentations they had held at conferences and workshops in the previous 3 years. The ratings on these items were summed to generate a single composite score.

Control variables
The control variables *age*, *sex*, and *organizational tenure* were recorded using three single-item self-report responses.

Factor analyses

For the HRM practices, we conducted a factor analysis for those practices that were measured by two or more items. Table 1 summarizes the results of the oblimin rotated analyses of the HRM practices social interactions, communication, participation, and decentralization. Additionally, it presents the Cronbach's alphas (α), the communalities (h^2), the loadings, and the total explained variance.

It appears from Table 1 that the items of social interactions and communication together represent one factor, which we call 'contacts'. Furthermore, participation and decentralization represent two separate factors.

The varimax-rotated factor matrix of the organizational commitment constructs is depicted in Table 2. The table also shows the reliabilities of the three sets of items determined by Cronbach's alphas (α), the communalities (h^2) of the items, the loadings, and the total explained variance.

The data in Table 2 reveal that the commitment scales possess quite acceptable psychometrical properties. Also, the three factors appear to be uncorrelated. These results largely resemble and support Allen and Meyer's (1990) findings indicating that affective, continuance, and normative commitment are conceptually and empirically separable components of organizational commitment.

Table 3 presents the unrotated factor solution for the quality of job performances together with the reliability denoted by the Cronbach's alpha (α), the communalities (h^2) of the items, the loadings, and the total explained variance. The table demonstrates that the quality of job performances is reliably measured by the items that covered the respondents' thoughts about how they think their colleagues would rate the quality of the respondents' performances.

Results

To test the direct and indirect effects of HRM practices on quality of performances of university employees in countries with different levels of managerialism, we used the multiple mediator model as discussed by Preacher and Hayes (2006). All estimates presented below were controlled for faculty type and for personal variables. First of all, we examined which HRM practices affect organizational commitment and quality of job performances among the

Table 1 Factor analysis of HRM practices

Dimensions and scale items	h^2	*Pattern matrix*[a]		
		I	*II*	*III*
Contacts ($\alpha = 0.77$)				
I feel a part of my department	0.46	0.71		
I feel a part of my faculty	0.54	0.75		
I am adequately informed about what is going on in the faculty	0.47	0.60		
I am adequately informed about changes that affect my job	0.46	0.56		
I frequently have off-the-job contacts with my colleagues[b]	—	—		
Participation ($\alpha = 0.62$)				
There should be more employee involvement (R)[c]	0.40		0.63	
I wish to have more say in decisions about my work (R)	0.47		0.67	
I am given the possibility to participate in decisions that affect my work	—		—	
I am satisfied with my possibility to participate in decisions that affect my work	—		—	
Decentralization ($\alpha = 0.55/0.79$[d])				
I have the possibility to develop new research and/or teaching programmes	0.32			0.58
I take part in faculty decisions about investments in new projects	0.48			0.65
I monitor data on my productivity	—			—
I determine my work flow (tasks-ordering)	—			—
Total explained variance: 44.9%		29.9	9.1	6.0

[a]Roman numerals refer to the order in which the factors appeared in the oblique (oblimin) rotated solution using principal-axis factoring. Factor loadings lower than 0.35 are not reported.
Correlation between factors:

	I	II	III
I	1.00	0.40	0.45
II		1.00	0.16
III			1.00

[b]Items in italics were excluded from the analyses because of low communality ($\leqslant 0.20$) or high loadings ($\geqslant 0.30$) on two or more factors.
[c]Reversed items are indicated with (R).
[d]As the original reliability is lower than the lower limit of acceptability (between 0.60 and 0.70 — Hair *et al*., 1998), we calculated the six-item reliability using the Spearman-Brown formula: $r_{kk} = k \times r_{xx}/(1 + [k-1] \times r_{xx})$, where r_{kk} is the reliability of the scale that has k times as many items as the original scale, r_{xx} is the reliability of the original scale, and k is the multiplier.

respondents of all countries (n=1,700). Owing to the deletion of respondents with missing values, this number deviates from the original number of respondents (n=2,325). Table 4 presents the significant ($P < 0.05$) standardized regression coefficients.

