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FACT SHEET

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NAVIGATING BEST
PRACTICE, EVIDENCE-
BASED PRACTICE, AND
GOOD PRACTICE IN
HRM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At conferences and in our day-to-day work, we hear people referring to best practices in Human Resource Management (HRM), and they may interchangeably use the terms best practice and good practice. A review of the literature, however, points out that there is neither consensus on a definition of best practice nor an agreed-on list of best practices. In fact, we find that there are debates on the applicability of the best practice approach to HRM. There are criticisms of its assumptions, including that of a universal and single best way of practising HRM, without regard for the context or the contingencies within and external to an organisation. And we find that there are varied lists of best HRM practices, just as there are varied lists of HR priorities. Thus, we note the contrast being drawn between 'best practice' and 'best fit' approaches, and reference to appropriate practices rather. We also note the contrast between best practices and good practices based on the National People Practices and Governance Standard (PPGS).

The **best practice approach** entails some form of comparison or benchmarking, where causal links are drawn between an action and outcome. Identifying an action and outcome/goal and drawing a causal link between them is not straightforward though. There are challenges with the presumed causality, the unit of analysis, and with sampling adequately to draw inferences on what is best. The approach presumes the generalisability of a set or bundle of HR practices across organisations, industries, markets, contexts, and national boundaries and populations. It also may utilise narrow conceptions and measures of actions/performance and outcomes/goals, and it may neglect the negative impact on employees and workers. The **best fit approach**, in contrast, focuses on the alignment and integration of HRM practices with the organisational and HR strategies as well as the contextual factors in the internal and external environments of the organisation. Thus, there are various levels of fit that have been identified, such as the following: *strategic or vertical fit, internal or horizontal fit, organisational fit, environmental fit, goal fit, outcome fit, and macro-micro fit.*

We do not need to view the best practice and best fit approaches as opposites and as being mutually exclusive. In our day-to-day practice, we need to consider these approaches using various

sources of data, internally and externally to the organisation, along with the body of knowledge and research, the body of professional expertise, and the views of stakeholders. This is how **evidence-based HRM practice** is framed, as high quality and effective decisions and practice that are based on evidence from multiple sources and perspectives.

Our decisions and practice also need to be **systematic and systemic**. Here, the **People Practices and Governance Standard (PPGS)** can be an enabling and informative framework for **good people practices** that is systematic, systemic, and evidence based. It comprises a coherent and integrated set of objectives and a holistic approach to defining and achieving good outcomes. The PPGS embodies a multi-dimensional perspective of what is good in good people practices. This is informed by the following for example: good governance as defined in the King Code; the need for a sound and integrated approach to governance, risk, and compliance within organisations and the HR or people function; the duty of care as articulated in the King Code; the duty to society of professionals; acting in good faith, with due care, and maintaining professionalism in terms of critical, ethical and effective decision-making and practice; continual learning and improvement in decision-making and practice; and realising benefit or beneficial effect for all stakeholders, including both the organisation and the individuals within the organisation.

The 'good' in good practice is also informed by an appreciation of the various situational and contextual realities within organisations and the complicated and complex relationships between cause and effect therein. The Cynefin framework is used as an illustrative example of how good and best practice differs in terms of the nature of causal relations within organisations. Relatedly, the Fact Sheet discusses the development of **Strategic HRM** and the different SHRM perspectives, and it outlines how these can be utilised by HR practitioners through the strategic **HRM process** within their respective organisations and in achieving the objectives of the PPGS. These SHRM perspectives are the **universalist, configurational, and contingency perspectives**. The best practice approach is aligned with the universalist perspective and the best fit approach with the configurational and contingency perspectives.

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WHAT IS BEST PRACTICE?

At various forums we hear the reference to 'best practice'. It is assumed that the term, best practice, is self-evident and rather obvious. We accept certain known examples as best practice – without question or doubt. These exemplars could be a specific organisation, based on their iconic brand strength and reach, industry dominance, financial performance, market dominance and capitalisation, or achievement of an excellence award. Or it could be a specific way of doing things that appears to be novel or contrarian (at the time) or is adopted by large global companies (at a specific time). Think about the global companies who were rethinking the office space and implementing flexible working arrangements in 2020 and 2021 that were held as best examples or as best practice, before the 'return to office' mandates that continue to today¹. Are flexible working arrangements and redesigned offices seen as best practice *now*? And would these same companies *continue* to be seen as the best examples or instances of best practice? Thus, the question that arises is whether best practice is defined for a particular time, context, and organisational setting.

