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INNOVATION DYNAMICS IN MULTIPARTNER- ALLIANCE TEAMS: A FOCUS ON HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT FIT

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Abstract: We explore the innovation dynamics in multipartner-alliance teams (MA teams), a particularly complex type of teams. MA teams are temporary project teams composed of members from different partners and are in charge of attaining innovation. In particular, we focus on the potential contributions of human resource management (HRM) fit on the creation of a proper MA team climate for innovation. We address the necessity of reconceptualizing the notion of HRM fit from a holistic view, offering a new multi-level conceptualization. At the partner-level, we include the two traditional dimensions of HRM fit (*vertical fit* and *horizontal fit*); at the alliance-level, we include a new dimension (*relational fit*). Our arguments allow us to conclude that the power of the HRM fit at the partner-level is reinforced/undermined depending on the synergistic effects of the combination of the partners' sets of alliance-specific HRM practices for a particular MA team. Some directions for further work are suggested.

Keywords: Multipartner alliances, team, fit, Human Resources Management, innovation

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the current high-tech environment, enabling technological innovation is essential to firms' survival. However, it is difficult for firms to acquire by themselves all the required technological capabilities in a short period of time. Hence, the formation of technological strategic alliances is becoming increasingly an important tool to face the innovation challenge. The alliance potential for innovation increases as the amount of complementary technological knowledge does (Lane and Lubatkin, 1998), thus, technological multipartner alliances¹ (MAs) are gaining more and more popularity (Lavie et al., 2007). The complex functioning of this kind of collaboration usually relies on the creation of multiple temporary project teams. These teams are composed of members from different partners and are in charge of attaining innovation. Henceforth, we will refer to them as multipartner-alliance (MA) teams². Understanding innovation dynamics in MA teams may have important implications for research and for alliance and team management. However, despite the extensive existing literature on innovation teams, there is still a lack of research about the issue. This paper aims to fill this literature gap, by focusing on the impact of HRM fit from a holistic perspective.

Teams represent one of the organizational structures with greatest potential for innovation (e.g. Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Grant, 1996). However, the creation of multiple MA teams in a technological alliance does not guarantee the collaboration success. To make this possible, a proper climate supporting learning, creativity and innovation need to be generated for each of the MA teams of the alliance (Argote et al. 2001, Paulus et al., 2001). In attaining that, human resources management (HRM) may play a key role (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Thus, if the firm systematically fosters HRM fit by adopting an appropriate system of HRM practices, competitive advantages may be achieved, including those from innovation (e.g. Laursen and Foss, 2003). Traditionally, two dimensions of HRM fit have been established: *vertical fit* (alignment between HRM practices and firm's strategic goals) and *horizontal fit* (HRM practices mutually complementary).

With regard to HRM fit effects, MA teams and any other type of innovation team could have something in common, but there are some peculiarities which

¹ Following Lavie et al. (2007), we define a technological multipartner alliance as an inter-firm agreement that interactively engages its multiple members in shared value chain activities, such as collaborative R&D, entailing multilateral interaction among partners, and which main objective is to attain technological innovation in a certain field.

² Assumptions about multipartner alliances functioning have been based on information from a real Spanish multipartner alliance- '*Towards a Sustained Aquiculture. The Acuisost Project*'-, whose main objective is to achieve technological innovation in the aquiculture sector.

may affect the innovation dynamics of the former (Lavie et. al, 2007). First, specific objectives may be assigned to each MA team of a particular alliance. Nevertheless, all MA teams share the primary alliance's goal: attaining technological innovation in a certain field. Secondly, MA teams have a high degree of member diversity. They are composed of individuals from different partners, which have different strategic patterns, in particular, different HRM styles. In order to provide better understanding about the innovation dynamics in MA teams, it is necessary to go beyond the traditional dimensions of HRM fit. In this thread of thought, we present two linked research questions: *How can HRM fit be conceptualized for MA teams? What are the potential contributions of HRM fit to innovation dynamics in MA teams?*