Table 2 Factor analysis of organizational commitment

Dimensions and scale items	h^2	*Factor matrix*[a]		
		I	*II*	*III*
Affective organizational commitment ($\alpha = 0.83$)				
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career at this faculty	0.34	0.53		
I enjoy discussing the faculty in a positive sense with people outside it	0.50	0.70		
I really feel as if the faculty's problems are my own	0.43	0.63		
I feel like 'part of the family' at the faculty	0.60	0.76		
The faculty has a great deal of personal meaning for me	0.67	0.81		
I easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one (R)[b,c]	—	—		
Continuance organizational commitment ($\alpha = 0.77$)				
I am afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up	0.29		0.53	
It would be very hard for me to leave the faculty right now	0.49		0.65	
Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave the faculty now	0.61		0.76	
I could leave the faculty at no cost now (R)	0.23		0.47	
I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving the faculty	0.36		0.58	
I continue to work for the faculty as leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice	0.39		0.62	
Normative organizational commitment ($\alpha = 0.66$)				
Employees generally move from organization to organization too often	0.30			0.54
I do not mind at all when employees move from organization to organization (R)	0.32			0.56
If I got offered a job elsewhere I would feel uncomfortable leaving the faculty	0.29			0.36
I believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organization	0.46			0.63
I think that wanting to be a 'company man/woman' is still sensible	0.23			0.43
Nowadays, things are better than in the days when people stayed with one organization for most of their careers (R)	—			—
Total explained variance: 40.5%		16.8	14.6	9.0

[a]Roman numerals refer to the order in which the factors appeared in the orthogonal (varimax) rotated solution using principal-axis factoring. Factor loadings lower than 0.35 are not reported.
[b]Items in italics were excluded from the analyses because of low communality ($\leqslant 0.20$).
[c]Reversed items are indicated with (R).

Table 3 Factor analysis of quality of job performances

Dimensions and scale items	h^2	*Factor matrix*
Quality of job performances ($\alpha = 0.70$)		
The overall quality of your performances	0.95	0.97
The quality of your research performances	0.22	0.47
The quality of your teaching performances	0.31	0.56
The quality of your management performances	0.31	0.56
Composite quality score measured by activities	—	—
Total explained variance: 44.7%		44.7

The results in Table 4 reveal that organizational commitment and almost all HRM practices (directly or indirectly) affect quality of job performances. With regard to the effects of the organizational commitment constructs, the results largely support the previous findings on the positive effect of affective commitment on the quality of job performances (e.g., Meyer *et al*., 1989; Iles *et al*., 1990; Meyer *et al*., 2002), the negative effect of continuance commitment (e.g., Meyer *et al*., 1989; Meyer and Allen, 1997), and the statistically insignificant effect of normative commitment (e.g., Allen and Meyer, 1996).

Regarding the direct effects of HRM practices on the quality of job performances, the results in Table 4 show that both contacts and decentralization positively affect the quality of job performances, whereas compensation and training/development have negative effects. Employment security, participation, performance appraisal, and the style of management do not have any influence.

When we take a look at the indirect effects of the HRM practices, it appears that contacts, decentralization, employment security, and performance appraisal positively affect quality of job performances, whereas participation has a negative effect. The indirect effect of contacts is by far the largest. It furthermore appears that most of the indirect effects occur via the affective construct of organizational commitment.

Another noteworthy result is that most of the HRM practices have either a direct effect (compensation and training/development) or an indirect effect (employment security, participation, and performance appraisal). Only contacts and decentralization have both direct and indirect effects, although the indirect effect of contacts is by far the larger of the two.

Subsequently, we conducted separate analyses for the three groups of countries that are characterized by different levels of managerialism: low-managerialism countries (n=495), middle-managerialism countries (n=470),

Table 4 Standardized direct, indirect, and total effects of HRM practices and organizational commitment on quality of job performances of all employees

	Dependent variables								
	AC[a]	*CC*[a]	*NC*[a]	*Quality of job performances*					
				Direct effect	*Indirect effect via*[b]			*Total indirect effect*	*Total effect*
					AC	*CC*	*NC*		
Organizational commitment									
AC				0.161*					0.161*
CC				−0.091*					−0.091*
NC				−0.022					−0.022
HRM practices									
Contacts	0.541*	0.013	0.177*	0.100*	0.087*	−0.001	−0.004	0.082*	0.182*
Decentralization	0.038	−0.036	0.003	0.076*	0.006	0.003	−0.000	0.009*	0.085*
Compensation	0.004	0.058*	0.051*	−0.176*	0.000	−0.005	−0.001	−0.006	−0.182*
Training/development	−0.011	−0.034	−0.026	−0.050*	−0.002	0.003	0.001	0.002	−0.048*
Employment security	0.054*	−0.004	−0.014	−0.031	0.009*	0.000	0.000	0.009*	−0.021
Participation	−0.050*	−0.045	−0.018	−0.030	−0.008*	0.004	0.000	−0.004	−0.033
Performance appraisal	0.087*	−0.026	−0.023	−0.023	0.014*	0.002	0.001	0.017*	−0.006
Management style	0.043*	−0.001	−0.016	−0.014	0.007	0.000	0.000	0.007	−0.007
(Adjusted) $R^2 = 0.100^*$ (0.092*)									