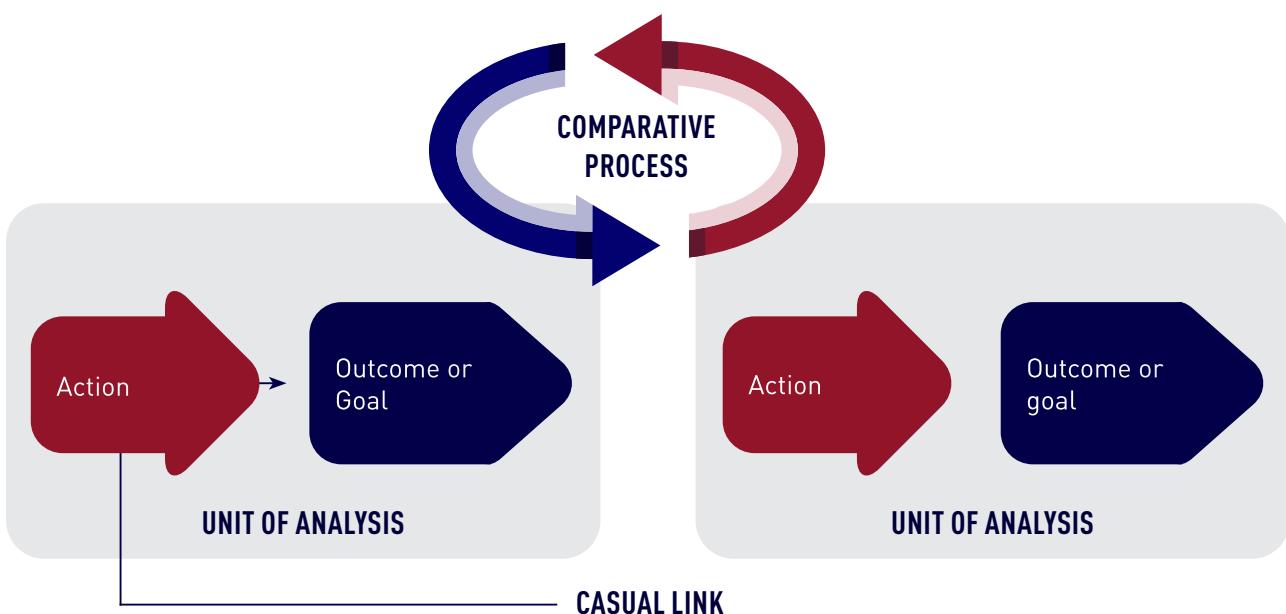
Although consultants, practitioners and academics refer to 'best practice', we find that there is no agreement on what best practice is (Bretschneider, Marc-Aurele, & Wu, 2004; Elnathan, Lin, & Young, 1996; Kaplan, 2003; Malik, 2018; Marchington and Grugulis, 2000; Vesely, 2011)². There is no consensus on a definition of best practice or on a single list or set of specific practices as being best practice. And the very term 'practice' is also used variously to refer to different aspects of organisations such as activities, processes, methods, techniques and outcomes as well as policies and systems. This is the case with human resource management or people practices as well. There is no consensus on a definition of HRM

best practice or agreed on list or set of HRM best practices. And we find that there are varied lists of best HRM practices, just as there are varied lists of HR priorities³. Malik (2018) notes, additionally, that there is "also some disagreement on what might be the agreed and enforceable *standards*, if one were to implement these sets of HR best practices" (italics added, p29). Malik further observes that while the "HR professional bodies promote *ethical* code of conduct as a *guide for shaping HRM best practices*, the membership of HR professionals into this community is voluntary and as such may not always result in any enforceable HRM *standards*" (italics added, *ibid*). We will discuss the approach of the SABPP National People Practices and Governance Standard to standards setting and enforcement later in this Fact Sheet.

Identifying best practices usually entail some form of comparison or benchmarking. This **comparative process** is one of the characteristics of best practice (Bretschneider et al., 2004). The other two related characteristics are an identified *action* and the "*linkage between the action and some outcome or goal*" (p3). Thus, there is an assumption of the comparability of actions, performance, and outcomes or goals across time and contexts (Kaplan, 2003; Malik, 2018). This includes assumptions regarding the population of interest from which to sample and compare. This means that implicit (or explicit) in best practice is a certain unit of analysis and assumptions regarding these units⁴. For example, the unit of analysis can be individuals, groups, social interactions, organisations, business divisions, regional divisions of global companies, or an industry. Some authors specify best-in-industry or best-in-class to indicate the level of analysis of best practice.