We propose a new multi-level conceptualization for HRM fit to be relevant for MA teams, by including a new dimension ('*relational HRM fit*'). This new dimension allows to create internal consistency within each MA team when exists.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, we summarize relevant contributions from teams and strategic HRM literatures. Next, we present and support our model on multi-level HRM fit and climate for innovation in MA teams. Finally, we point out our main implications and limitations, as well as some directions for further work.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND: CLIMATE FOR INNOVATION IN TEAMS AND HRM FIT

2.1 The importance of a proper team climate for innovation

The potential of teams for innovation has certainly stated in the literature (e.g. Grant, 1996; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Thus, teams are widely considered as appropriate structures to develop creativity, organizational learning and innovation beyond the capabilities of any single individual. For example, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) consider the creation of knowledge as the baseline for innovation. They stress that “[...] *the organization cannot create knowledge on its own without the initiative of the individual and the interaction that takes place within the group. Knowledge can be amplified or crystallized at the group level through dialogue, discussion, experience sharing, and observation [...] and they emphasize “the central role teams play in the knowledge-creation process”* (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995: 13).

In spite of their great capacity for innovation, the creation of teams does not guarantee the success. A team climate that fosters learning, creativity and innovation behaviours need to be generated (Argote et al. 2001, Paulus et al., 2001; Zárraga-Oberty and DeSaá-Pérez, 2006). Following Bowen and Ostroff

(2004), the climate of a project team can be defined as the shared perception of its members about what the project is like in terms of its procedures and routines, making clear which behaviours will be expected and rewarded. Therefore, only if the created climate sends clear signals to the team members about which strategic goals are pursued, innovation is likely to be attained (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Werbel and DeMarie, 2005).

To establish how such proper team climate should be characterized, we resort to the West's (1990) four-factor theory of climate for work group innovation. From this view, four major factors can be identified as characteristics of a proper climate for team innovation: *vision*, *task orientation*, *participative safety* and *support for innovation* (West, 1990; West and Anderson, 1996). These factors have been found to be conducive to team innovativeness across studies (e.g. Burch and Anderson, 2004; Anderson and West, 1998). A brief explanation based on Burch and Anderson, (2004; p. 408-409) is offered below:

- *Vision*: The extent to which the team has clearly defined objectives.
- *Task orientation*: The extent to which the team strives for excellence in what it is going.
- *Participative safety*. The extent to which the climate of the team is 'safe' and encourages participation from each member of the team.
- *Support for innovation*: The support provided by the team for innovative ideas.

Having said that, it is necessary to address how such climate for innovation in teams may be achieved. Next section compiles contributions from strategic HRM research, which may offer insights into the issue.

2.2 HRM fit and climate for innovation in teams

HRM has been well-established as a key factor in promoting organizational learning and innovation (e.g. Collins and Smith, 2006), as well as in managing innovation teams (e.g. Zárraga-Oberty and De Saá-Pérez). Thus, the design of HRM practices may also play a key role in generating a proper team climate for innovation. In particular, we focus on the potential contributions of HRM fit.

The great importance of fit is one of most long-standing notions in strategy research (Porter, 1996). Thus, the concept of fit has been considered in different research fields, like strategy (e.g. Venkatraman, 1989; Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993; Stieglitz and Heine, 2007), alliance management (e.g. Stach, 2006; Saxton, 1997; Douma et al., 2000; Colombo et al., 2006) or strategic HRM (e.g. Delery, 1998; Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Werbel and DeMarie, 2005; Boon, 2008). Here, the main underlying assumption is that if the

firm systematically fosters HRM fit by adopting an appropriate system of HRM practices, competitive advantages are likely to be achieved and sustained through them. More specifically, the strategic approach of HRM traditionally has established two main dimensions of HRM fit: *vertical fit* and *horizontal fit* (e.g. Delery, 1998). Scholars have expanded the issue of HRM fit by considering other dimensions, like organizational or institutional fit (e.g. Boon, 2008) or person-environment fit (e.g. Werbel and DeMarie, 2005). However, we will concentrate on the traditional ones.

