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경영학석사 학위논문

**A study on the adoption of the HR
practices characterized by freedom
and flexibility at work**

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서울대학교 대학원

경영학과 인사조직전공

최 혜 정

A study on the adoption of the HR practices characterized by freedom and flexibility at work

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Abstract

A study on the adoption of the HR practices characterized by freedom and flexibility at work

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This study summarized newly introduced HR practices in Korean companies and defined characteristics as freedom and flexibility pointing out differences from the high performance work practices and high involvement work practice which have been mainly investigated in the existing HRM studies. These distinct features of the HR practices were conceptualized in this study, and at the same time, it examined the motives of the firm's adoption using contingency theory and institutionalism. An empirical analysis was conducted using data from the Human Capital Corporate Panel Survey conducted by the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training, including four surveys from 2011 to 2017. As a result, with regard to corporate strategy, pursuing innovation strategy led to the adoption of the HR practices characterized by freedom and flexibility. And from the institutional point of view, when the firm belonged to a similar industry sector and more than half of the companies were using such HR practices, the diffusion of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility existed.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, HR Practice, Adoption, Freedom and Autonomy, Flexibility, Strategy, Isomorphism.

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INTRODUCTION

Institutional theory and contingency theory have long been used for explaining the adoption and implementation of a specific practice. The adoption of a new practice is due to a firm's strategic decision or sometimes due to an institutional force. And when a firm decides to adopt a new practice, there must be a desirable result from the practice in accord with the motive. For the past decade, Korean firms have introduced diverse human resources (HR) practices which are never been and quite different from what they operated before in terms of Korean Confucian culture. Such as a flexible working hour system, an abolition of a staff level and a job title, a promotion by selection, and an online learning system, these practices are new and trendy for Korean firms these days. This study defines these HR practices' attributes are employees' autonomy/freedom and a system's flexibility in a workplace. This is against what Korean firms had sought to focus on hierarchy, rules, and unity. Furthermore, even though these HR practices have been adopted in many firms internationally and have differences from HPWP or HIWP which are main streams of accounts for HR practice with distinct characteristics, the explanation of this new form of HR practices is limited.

This research, above all, aims for organizing the trendy HR practices defining the distinct feature. Then, this study explains why firms adopt and implement the trendy HR practices and what they expect. Even if it seems that the new HR practices are for employees' autonomy/freedom and flexibility, there can be hidden intentions of a firm. Thus, this study is a heuristic study by organizing the HR practices in the real world, meanwhile, is a major precedent study by investigating the motive of adoption from a macro level for a follow-up study. A follow-up study such as research on effectiveness of an HR practice or a decoupling

issue between the motive and the outcome can be conducted under detailed boundary conditions from this study.

LITERATURE AND PRACTICE REVIEW

Human Resources Practices

For the past decade, Korean firms have introduced diverse HR practices that are never been and different from what operated before. Korean firms have considered Confucian values such as diligence at the workplace, loyalty to authority, and unity for all importantly (Kim & Park, 2003). And undoubtedly, due to the certain value, Korean firms could achieve a high industrialization and explosive financial growth. For that, Korean firms' HR practices followed the high performance work practices (HPWPs) for achieving higher performance or high involvement work practice (HIWP) for making employees participate more actively which have been both studied in the academic field for a long time.

HPWPs organized by Huselid (1995) are a bundle of performance-enhancing practices through increasing employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities related to their job. HPWPs aim to achieve organizational financial performance and many studies revealed the effectiveness of HPWP in terms of a firm's performance (Combs et al., 2006). And it was mainstream for explaining common HR practices in Korea such as pay for performance, training for firm-specific skills, and appraisals based on objective results.