1. See the August 2021 Fact Sheet on the return to office debate: <https://sabpp.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/aug-21.pdf>
2. Bretschneider, S., Marc-Aurele, F. J., & Wu, J. (2004). "Best practices" research: A methodological guide for the perplexed. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 15(2), 307-323.
3. Elnathan, D., Lin, T. W., & Young, S. M. (1996). Benchmarking and management accounting: A framework for research. *Journal of Management Accounting Research*, 8, 37-53.
4. Kaplan, S. (2003). The seduction of best practice: Commentary on "Taking strategy seriously". *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 12(4), 410-413.
5. Malik, A. (2018). *Strategic Human Resource Management and Employment Relations. An International Perspective*. Singapore: Springer.
6. Marchington, M., and Grugulis, I. (2000). 'Best practice' human resource management: Perfect opportunity or dangerous illusion? *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 11(6), 1104-1124.
7. Vesely, A. (2011). Theory and methodology of best practice research: a critical review of the current state. *Central European Journal of Public Policy*, 5(02), 98-117.
8. See the February 2025 Fact Sheet on navigating the evolving landscape of 2025 and HR priorities: https://sabpp.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Fact-Sheet_FM_2025.pdf
9. For a brief explanation of unit of analysis see the following resource: <https://atlasti.com/research-hub/unit-of-analysis>

Another assumption is that of causality between the action and an outcome or goal. Thus, causality is inferred in the comparative process when comparing across the units of analysis or cases. This is illustrated in the figure below. As an example, causality is inferred in a comparative process where we compare organisations with flexible working arrangements, with flexibility as the action and productivity as the outcome or goal. However, as we know, productivity within an organisation is complex and there are different aspects or types of productivity that can be measured. The organisations themselves are complex and vary. Similarly, flexible arrangements are complex and are linked with, and interdependent on, other HRM policies, systems, processes and activities as well as organisational cultures and leadership. This illustrates how identifying an action, an outcome or goal, and the linkage between these is not straightforward. And how generalising across the unit of analysis, time and contexts can be challenging.



Given the challenges with establishing a causal linkage between an action and an outcome, and with sampling sufficiently across the units of analysis, we find that some authors utilise the term **good** practices rather than **best** practices (Malik, 2018; Marchington et al., 2000). However, at times good practices and best practices are used interchangeably. Thus, we find that the Standard of **good** people practices, published by the South African Board for People Practices (SABPP), is described as **best** practice by some. We will discuss the importance of differentiating between good and best practice in relation to the Standard, which was revised and launched as the People Practices and Governance Standard (PPGS) in 2023. There we will point out why the Standard refers to good practice and not best practice. Relatedly, we can note here that the pharmaceutical industry refers and abides to Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), which describes a “set of principles and procedures that when followed helps ensure that medicines and related substances are of high quality, safety and efficacy” (SAHPRA, 2019)⁵.

Other authors refer to **promising or appropriate practices** rather than best practices given the challenges with best practice (Leseure, Bauer, Birdi, Neely, & Denyer, 2004)⁶. This acknowledges that there is no single best way, process, method, or technique, and that consideration needs to be given to the contingencies and circumstances of a particular context at a particular time. This means considering the fit of practices for the context and strategy of the organisation. In the next section we will discuss the differentiation between best practice and best fit in HRM.

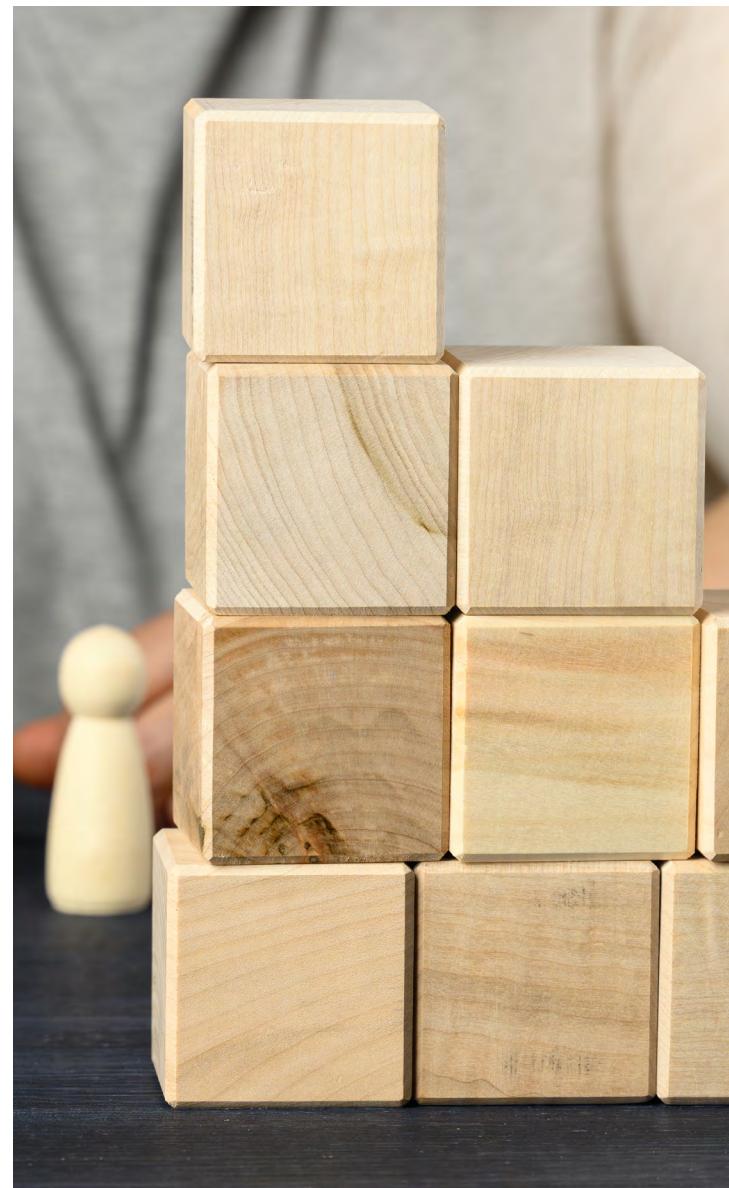
5. [South-African-Guide-to-Good-Manufacturing-Practice-for-Medicines.pdf](#)