The first traditional dimension of HRM fit represents the fit between HRM practices and the firm's competitive strategy. This alignment is traditionally known as *vertical fit*. Theoretically, the idea of *vertical fit* is compelling, and some empirical evidence has supported it. For example, Laursen and Manhke (2001) study the link between firms' knowledge strategies and the HRM system they adopt. Using a multisectorial sample, they find that the combinations of HRM practices are contingent on the choice of the particular knowledge strategy. However, "*in strategic fit models, strategy is often oversimplified in static constructs (e.g. cost leadership versus differentiation) that do not capture the full breadth of business strategies in contemporary organizations*" (Boon, 2008: 39). Thus, recent research is increasingly aimed to improve the operationalization and measurement of *vertical fit*. For example, Boon (2008), conducts a multiple case study in the Dutch retail sector. She compares the degree of *vertical fit* of each organization according to the existence and strength of links between the firm's competitive strategy and its HRM system, as well as the role of HRM system in strategy formulation.

The second traditional dimension of HRM fit is usually called *horizontal fit*. It has been stressed traditionally that the positive effects of the HRM practices on firm's performance arise specially when they are adopted not in isolation, but as a system of mutually reinforcing (i.e. complementary or horizontally aligned) practices. Empirical research has mainly provided support for the *vertical fit* hypotheses rather than for the *horizontal fit* ones³. How to capture the complexity of the synergistic effects among HRM practices remains a major challenge for research (Laursen and Foss, 2003; Boon, 2008). However, some relevant attempts have been made to address *horizontal fit* and its impact on performance. For example, Ichniowski, Shaw, and Prennushi (1997) study the effects of innovative HRM practices on the productivity of steel productions lines. They find that systems of complementary HRM practices have larger impact than individual innovative practices.

³ Based on Andersen, T., Eriksen, B., Lemmergaard, J., and Povlsen, L. "Is Strategic Human Resource Management Strategic? The Fit between Strategy and Strategic Human Resource Management", www.knowledgelab.dk/now/shrm, September 2008.

Little is known yet about the contribution of HRM fit to the functioning of innovation teams. However, it has been addressed theoretically and empirically the link between HRM fit and firm's innovativeness. For example, Laursen and Foss (2003) study the relationship between new HRM practices, their complementarities, and their impact on innovation performance. They identify two HRM systems that are conducive to innovation. Jiménez-Jiménez and Sanz-Valle (2005), using a sample of manufacturing Spanish firms, analyse the relationship between innovation and the HRM system. They find, first, that mutual fit exists between the choice of an innovation strategy and the system of HRM practices the firm adopts. Secondly, they find that the effect of systems of complementary HRM practices on innovation performance is greater than the separate effect of these practices. Hence, there are strong reasons for stating that HRM fit also may lead teams towards innovation, by fostering *team vision*, *task orientation*, *participative safety*, and *support for innovation*.

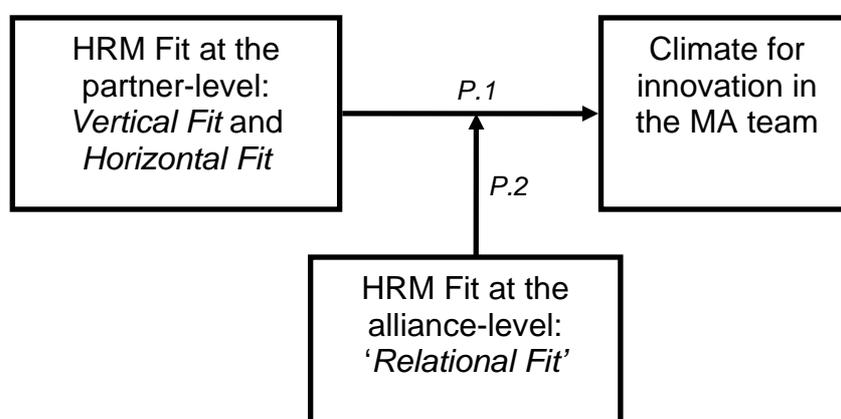
3. A PROPOSAL FOR A MODEL ON MULTI-LEVEL HRM FIT AND CLIMATE FOR INNOVATION IN MA TEAMS