[a]AC = affective commitment, CC = continuance commitment, NC = normative commitment.
[b]Coefficient is greater than two times the standard error. The program INDIRECT by Preacher and Hayes (2006) was used to assess the significance of the indirect effects. The standard errors of the indirect effects are obtained by bootstrapping using 5,000 bootstrap samples. The standard errors for the other effects are obtained by OLS. The parameters estimates are controlled for faculty type, age, sex, and organizational tenure.
*$P < 0.05$.

and the high-managerialism countries (n=735). The significant ($P<0.05$) unstandardized regression coefficients for the employees in the low-, middle-, and high-managerialism countries are presented in Tables 5, 6 and 7, respectively.

The general picture that results from these tables regarding the effect of organizational commitment on the quality of job performances demonstrates again that affective commitment is positively related, continuance commitment is negatively related, and normative commitment is statistically insignificantly related to quality of job performances.

In low-managerialism countries (Germany and Belgium, see Table 5), however, employees' organizational commitment is not related to the quality of their job performances. This finding is in line with the result that in these countries the effects of HRM practices on the quality of job performances are direct (or at least not mediated by organizational commitment). In detail, compensation and training/development have relatively large negative effects, whereas contacts have positive effects.

In contrast, in middle-managerialism countries (Finland and Sweden, see Table 6), the effects of HRM practices on the quality of job performances are all mediated by organizational commitment. Contacts and training/development appear to constitute the most important HRM practices that indirectly (via affective and continuance commitment, respectively) affect the quality of job performances of employees in these countries.

The effects in the high-managerialism countries are mixed (Netherlands and UK, see Table 7): HRM practices have both direct and indirect effects on the quality of employees' job performances. The most important HRM practices in these countries are decentralization and compensation, which have relatively large positive and negative direct effects, respectively, and contacts, which have relatively large positive indirect effects. With regard to the indirect effects, it appears again that affective commitment is the main mediating variable between HRM practices and the quality of job performances, especially for the indirect effects of contacts.

When we look at the sets of practices, we see that there is little difference among the employees of the various countries. Both compensation and contacts have relatively large negative and positive effects, respectively, in all countries. Furthermore, training/development is important for employees' performances in the low- and middle-managerialism countries, although the direction and mediating role of organizational commitment differ between the two groups of countries. Management style appears to have an effect among employees in middle- and high-managerialism countries. Finally, employment security and performance appraisal are unique HRM practices in middle-managerialism countries, whereas participation has an impact in high-managerialism countries only.

Table 5 Unstandardized direct, indirect, and total effects of HRM practices and organizational commitment on quality of job performances of employees in low-managerialism countries

	Dependent variables								
	AC[a]	*CC*[a]	*NC*[a]	*Quality of job performances*					
				Direct effect	*Indirect effect via*[b]			*Total indirect effect*	*Total effect*
					AC	*CC*	*NC*		
Organizational commitment									
AC				0.113					0.113
CC				0.011					0.011
NC				−0.028					−0.028
HRM practices									
Decentralization	0.066	−0.031	0.088	0.014	0.007	−0.000	−0.003	0.005	0.018
Compensation	−0.069	0.154*	−0.016	−0.484*	−0.008	0.002	0.001	−0.006	−0.489*
Participation	0.035	−0.056	0.017	−0.080	0.004	−0.001	−0.001	0.003	0.077
Training/development	0.067	0.001	−0.018	−0.207*	0.008	0.000	0.001	0.008	−0.199*
Employment security	0.105*	−0.042	0.043	−0.020	0.012	−0.001	−0.001	0.010	−0.010
Contacts	0.554*	0.047	0.139*	0.289*	0.062	0.001	−0.004	0.059	0.348*
Management style	−0.090	0.004	−0.225*	−0.045	−0.010	0.000	0.006	−0.004	−0.048
Performance appraisal	0.050	−0.100*	−0.051	−0.035	−0.001	−0.001	0.001	0.006	−0.029
(Adjusted) $R^2 = 0.206$* (0.182*)									