6. Leseure, M. J., Bauer, J., Birdi, K., Neely, A., & Denyer, D. (2004). Adoption of promising practices: a systematic review of the evidence. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 5(3-4), 169-190.

BEST PRACTICE OR BEST FIT APPROACH TO HRM?

The **best practice approach** attempts to identify and verify the value of HRM practices – or rather a specific set or bundle of HRM practices – to organisational performance (Boselie, Paauwe, & Peccei, 2021; Boxall and Purcell, 2000; Malik, 2018; Marchington et al., 2000)⁷. It attempts to demonstrate the causal link between specific HRM practices and organisational outcomes or measures of excellence, which is difficult and challenging theoretically and methodologically. One of the key critiques of the best practice approach to HRM is that it assumes the universal application of the identified set or bundle of best practices regardless of contingencies or context. And, therefore, it presumes the generalisability of the set or bundle of practices across organisations, industries, markets, contexts, and national boundaries and populations. It also may utilise narrow conceptions and measures of performance, outcomes, and excellence, and it may neglect the negative impact on employees and workers.

We need to recognise though that the above cited universalist assumption and presumption of generalisability can be seductive in everyday practice – indeed, Kaplan (2003) titles her paper the ‘seduction of best practice’. We often hear in conferences how HR executives and practitioners from various companies speak about adopting best practices or the practices of exemplars such as large global or iconic corporates. There seems to be a certain legitimacy, status, and peer recognition that comes with the association with so-called best practices. Here, we can remind ourselves of the earlier cited observation by Malik’s (2018) that while the “HR professional bodies promote *ethical* code of conduct as a *guide for shaping HRM best practices*, the membership of HR professionals into this community is *voluntary* and as such may *not* always result in any enforceable HRM *standards*” (p29).



⁷. Boselie, P., Paauwe, J., & Peccei, R. (2021). Picking up the HRM pieces: why fit doesn't fit in the public sector. In [Eds.] Steijn, B., & Knies, E. *Research handbook on HRM in the public sector*. Edward Elgar Publishing. (pp. 14-28). Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing.
Boxall, P. and Purcell, J. (2000). Strategic human resource management: where have we come from and where should we be going?. *International journal of management reviews*, 2(2), 183-203.

It is in the adoption of the so-called best practices that the HR executives and practitioners are forced to consider and contend with various contingencies within their organisation, including culture, capabilities, leadership, organisational strategy, good governance, and change management as well as the existing HR strategy, governance, policies, systems, and processes. That is, they are forced to consider the fit of the set or bundle of best practices within the organisation and the adaptation of the organisation to these practices. They also need to consider the various stakeholders. The critical questions we need to ask are (1) what informs their adoption, fit and adaptation of HRM practices and (2) how systematic and systemic are their approaches. Below we will discuss various levels of fit and in the next section we will discuss the People Practice and Governance System Model and Standard as a systematic and systemic approach to ensure good people practices.

The **best fit approach** purposely focuses on the alignment and integration of HRM practices with the organisational and HR strategies and the contextual factors in the internal and external environments of the organisation. Thus, there are various levels of fit that have been identified, such as the following:

- » *Strategic or vertical fit*: alignment of HRM or people practices with the business or organisational strategy to enable effective strategy implementation and organisational performance
- » *Internal or horizontal fit*: alignment of the individual HRM or people practices enabling a coherent and consistent HRM system and set of practices
- » *Organisational fit*: alignment of the HRM system with the other systems within the organisation
- » *Environmental fit*: alignment of the HRM strategy with the organisation's institutional context and its the broader community of stakeholders (Boselie et al., 2021)



In addition to the above, we can identify goal fit and outcome fit. *Goal fit* examines how the *intended* HRM policies are (a) aligned and consistent with each other and (b) are aligned with the strategic goals of the organisation. *Outcome fit* looks at whether the *actual* outcomes are "(a) mutually consistent and reinforcing (internal or horizontal outcome fit), and (b) in line with and contribute to the achievement of key strategic and policy goals of the organisation (strategic or vertical outcome fit)" (p18).