As previously mentioned, teams have great potential for innovation. Thus, it seems appropriate to create multiple MA teams in an alliance to deal with the innovation challenge. However, does that guarantee the alliance success? Obviously, the creation of multiple MA teams may prove insufficient by itself. Additionally, a team climate that fosters learning and creativity behaviours need to be generated for each of the MA teams (Argote et al. 2001, Paulus et al., 2001). Integrating the proposals of West (1990) and Bowen and Ostroff (2004), the climate of a MA team can be defined as the shared perception of its members about what the alliance is like in terms of its procedures and routines. Thus, it should be emphasized which one is the shared objective (*MA team vision*), and which behaviours will be expected and rewarded. To promote innovation, these behaviours should refer to seeking MA team excellence (*task orientation*), sharing knowledge, providing mutual feedback, and taking risk on new ideas (*participative safety* and *support for innovation*). Therefore, only if the created climate sends clear signals to the members of each MA team about which alliance goals are pursued, innovation is likely to be attained (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Werbel and DeMarie, 2005). Otherwise, the alliance is not likely to succeed.

HRM fit may contribute to generate such climate in any type of innovation teams. Nevertheless, the unique characteristics of MA teams drive the necessity of reconceptualizing the notion of HRM fit. In this regard, we propose a multi-level concept of HRM fit. From this holistic view, we consider, first, the two

main traditional dimensions of HRM fit (*vertical fit* and *horizontal fit*) at the partner-level. Additionally, we add a new dimension of HRM fit (*relational fit*) at the alliance-level. Figure 1 shows our model. The synergistic effects of the three dimensions of HRM fit on the creation of a proper climate for innovation in MA teams are represented. The dimensions of HRM fit at the partner-level are primarily about the relationship between a partner and its own employees who are involved in a particular MA team. On the contrary, the dimension of HRM fit at the alliance-level is directly connected with the interactions among multiple partners within the collaboration process. Next sections are devoted to explaining that.

Figure 1. Impact of multi-level HRM fit on the creation of a proper climate for innovation in MA teams⁴.



3.1 Impact of HRM fit under a traditional perspective

There is a dearth of specific research linking HRM fit and MA teams' capacity for innovation. However, HRM fit implications for MA teams' can be built on the available strategic HRM research. Thus, with regard to MA teams, *vertical fit* refers to the alignment between the partner's alliance-specific HRM practices⁵ with the objective of the MA, i.e. innovation. *Horizontal fit* refers to the complementarities between the partner's alliance-specific practices. HRM fit itself is a multidimensional concept (Boon, 2008), so both dimensions (*vertical* and *horizontal*) are required simultaneously to promote a proper climate for innovation in MA teams. There could be some sets of complementary HRM practices that even so do not encourage such proper climate for innovation. For instance, let us imagine the synergistic effects of a reward system that fosters

⁴ The model is presented for a hypothetical MA team of the alliance. Recall that multiple MA teams are likely to be created, and it is possible that the combination of partners involved in MA teams is different from each other. A proper climate needs to be generated for each and every of MA teams of the alliance, in order to achieve overall alliance success.

⁵ The term 'alliance-specific HRM practices' refers to those practices that the firm adopts to its employees involved in a MA team, which may be different or not to the general firm HRM practices.

individual effort instead of team effort, an internal communication system that enhances vertical communication instead of lateral communication among MA team members, and a job design strategy that establishes only individual responsibilities for team members. This set is composed of complementary HRM practices but there is no sense in claiming that, under such circumstances, values like *MA team vision*, *task orientation*, *participative safety*, and *support for innovation* are likely to simultaneously arise. Hence, in addition to be complementary, alliance-specific HRM practices should be specifically aimed to achieve the alliance objective, thus, to foster innovation

To sum up, we propose the positive relationship between HRM fit at the partner-level and the generation of a proper MA team climate for innovation. More specifically, we claim that it is necessary that partners, individually considered, adopt a set of alliance-specific HRM practices vertically aligned to the alliance's goal, as well as horizontally aligned among them (HRM fit at partner-level). These arguments are represented in the following proposition.