Another major explanation of HR practice is HIWP (Lawler, 1986; Benson, & Lawler, 2016). HIWP's key principle is employee involvement in working place with practice, for example, participative decision making, quality circles, and gainsharing. While, HPWPs

concern HR practices related to employee's competence on a job, HIWP emphasizes HR practices and culture giving employees a high level of authority for decision making. For the decision making authority, there are four features of HIWP; power, information, knowledge, and rewards. Firstly, giving the power to make a decision related to work is fundamental. For making a decision correctly and acting, abundant information and knowledge are necessary. So, for that the supportive HR practice for employees to access information and to get the knowledge is important. Lastly, rewards revealing whether the made decision was right or not is a crucial factor for HIWP. These four attributes represent HIWP and are related to giving employees decision-making authority and providing a proper environment for that.

Therefore, existing HR practices in Korea are usually related to performance or authority for decision making, and both are for enriching the job skills of individuals. However, the introduced HR practices are different from what employees experienced. The below section summarizes what has been adopted and which characteristics can represent the trendy practices. The attributes are freedom/autonomy and flexibility at the workplace which is not directly and intuitively related to one's performance or authority for decision-making.

Discussion about recently popular HR practices in Korea

For organizing which HR practices have been introduced on-trend, I reviewed monthly human resource management magazine issued by Korea Personnel Improvement Association and major daily newspaper from 2018 to June of 2020. I adopted the HPWPs taxonomy system (Posthuma et al., 2013) selecting and modifying six categories; Training and Development, Job Structure and Work Design, Compensation and Benefits, Performance Management and Appraisal, Recruiting and Selection, Work Environment and Culture.

Table I. The trendy HR practices in Korea

Training and Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-directed training and development system through online or external institution learning • Development system with the goal of "Anytime Anywhere Anything"
Job Structure and Work Design
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff level simplification/abolition and formal title abolition • Separation between staff level and the post (even if the level is low, a position can be assigned according to the expertise of the work) • Design employees' work and time by oneself • In-house job market for improving internal mobility • Work from outside with unrelated to one's job • Support program for spin-off and start-up
Compensation and Benefits (Promotions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weakened linkage between staff level and reward • Abolition/Simplification of annual salary table and expansion of pay band • Peer recognition and spot bonus • Flexible promotion system such as promotion by selection
Performance Management and Appraisal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year-round evaluation and absolute evaluation (for personal development based on feedback) • 360° evaluation (Feedback from various business associates, not just one direct supervisor)
Recruiting and Selection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment at any time based on the discretion of each business department enhancing proper timing (instead of seasonal open recruitment led by the HR department)
Work Environment and Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible working hour • Liberalization of workplace (including work from home) • Removal of partition and executive room • Freedom of attire

I stipulate the key attributes of these trendy HR practices in Korea as freedom/autonomy and flexibility. The argument on freedom and flexibility at the workplace has been existed, however, organizing HR practices in terms of freedom and flexibility has never been done. This is because the strong belief that HR practices should be operated from

the view of a firm and advantage of a firm in Korea could be a reason. Also, the concept of freedom and flexibility is not familiar to the Korean culture, even though is familiar to western culture. Therefore, this organizing and defining the attribute as freedom and flexibility in Korean firms can be a new attempt and meaningful work.

This study defines the key attributes as followed. Freedom; the power or right to act as one wants without restraint. In the research field, freedom at the workplace has been viewed from freedom of speech for harassment or of expression (Volokh, 1991; Barry, 2007), which is quite an uninterested subject, because the relationship between freedom and a workplace seems opposite and unrelated. Indeed, the concept of freedom at the workplace is so-called autonomy. Autonomy; the degree to which the job offers substantial freedom, independence, and discretion. For existing literature, autonomy is related to job and work, however, what I point in this paper is autonomy itself even unrelated to work; employees can choose anything what they learn, even they can prepare for their next step after the job. Therefore, I use freedom rather than autonomy for representing the trendy HR practices for expressing extremely. Flexibility; the ability to be easily modified or willingness to change or compromise. Commonly, in the academic field, flexible work practices are viewed to facilitate work and life balance for employees (Richman et al., 2008). However, in this research, I apply the meaning of flexibility over the work and life balance, it can be flexibility for the whole HR system; there isn't a limited pay band for a specific level and position, there isn't an assigned evaluator from the HR department. In this literature, flexibility is interpreted in a broad sense more than work and life balance.