We do not need to view the best practice and best fit approaches as opposites and as being mutually exclusive. For example, Boselie et al. suggest that we can use both these approaches if we rethink these approaches in terms of a macro-micro fit. That is, the fit between (1) the intended HRM philosophy, strategy, principles, policies and systems at the macro level and (2) the specific practices selected as part of the HRM system at the micro level to enact or implement the macro level, dependent on the contingencies and context of the organisation. At the micro level, various HRM practices, including those that have been identified as best practices, could be considered and selected from.

We can link the macro-micro fit to the previous discussion on goal and outcome fit where the fit of the intended goals or objectives can be used for the macro level and the fit of actual outcomes for the micro level. As we consider the use of the macro-micro divide for heuristic or practical purposes, we should note the caution regarding the lack of consensus on the definition of the macro and micro in the HRM and organisational literature and that only attending to the macro and micro can be simplistic as it neglects the other levels of analysis (Jivan, 2017)⁸.

Through the above and the previous discussion, we can see that HRM practice and what informs it is not clear-cut or simple. We need to consider the theoretical and conceptual complexities and dilemmas; weigh the different sources of data and opinions; evaluate the soundness, validity and generalisability of research findings; and consider what is appropriate, effective, and good within context. Here we can note the discussion on evidence-based practice, which also points to the importance of being systematic and critical (Barends and Rousseau, 2018; Rousseau and Gunia, 2016)⁹.

8. Jivan, A. M. (2017). *Towards an Integrative Framework of Leadership Development in the South African Banking Industry*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand].

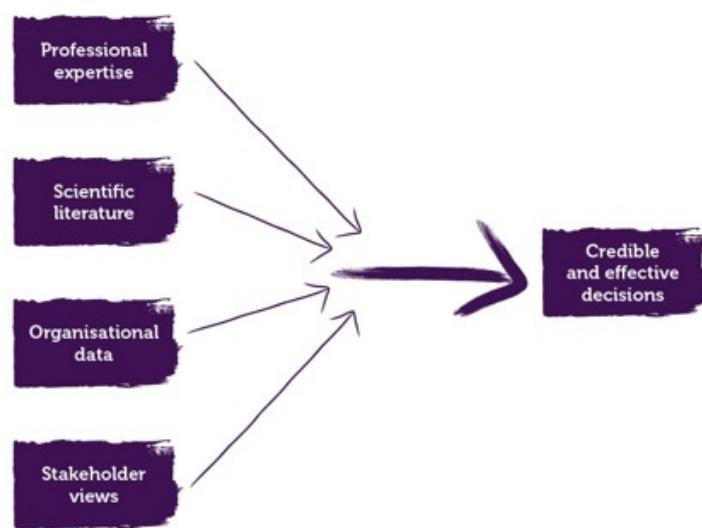
9. Rousseau, D. M., & Gunia, B. C. (2016). Evidence-based practice: The psychology of EBP implementation. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 67(1), 667-692.

Barends, E., & Rousseau, D. M. (2018). *Evidence-based management: How to use evidence to make better organizational decisions*. London: Kogan Page Publishers.

AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO HRM

A CIPD Fact Sheet defines evidence-based HRM practice as “high-quality decisions and effective practices [that] are based on critically appraised evidence from multiple sources”¹⁰. The below CIPD figure illustrates what they identify as the four minimum sources of evidence, namely professional expertise, scientific literature, organisational data, and stakeholder views. The CIPD Fact Sheet adds the following caveat which aligns with the previous discussion on the challenges of establishing causality as well as on professional practice, standards, and ethics:

“Evidence-based practice is about using the best available evidence from multiple sources to optimise decisions. Being evidence-based is not a question of looking for ‘proof’, as this is far too elusive. However, we can – and should – prioritise the most trustworthy evidence available. The gains in making better decisions on the ground, strengthening the body of knowledge and becoming a more influential profession are surely worthwhile.”



Source: CIPD¹¹

The figure illustrates the importance of integrating multiple sources of evidence. Equally important is the approach to this integration, which should be systematic and systemic. The next section discusses the People Practices and Governance System Model and Standard (PPGS) as a systematic and systemic approach. Before that, we need to acknowledge that, as professionals, we attempt to make better, credible, effective and ethical decisions given our time, cognitive and other resource constraints as well as our “imperfect understanding of reality” (Kroon, 2021, p18)¹². This is referred to as our “bounded rationality”, meaning that our rationality or reasoning is limited. We cannot measure, account for, and manage all the variables, factors and contingencies within organisations that impacts on people management and performance. Thus, evidence-based HRM is “not about ‘applying best practice’. Best practice assumes that there is one best way of doing HR in all organisations” (p23). Kroon adds that it is also “not about ‘benchmarking’, which essentially holds that practices are compared between organisations. Benchmarking leads to copying HR practices from successful competitors, without much consideration for the precise needs [and the context and contingencies] of the organisation” (ibid). Kroon and others emphasise the need to consider the local context and evidence from the internal organisation as well as the external context and evidence from professional expertise, theoretical knowledge, and credible research (Barends et al., 2018).