Proposition 1. HRM fit at the partner-level (vertical fit and horizontal fit simultaneously considered) has a positive impact on the generation of a proper MA team climate for innovation.

3.2 Addressing MA teams' oddness: Relational HRM fit

Up to now, we have presented arguments which may be applied to all kind of innovation teams. We have just 'translated' the concepts and implications of traditional HRM fit for the case of MA teams. However, the multilateral interaction among partners in MAs involves unique idiosyncrasies of collaborative dynamics at all levels (Lavie et. al, 2007), including the innovation process in MA teams. Thus, in order to make sense, the notion of HRM fit need to be reconceptualized.

Little research has focused on this particularly complex type of innovation teams. However, the literature on multinational corporations (MNCs) offer helpful contributions. To address the innovation challenge, MNCs are increasingly resorting to transnational project teams "*to bring together individuals from different countries, functions and/or divisions of the corporation*" (Atamer and Schewiger, 2003: 81). In an attempt to stimulate research on the topic, the *Journal of World Business* developed a special issue on transnational horizontal projects teams⁶, in which interesting case-study based papers are included. For example, the research by Chevrier (2003) improves the understanding of multinational project teams through the analysis

⁶ Journal of World Business, 38 (2003)

of the strategies adopted in order to face cultural diversity. From a comparative case study, she identifies several cross-cultural strategies and proposes an alternative method for managing multinational projects. One of the cases included in the study is a consortium for R&D (i.e., a technological MA).

Particularly relevant for our research is the paper by Lunnan and Barth (2003). They focus on what they refer to as ‘bridge-teams’ (i.e., organizational teams that interact closely with an alliance partner in the pursuit of a joint project, ranging from production to innovation oriented teams). After investigate the knowledge exploration-exploitation dilemma they conclude that both process are important for these teams, regardless of they orientation. They also find these teamwork dynamics as important tools for attain technology learning from partnerships.

Apart from these papers, the only study to our knowledge that actually focuses on MA teams is that of O’Sullivan (2003). He focus on virtual multi-firm teams composed of members from the lead firm and its suppliers. These teams are in charge of co-developing a high-tech aerospace product working across geographic boundaries. Using a case study, he establishes implications for managing these types of teams. His results suggest that standardization, synchronization and joint design of systems are important for managing the multiple interdependences between the teams. He also emphasizes the significance of complete ‘share understanding’ (both on the technical and social sides).

From this review, two main specific features of MA teams can be recognized. First, specific objectives may be assigned to each MA team of a particular alliance. However, all MA teams share the primary alliance’s goal. In our case, that is technological innovation achievement in a certain field. Secondly, MA teams have a high degree of member diversity. They are composed of individuals from different partners of the MA, which have different strategic patterns. In particular, they may have different HRM styles. Thus, it is necessary to go beyond the two main traditional dimensions of HRM fit (*vertical* and *horizontal*) included at the partner-level perspective.

On the other hand, fit implications for MA teams can be found within the alliance literature. In particular, the relational view (Koza and Lewin, 1998; Dyer and Singh, 1998; Faems et al., 2008) establishes that inter-firm relationships depend on inter-personal interactions. The positive role of trust for leading the collaboration to succeed is stressed. From this view, it is supposed also that trust is more likely to evolve when fit is achieved. On the one hand, fit should be achieved between the alliance design and partners’ strategic patterns. On the other, fit should also be achieved between partners’ strategic patterns. In this thread of thought, we present the concept of ‘*relational fit*’. In a wide sense,

'relational fit' can be defined as the alignment between all partners' strategies and objectives. When this alignment exists, a positive synergistic configuration of strategic patterns is likely to arise. Under such circumstances, the whole is more than the sum of the parts, and it is possible to achieve the overall alliance goals. As the Lilly's Senior Vice President of Corporate Strategy and Business Development states with regard to its partnerships profile "*What makes these alliances great is a dedication to aligning our strengths- and our actions- that results in shared success [...]*"⁷

'Relational fit' can be referred to several strategic levels. For instance, three levels can be recognized following the three-dimensional fit model proposed by the Lilly's Office of Alliance Management in order to evaluate the convenience of a partnership (Stach, 2006): strategic, operational and cultural fit. Given the importance of HRM for the functioning of innovation teams, we focus on *'relational fit'* regarding alliance-specific HRM practices (i.e. *'relational HRM fit'*). Thus, *'relational fit'* as a dimension of HRM fit refers to the alignment between the separate sets of alliance-specific HRM practices, which are adopted by the partners involved in a particular MA team.