[a]AC = affective commitment, CC = continuance commitment, NC = normative commitment.
[b]Coefficient is greater than two times the standard error. The program INDIRECT by Preacher and Hayes (2006) was used to assess the significance of the indirect effects. The standard errors of the indirect effects are obtained by bootstrapping using 5,000 bootstrap samples. The standard errors for the other effects are obtained by OLS. The parameters estimates are controlled for faculty type, age, sex, and organizational tenure.
*$P < 0.05$.

Table 6 Unstandardized direct, indirect, and total effects of HRM practices and organizational commitment on quality of job performances of employees in middle-managerialism countries

	Dependent variables								
	AC[a]	*CC*[a]	*NC*[a]	*Quality of job performances*					
				Direct effect	*Indirect effect via*[b]			*Total indirect effect*	*Total effect*
					AC	*CC*	*NC*		
Organizational commitment									
AC				0.152*					0.152*
CC				−0.159*					−0.159*
NC				−0.047					−0.047
HRM practices									
Decentralization	0.040	−0.065	−0.039	0.100	0.006*	0.010*	0.002*	0.018*	0.118
Compensation	0.102*	0.047	0.121*	−0.126	0.016*	−0.008*	−0.006*	0.002	−0.123
Participation	−0.128*	−0.050	−0.119*	−0.087	−0.020	0.008	0.006	−0.006	−0.093
Training/development	−0.225	−0.390*	−0.178	−0.078	−0.034	0.062*	0.008	0.036	−0.042
Employment security	0.073	−0.036	−0.038	−0.061	0.011*	0.006*	0.002*	0.019*	−0.042
Contacts	0.631*	0.088	0.270*	0.091	0.096*	−0.014	−0.013	0.070*	0.160*
Management style	0.088	−0.044	0.070	0.002	0.013	0.007	−0.003	0.017*	0.019
Performance appraisal	0.111*	−0.056	−0.013	−0.005	0.009	0.009	0.001	0.027*	0.022
(Adjusted) $R^2 = 0.105^*$ *(0.076*)*									

[a]AC = affective commitment, CC = continuance commitment, NC = normative commitment.
[b]Coefficient is greater than two times the standard error. The program INDIRECT by Preacher and Hayes (2006) was used to assess the significance of the indirect effects. The standard errors of the indirect effects are obtained by bootstrapping using 5000 bootstrap samples. The standard errors for the other effects are obtained by OLS. The parameters estimates are controlled for faculty type, age, sex, and organizational tenure.
*$P < 0.05$.

Table 7 Unstandardized direct, indirect, and total effects of HRM practices and organizational commitment on quality of job performances of employees high-managerialism countries

	Dependent variables								
	AC[a]	*CC*[a]	*NC*[a]	*Quality of job performances*					
				Direct effect	*Indirect effect via*[b]			*Total indirect effect*	*Total effect*
					AC	*CC*	*NC*		
Organizational commitment									
AC				0.226*					0.226*
CC				−0.106*					−0.106*
NC				−0.056					−0.056
HRM practices									
Decentralization	0.015	−0.069	−0.026	0.147*	0.003	0.007	0.002	0.012	0.159*
Compensation	−0.064	0.103	−0.091	−0.241*	−0.014	−0.011	0.005	−0.020	−0.261*
Participation	−0.093*	−0.035	−0.008	0.030	−0.021*	0.004	0.001	−0.017	0.013
Training/development	−0.041	−0.034	0.069	−0.037	−0.009	0.004	0.004	−0.002	−0.038
Employment security	0.039	0.046	−0.002	−0.035	0.009	−0.005	0.000	0.004	−0.031
Contacts	0.543*	−0.049	0.117*	−0.007	0.123*	0.005	−0.006	0.122*	0.115*
Management style	0.184*	−0.011	0.068	−0.053	0.042*	0.001	−0.004	0.039*	−0.014
Performance appraisal	0.073*	0.021	0.012	0.020	−0.002	−0.002	−0.001	0.014	0.033
(Adjusted) $R^2 = 0.098$* (0.079*)									

[a]AC = affective commitment, CC = continuance commitment, NC = normative commitment.
[b]Coefficient is greater than two times the standard error. The program INDIRECT by Preacher and Hayes (2006) was used to assess the significance of the indirect effects. The standard errors of the indirect effects are obtained by bootstrapping using 5,000 bootstrap samples. The standard errors for the other effects are obtained by OLS. The parameters estimates are controlled for faculty type, age, sex, and organizational tenure.
*$P < 0.05$.