10. <https://www.cipd.org/en/knowledge/guides/evidence-based-profession/>

11. <https://www.cipd.org/en/knowledge/guides/evidence-based-profession/>

12. Kroon, B. (2022). *Evidence Based HRM: What We Know About People in Workplaces*. Tilburg: Open Press Tilburg University.

GOOD PRACTICES AND THE APPROACH OF THE PEOPLE PRACTICES AND GOVERNANCE STANDARD (PPGS)

The HRM Standard (HRMS) was launched in 2013/14 to realise the mission of SABPP, as a HR professional body. That mission is to “lead and give a credible voice to the HR profession based on clear *standards* of governance, quality assurance and professionalism in human resource management and people practices in the workplace” (italics added). The HRMS was positioned as a Standard of good people practices. It was developed by the HR community through the facilitation of the SABPP. Thus, we can describe the Standard as the distilled professional expertise in terms of the previous discussion on evidence-based HRM. The HRMS was reviewed between 2022 and 2023, and the revised Standard, renamed as the People Practices and Governance Standard (PPGS), was launched in 2023. As with the HRMS, the PPGS is positioned as a Standard of good people practices for the evolving world of work.

To begin to clarify what is meant by good people practices, we can begin with Meyer and Abbott's (2019)¹³ discussion of how the Standard is deliberately **not** conceptualised as **best practice** in the below excerpt:

“The National HRM Standards are intended to set out the **minimum set of good HR practices** that any organisation (large or small) should have in place in order to build an aligned, engaged and productive workforce that will achieve the organisation's objectives. “**Good practice**” means that anything less than the described Standard is unlikely to produce a beneficial effect for the organisation. “**Best practice**” **should** mean the latest, evidence-based thinking on what will produce the most benefits in the most appropriate time frame. **But it is sometimes difficult to determine whether “best practice” is in fact evidence-based or is more of an opinion of an expert** (which might be sound, but is not evidence-based). “Best practices” too often turn out to be **fads** and are rapidly supplanted by the latest fad, and so become a moving target” (bold and red added, p41).

Initially, the Standard was positioned as a minimum set of good Objectives and outcomes, but not a minimum set of processes or activities. Meyer et al. later qualify that the Standard is meant to be an enabling framework. That is, a meta-framework that provides HR practitioners a systematic and systemic approach and guide to good people practices. It is an approach to strategic alignment and for decisions regarding the HR architecture, HR service delivery platform to deliver the HR services to stakeholders, and the HR measurement platform for monitoring and evaluating these services and the broader HRM system and its impact. This means that the Standard is not the minimum that an organisation is expected to do, and we should not imagine a continuum with minimum practices on the one end and best practices at the other end. The Standard is aspirational and pragmatic. Meyer et al. add that the:

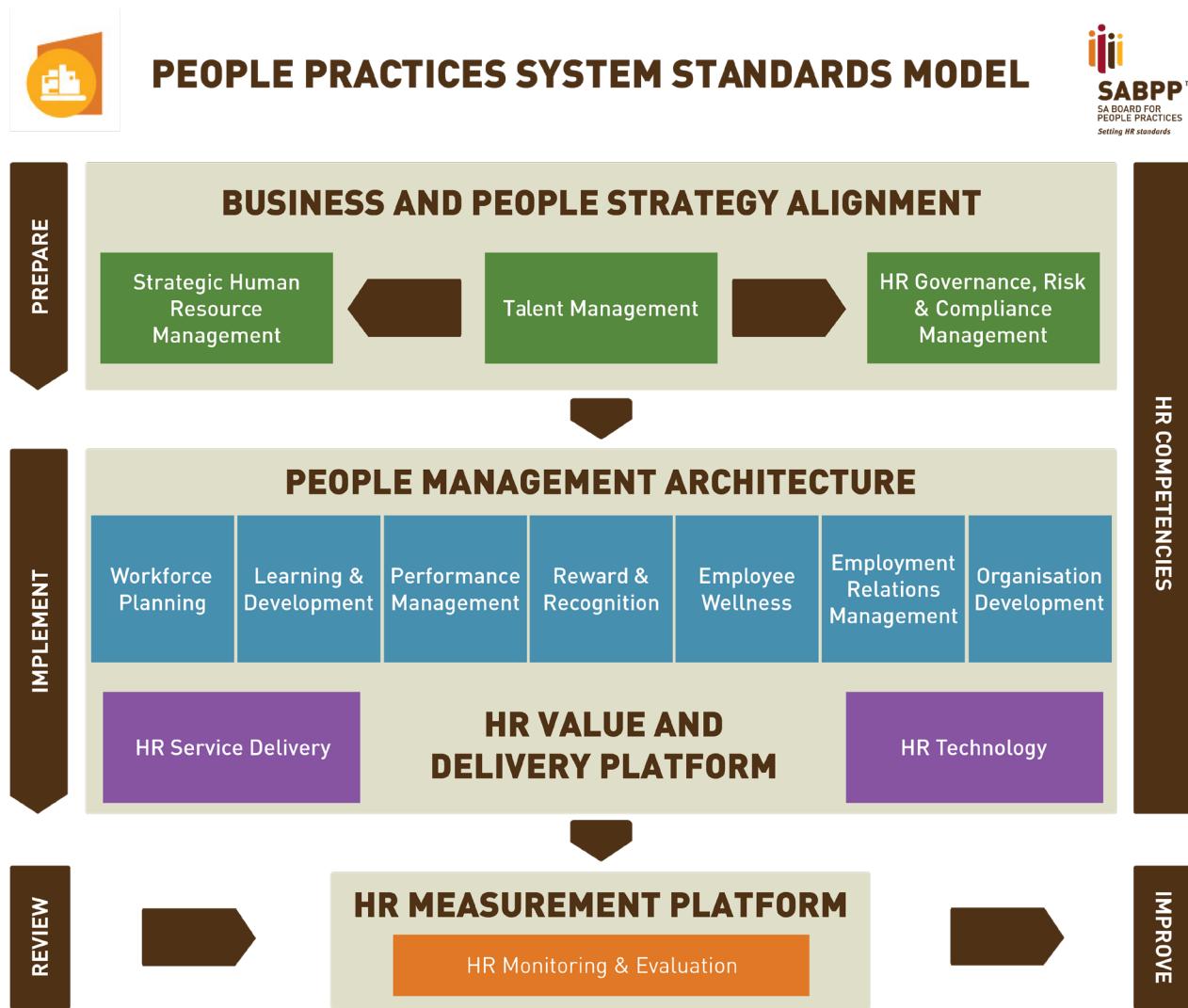
“HR profession is vulnerable to being constantly distracted from implementing a **comprehensive set** of minimum good practices by the **latest “best practice” in one or more sub-functions**. Line management senses this distraction and lack of focus, often expressing frustration that HR practices are constantly changing with no discernible improvement in results. “Best practices” are most often not amenable to being regarded as “national” minimum standards” (bold added, ibid).

They note, though, that:

“While the South African HRM Standard in its current format focuses on minimum standards, some aspects of “best practice”, where the formulators of the Standard thought it appropriate, inform the standards, **particularly in the Application Standards**” (bold added, ibid).

^{13.} Meyer, M., & Abbott, P. (2019). *National HRM Standards for South Africa. Setting Professional Standards for Practice*. Houghton: SABPP.

The HRMS and PPGS comprise thirteen Elements, which at times are referred to as individual 'standards'. Each of the thirteen Elements contain a set of high-level Objectives. The thirteen Elements and how these are organised as a System Model is illustrated in the figure below.



Each Element's set of high-level Objectives help HR practitioners to define the specific outcomes that are to be achieved within context and in alignment with the organisation's strategy. Thus, the thirteen Elements together comprise a coherent and integrated set of Objectives and a holistic approach to defining and achieving good outcomes. As previously noted, the HR community with the SABPP's facilitation defined what are the **good** Objectives for people practice and the good ways of achieving these. The Objectives per Element are organised in a System Model, which means that the Standard provides a systematic and systemic approach to realising the set of Objectives and outcomes within context and alignment with the organisation's strategy. Each Element has an Application Standard which provides guidance on **good** ways to interpret and realise the Objectives.

What informs the good in good people practices of the Standard? We need to recognise that the good in good practices is not singular, but it is rather multi-dimensional. It is informed by the following, remembering that the Standard is an enabling framework rather than a rule book, compliance list, or a list of prescribed activities, processes or procedures:

- » good governance, as defined in the King Code for example
- » the need for a sound and integrated approach to governance, risk, and compliance within organisations and the HR or people function
- » the duty of care, as articulated in the King Code for example
- » the duty to society of professionals
- » acting in good faith, with due care, and maintaining professionalism in terms of critical, ethical and effective decision-making and practice
- » continual learning and improvement in decision-making and practice
- » and realising benefit or beneficial effect for all stakeholders, including both the organisation and the individuals within the organisation (HRMS; Meyer et al., 2019; PPGS)

The good in good people practices speaks to the HR professional's role in people management and people stewardship as the champion of people in the workplace and of evidence and ethically based decision-making and practice in organisations. The benefit and beneficial effect for all stakeholders is framed broadly in the Standard and, thus, it is not limited to financial benefits only. Here, for example, the six capitals of integrated reporting, the sustainable development goals (SDGs) such as SDG8 on decent work and economic growth, and the International Labour Organisation's decent work agenda could be instructive in defining the benefits and beneficial effects for all the stakeholders. Ultimately, though, each organisation will define how they frame and realise the benefit and outcomes for all stakeholders as they work through the sets of Objectives and the Standard as a whole. It bears repeating, the Standard is an enabling framework that distils professional expertise of the broader HR community.