Taking into account the interaction among different systems of HRM practices in MA teams, we state the importance of this new dimension of HRM fit at the alliance-level. It is necessary not only to achieve HRM fit at the individual partner-level, but also at the overall alliance-level. Otherwise, MA teams risk to ending up with an inconsistent HRM architecture (Stieglitz and Heine, 2007), and a proper climate for innovation is not likely to arise. As Boon (2008) stresses "*the HR system used for a specific group of employees should be consistent*" (p.23). To that end, *'relational fit'* among the separate sets of HRM practices of each and every of the partners involved in the MA team should be achieved (HRM fit at alliance-level). Thus, that *'fit between the fits'* (Boon, 2008) may be relevant for supporting innovation in MA teams.

In other words, we propose that these three dimensions of HRM fit (*vertical* and *horizontal fit* at the partner-level, and *'relational fit'* at the alliance-level), are simultaneously required to foster MA team climate for innovation. That stems from the synergistic effects the dimensions of HRM fit (both at the partner-level and alliance-level) have on the creation of a proper climate. In general terms, there are certain HRM practices that lead to unintended negative synergistic effects when are combined, for example, teamwork and individual-based compensation. However, with regard to MA teams, one may wonder whether would be preferable for MA teams' climate that all partners adopt HRM practices theoretically not appropriate for innovation or the lack of internal

⁷ Quote taken from www.lilly.com/about/paternships/profiles (September, 2008)

consistency. What is clear is that it would be worthless that a partner adopts individually a set of alliance-specific HRM practices that fosters HRM fit at the partner-level without ‘*relational fit*’, as the lack of internal consistency in the MA team could spoil the climate. In this regard, ‘*relational fit*’ is related to the Porter’s (1996) notion of *third-order fit*, which “Goes beyond activity reinforcement to what I call *optimization of effort*. [...]. Coordination and information exchange across activities to eliminate redundancy and minimize wasted effort are the most basic types of effort optimization” (Porter, 1996: 73). With regard to MA teams, ‘*relational fit*’ involves the coordination among separate sets of partners’ alliance-specific HRM practices, thus, minimizing wasted effort for each partner individually considered. The power of a set of alliance-specific HRM practices to foster a proper climate is reinforced when internal consistency in the MA team is promoted by achieving ‘*relational fit*’. On the contrary, such power is undermined when the combination of different partners’ sets of alliance-specific HRM practices for a particular MA team results in negative synergistic effects.

To sum up, we claim that HRM fit at the partner-level may be consider a necessary but not sufficient condition for generating a proper climate for innovation in MA teams. HRM fit at the alliance-level has a positive moderating effect on that relationship.

Based on the arguments pointed out above, we present the following proposition:

Proposition 2: ‘Relational fit’ between partners’ alliance-specific HRM practices have a positive moderating effect on the relationship between HRM fit at the partner-level (vertical and horizontal fit) and the creation of a MA team climate for innovation.

4. CONCLUSION

Technological multipartner alliances are gaining popularity in recent years, due to their great potential for attaining innovation. The complex functioning of this type of collaborative forms usually relies on the creation of multiple MA teams. These teams are temporary project teams composed of members from different partners and are responsible for innovation achievements within the alliance. Understanding the innovation dynamics in the particular case of MA teams may have important implications for research and for alliance and team management. However, little is still known about how to lead this kind of teams towards innovation. This paper is devoted to covering this literature gap, from a conceptual perspective. We focus on the potential contributions of HRM fit on

the creation of a proper MA team climate for innovation. Moreover, such climate has been characterized by values of *MA team vision*, *task orientation*, *participative safety* and *support for innovation*.