To clarify, these tries are not the first time in terms of the beginning of the HR practices for employees' freedom and flexibility. The movement of respecting each employee as a person had existed before, away from treating employees as labor machines, namely the Taylorism

(1911) that started first managing workers through labor standardization. From the Taylorism perspective regarding employees as a workforce by developing specific work skills directly related to performance, employees were recognized as a person and a citizen. In other words, an organizational citizenship model emerged with the perspective that as employees were a citizen belongs to the organization, they should receive benefit services from the organization and also they should have psychological ownership of the organization (Monahan et al., 1994: 이경목, 1999 recited). In the emergence of these models, rather than controlling employees with strict rules and guided plans, companies tried to create an organizational culture and philosophy and interact with employees through the development program. Therefore, employees were able to lead their jobs creatively with more autonomy than before. This model could be also seen as an attempt to consider employee's freedom and autonomy in the company.

Furthermore, there are common features between these HR practices and the property of HPWPs and HIWP. In the long term, these trendy HR practices can be positively related to firm performance. Additionally, they are helpful for employees to make a decision at the workplace. Yet, for introduced HR practices, there is a distinct point that is not directly and intuitively different from performance and authority called freedom and flexibility.

In conclusion, the introduced HR practices are for employees' freedom and systems' flexibility at the workplace. Then, this research cast a question about 'Does firm really matter individual's freedom and systems' flexibility?' The previous study of employees' autonomy is related to the empowerment literature. Empowerment or empowered culture has been highlighted for improving individual worker's creativity, productivity, and employee satisfaction (Seibert et al., 2011). However, just because freedom and flexibility are positively related to creativity, productivity, and employee satisfaction, the firm's motivation for the adoption of specific practice can be different. The following section investigates the possible

hidden intentions of firms.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

There are two approaches when investigating the adoption of practice; rational choice perspective and institutional legitimacy perspective. The firm's rational choice perspective is explained by the contingency theory of organization strategy (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Porter 1981). And firm's legitimacy perspective is explained by institutional theory and isomorphism (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). The institutional theory claims that organizational imitation can be a proper way to gain social legitimacy. Contrary to institutional theory, the strategic view of practices' introduction delivers the importance of the response to environmental contingencies rather than social pressures being effective (Ferris & Judge, 1991).

Also in the case of adoption of new HR practices, firms often faced the difficulty of choice whether following the economic efficiency or the social legitimacy mechanisms when introducing new HR practices (Lees, 1997; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003). These two perspectives, therefore, have widely been used for explaining the adoption of HR practices in HRM research fields. Hence, I examined both opinions for investigating the phenomenon of the adoption of the HR practices characterized by freedom and flexibility.

Contingency Theory

The early argument of contingency theory was found in organizational theory research (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Pugh et al., 1968; Van de Ven, 1976). The researchers argued that there

exists the best or optimal structure for the organization depending on the environment around. It was the denial of the traditional view that existence of the one best way for managing and structuring the organization. This approach focusing on firms' ability to take the best and different way for managing and structuring themselves has been developed by business strategy management studies.

Business strategies are concerned with a firm's industry position relative to competitors and are contingent upon its environment (Porter, 1981). Firms choose business strategies in compliance with judgments for securing their distinctive competencies and with the environments where they should confront (Mintzberg, 1990). For that firms try to preoccupy the favorable position leading firms to have a competitive advantage to survive. Porter (1981) classified strategies into three generic types; cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. And Schuler and Jackson (1987) named it slightly different from those of Porter to classify business strategy into three types: innovation, cost-reduction, and quality-enhancement. Innovation strategy is for develop and provide original products or services which have distinguishing factors from the competitors. The primary point of the innovation strategy is offering something new and different. For achieving this, the culture and environment formed by HR practice should be something creative and liberal. The cost-reduction strategy is used for having a competitive advantage by being the lowest cost firms. Thus, a firm with this strategy tries to eliminate the cost for operating a firm. In this sense, personnel expenses are also a target of the cost-reduction strategy and related HR practices are needed. The quality-enhancement strategy is about a focus on improving and enhancing the quality of products and services. In fact, this paper considers the motivation of the adoption of HR practice with the conception of freedom and flexibility, the quality-enhancement strategy which is somewhat ambiguous is not exploited on the hypotheses development.