The 'good' in good practice is also informed by an appreciation of the various situational and contextual realities within organisations and the complicated and complex relationships between cause and effect (or action and outcome as in the previous best practice illustration). The Cynefin framework can serve as an example to illustrate the point. Snowden and Boone (2007) introduced this framework which identifies five contexts within the world, as illustrated in the diagram below. The Cynefin framework differentiates five contexts by the nature of the relationship between cause and effect. These contexts are termed as simple/obvious, complicated, complex, chaotic, and disordered. The aim is to help organisations diagnose the situation they face and then act appropriately in terms of how they make decisions and lead. Thus, it is meant to facilitate sense-making and for transitioning between these contexts – it is not designed to be a simple categorisation framework. For example, differentiating an obvious and clear linear relationship between cause and effect where there are 'known knowns' and where best practice is applicable versus good practice that is required in contexts where causality can be known but there are variations depending on the situational factors. The Cynefin framework helps visualise why we need to set standards of good people practice in our evolving context and world of work given the complicated and complex nature of organisations.



Source: Cynefin Company (2019¹⁴)

14. <https://thecynefin.co/cynefin-as-of-st-davids-day-2019/>

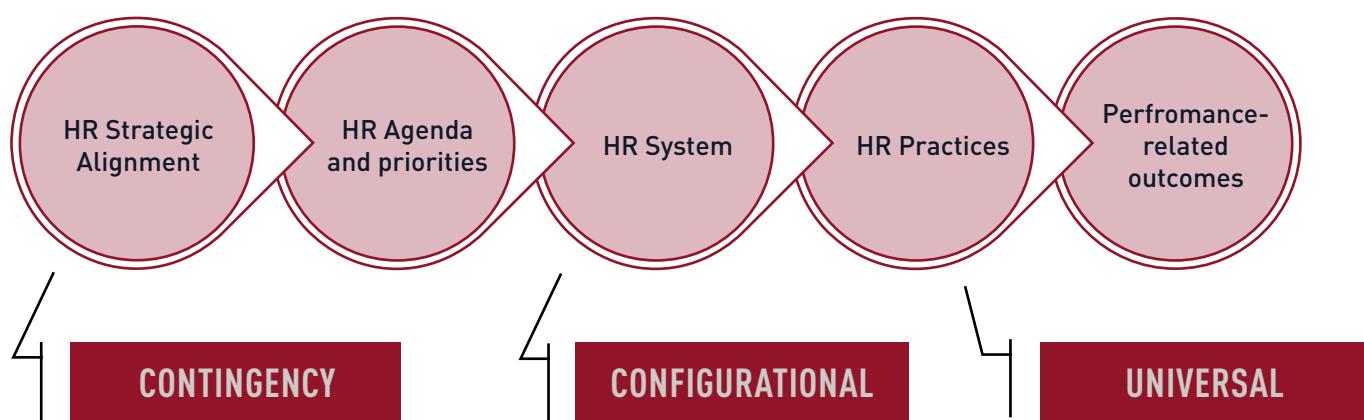
SYSTEMATIC AND SYSTEMIC HR

We can round off the discussion on good practices by locating the discussion on best practice and best fit approaches within the historical development of Strategic HRM (SHRM), where we see the shift in focus over time to HRM as a system. This shift initiated the exploration of the constituents of HR systems as well as the configuration, arrangement, alignment or synergy of individual HR practices within the HRM system and the impact thereof on organisational performance. This includes research on the interactions within the system and how the various HR practices complement each other or multiply their individual effects. This in part informed the debates on best practice and best fit approaches in HRM.

As discussed in the December 2022 Fact Sheet¹⁵, we can outline the development of SHRM in terms of three commonly cited SHRM perspectives:

- » *Universal perspective* that suggests that there is a set of best practices that universally applies across all contexts and lead to organisational performance-related outcomes
- » *Configurational perspective* suggests that the arrangement and alignment of specific HR practices is critical for organisational performance-related outcomes
- » *Contingency perspective* suggests that the selection and alignment of HR practices with the business strategy and context will lead to organisational performance-related outcomes

The best practice approach is aligned with the universalist perspective and the best fit approach with the configurational and contingency perspectives. From the position of a HR practitioner employed within a specific organisation, we can for practical purposes map these perspectives in terms of the strategic HRM process as follows:



Source: Author

The above illustrates how practitioners can utilise the best practice and best fit approaches in their engagement with, and their working through of, the People Practices and Governance Standard (PPGS). As they work through the PPGS they develop their strategic alignment, set the HR or people agenda, develop the HR system and constituent practices, deliver the range of HR services, facilitate the achievement of performance-related outcomes, and monitor and evaluate these and the system as a whole. In this way they ensure good and sound people practices in their organisation.

¹⁵. <https://sabpp.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Dec-22.pdf>



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