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Configuring and Contextualising HR Systems: An Empirical Study of Manufacturing SMEs

Human resource management (HRM) has become for SMEs a critical factor of adaptation to an increasingly complex and uncertain business environment. Founded on open systems and contingency theory, the present study seeks to identify configurations of HR systems in manufacturing SMEs, and to determine the extent to which these configurations are associated to the environmental and organisational context. Survey data analysis of 176 manufacturing SMEs revealed three configurations of HR systems, namely a “strategic-high-commitment system”, a “functional-high-commitment system”, and a “traditional-low-commitment system”. Differences in these systems are associated to variables that reflect the SMEs’ environmental, organisational and technological context.

Key words: HRM, gestalts, open systems theory, context, small business

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