Conclusions and Discussion

This article empirically examined which factors affect the quality of job performances of university employees in three groups of countries that are characterized by different levels of managerialism. More specifically, we focused on the direct and indirect effects (via organizational commitment) of HRM practices on the quality of job performances in low-, middle-, and high-managerialism countries. Our research demonstrates that HRM practices do play a role in affecting quality of job performances. This finding supports other studies that have investigated the relationship between HRM practices and job performances (e.g., Delery and Doty, 1996; Buck and Watson, 2002; Boselie *et al*., 2003).

When we go deeper into *which* HRM practices matter, it appears that there are some large differences between the effects of the various HRM practices among the employees in the three groups of countries. For instance, compensation and training/development negatively affect quality of employees' performances in low-managerialism countries, whereas the same practices have positive effects in middle-managerialism countries. Likewise, employment security and performance appraisal only have effects in middle-managerialism countries (Sweden and Finland) and not in the other four countries. Participation is unique in influencing HRM practice in the high-managerialism countries. We have no clear explanation for these separate findings, but in a larger perspective, they tend to support the *configurational approach* as proposed by Delery and Doty (1996) and the *bundles fit* of Guest (1997). Both perspectives argue that different configurations or bundles of HRM practices are suited for organizations with different characteristics and strategic orientations in order to achieve superior performance. However, there are also many similarities regarding the effects of HRM practices in various countries. For instance, contacts and compensation have positive and negative effects, respectively, on employees' performances in all countries, whereas decentralization and 'ideal' management style have positive effects in both middle- and high-managerialism countries. These findings tend to support proponents of the *best practice approach*, also labelled the *universalistic mode* (Delery and Doty, 1996), which does not take into account differences in culture and institutional settings (e.g., Pfeffer, 1994; Huselid, 1995; Ichniowski and Shaw, 1999).

When we go deeper into *how* HRM practices matter, it appears that there are clear differences among the employees in the three groups of countries in the way the HRM practices affect the quality of their job performances. In low-managerialism countries, the effects of HRM practices are predominantly direct (or at least not mediated by organizational commitment), in middle-managerialism countries the effects are all mediated by organizational

commitment, and in high-managerialism countries, the HRM practices have both direct and indirect effects. The results in low-managerialism countries regarding how HRM practices affect the quality of performances refute the theories which claim that the effects of HRM practices on job performances are mediated by organizational commitment (e.g., Beer *et al*., 1984). The level of commitment (whether high or low) does not play in role in the relation between the (perceived) HRM practices and the (perceived) performance of the respondents. In contrast, the results in the middle-managerialism countries are supportive of such theories. It further appears that if organizational commitment mediates the relationship between HRM practices and the quality of job performances, it is mainly the affective construct that plays this role.

The results of this paper may help practitioners in the field of HRM in universities to shape their HRM policy. After all, when managers or policy makers are aware of the level of managerialism, this research shows which specific HRM practices (Decentralization, Compensation, and Contacts) help building organizational commitment and quality of job performances in their organizations. Besides, the results are probably valid not only for university employees but also for other professionals who have to cope with increased rational-economic managerial organization values, such as civil servants and health care specialists. This suits the more general development of public sector governance, which can be characterized as a fragile balance between autonomy and regulation: while universities received more decision-making authority, they are increasingly forced to deal with a more complex environment (more competition, more accountability) resulting into more 'complete' organizations (Enders, 2002; De Boer *et al*., 2007).

We are aware that our study has some limitations that must be considered when evaluating the findings. For example, by creating three groups of countries on the basis of the levels of managerialism as reported in the literature, we did not account for the differences between the levels of managerialism of universities (Shattock, 1999) or faculties (Chan, 2001) within one country. In addition, we only considered organizational commitment to be a possible mediating variable. Further research could investigate whether the direct effects in this study are possibly mediated by other variables, such as satisfaction or motivation (Paauwe and Richardson, 1997).

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