In order to make sense for MA teams' case, we propose a new conceptualization for HRM fit under a multi-level perspective. In particular, we distinguish three dimensions in two levels. In fact, we include the two traditional dimensions of HRM fit (*vertical* and *horizontal fit*) at the partner-level. Additionally, we include a new dimension ('*relational fit*') at the alliance-level. Regarding HRM, '*relational fit*' refers to the alignment between the separate sets of alliance-specific HRM practices, which are adopted by the partners involved in a particular MA team.

We claim that, it is necessary that partners, individually considered, adopt a set of alliance-specific HRM practices vertically aligned to the alliance's goal. At the same time, these practices should be horizontally aligned among them. However, this HRM fit at the partner-level may prove insufficient by itself. MA teams risk to ending up with an inconsistent HRM architecture, and a proper climate for innovation may not arise. It is necessary to take a step further. Hence, '*relational fit*' among the separate sets of HRM practices of each and every of the partners involved in the MA team should be achieved. We claim that only when HRM fit is achieved simultaneously at the partner-level and at the alliance-level, internal consistency in MA teams is created. That situation entails the optimization of the partners' individual efforts.

Our theoretical contribution may have important implications for research, as well as for innovation team and alliance management. First, we expand prior innovation team and alliance management literature. We address the peculiarities of a particularly complex type of innovation teams (MA teams). Hence, our paper also takes a step further in understanding the functioning of technological multipartner alliances. Other than this contribution, we have reconceptualized the notion of HRM fit for such specific case. We contribute deeper understanding about how the dynamics of innovation in MA teams can be affected. We have explained the potential impact of '*relational HRM fit*' on the creation of a proper MA team climate. The synergistic relationship between this new dimension of HRM fit and the traditional ones (*vertical* and *horizontal fit*) has also been stated.

With regard to our implications for practice, some recommendations arise. We claim that not only is necessary to achieve HRM fit at the individual partner-level, but also at the overall alliance-level. Thus, ideally, all partners involved in a MA team would design jointly the HRM practices for its members. That situation would promote internal consistency in MA teams and would minimize

wasted individual efforts. Setting a well-defined alliance objective could serve as a guidepost to channel alliance-specific partners' HRM practices into a coordinate direction (Stieglitz and Heine, 2007). However, the more the number of partners and the strategic differences among them, the more complex is the control of the interdependences among their alliance-specific HRM practices. Therefore, firms thinking of technological multipartner alliance formation should be considered in advance how to combine properly the complementarities effects. In fact, firms need to take into account the degree of '*relational fit*' they are able to have with their potential partners in terms of strategy, objectives, cultures, and also HRM practices.

Despite the contributions of the paper, it has also limitations. We have based on the two main traditional dimensions of HRM fit to establish our propositions. However, other dimensions of HRM fit may have potential effects on the MA teams' functioning. For example, understanding how *person-team fit* (e.g. Werbel and DeMarie, 2005) can affect the dynamics of MA team innovation may be an interesting concern of further work.

Moreover, this paper is conceptual and exploratory in nature. Empirical evidence supporting the arguments suggested is required, and other questions remain unresolved. For example, 'Which HRM practices may be included in a proper alliance-specific HRM system?' and 'How should these alliance-specific practices be designed? Or 'How to operationalize the concept of '*relational HRM fit*'?' Another approach for further research is to analyse the specific links between HRM practices and the characteristics of a proper climate for innovation (*vision, task orientation, participative safety and support for innovation*).

Thus, our paper paves the way for further work. We pretend it to be the first step toward a broader empirical research. In this regard, we consider the case study research (Yin, 2003) as a superior method, comparing with the statistic-based methods traditionally used in HRM strategic literature. As Chadwick (2000) points out "*Different operationalizations of fit (e.g., interaction terms in hierarchical regressions, factor analysis, deviation from ideal profiles) can have markedly different statistical results in the same data set, suggesting that the performance effects described as synergistic in a particular study depends on the methodology used*" (Chadwick, 2000: 2). On the contrary, embedded case study research may offer higher capacity to capture the full complexity of HRM fit from a multi-level perspective, and of its impact on innovation dynamics in complex innovation teams, such as MA teams.

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