Looking at the specific links between the strategy and HR practices, according to strategic HR management research, the strategy of corporate-level could be an instruction of subsequent functional strategy, e.g. HR, marketing, R&D, and so on (Miles & Snow, 1984; Beechler et al., 1993; Gunnigle & Moore, 1994). Accordingly, the direction of HR practices follows the firm's strategy and each strategy is better aligned with the unique characteristics of HR policies (Porter, 1980; Wright & McMahan, 1992). This is because the HR policies following specific strategy would be an employees' behaviors instruction. These behaviors are viewed in various dimensions, for example, routinary versus innovative behavior, reluctant versus flexible to change, and low versus high risk-taking behavior. From the perspectives of alignment between the strategy and HR policy's goal, the cost-reduction strategy is related to tight managerial controls following disciplines, and innovation strategy is related to the culture of encouraging innovation, risk-taking, and individuality. The innovation strategy is contrasted with a cost-reduction strategy in terms of requirements for achieving each strategy. Despite these previous studies, this study maintains that the adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility could be both related to the cost-reduction strategy and innovation strategy. More specific stipulations will be covered in the hypotheses part.

To summarize, depending on each business strategy, a firm's decision to adopt and implement a specific practice can be various. Even though the same practice exists among firms, the motivation of adoption can be different contingent upon their strategy, and strategy is also contingent upon the environment. And following the contingency theory, a firm's behavior to adopt is about its rational choice with a specific goal and strategy. For example, as for the adoption of HR practices, in previous research, adoption of the set of so-called best practices such as HPWP has occurred because it could facilitate the achievement of organizational goals and strategies. For instance, during the fast economic growth, most enterprises pursued the

economic performance and they determined to adopt HPWP for the strategic reason. As the positive effects of the practices had been considered popularized, firms decided to introduce such HR practices referring to other organizations (Jackson & Schuler, 1995; Bamberger & Fiegenbaum, 1996). It seemed like just to follow other organizations' action imitating best HR practices, however, it was a strategic decision to remain competitive.

Institutional Theory

Keeping a good relationship with the external environment is important for organizations as much as improving performance and efficiency. For the good relationship with the environment, new institutionalism emphasized the role of social legitimacy within a social community (Meyer & Rowan 1977). And this social legitimacy has an opportunity for firms to make a choice that has no relevance to rational reason if the choice provides firms to get legitimacy for surviving. Consequently, the organizations generally show similar structures and practices. This phenomenon is called institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). And social pressures for isomorphism are strong mechanisms for institutional changes including adoption and implementation of new practice (Oliver, 1992). Even though there exists a criticism that institutional theory can't explain different response despite experiencing similar environment (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996), isomorphism is still a powerful mechanism to explain the diffusion of a specific practice. Furthermore, simple imitation could be more general in fields where standards are ambiguous and intangible such as HR management (Sanchez et al., 1999)

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) proposed three mechanisms of institutional isomorphism: coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism refers to when a firm adopts a specific practice it is due to the firm's relationship with powerful and influential

organizations such as the government and foreign capital. The adoption occurs from the pressure from an influential organization when a firm needs dependence on other organizations. Normative isomorphism concerns the norms of a professional community. Due to the influence from the expert group, such as advising and consulting, a certain practice can be spread out. Mimetic isomorphism is about an imitation of other organization's behavior. This occurs when a firm is under uncertainty or a high level of competition in the industry. In this study, for the clear comparison to the rational choice perspective, mimetic isomorphism which is the most irrelevant to economic rationality and the least way with discretion is employed for developing hypothesis.

In summary, there are two mechanisms when a firm decide to adopt and implement new practice. First, by rational choice, when there exists a certain business strategy HR practices must be combined with the certain strategy. Second, by the isomorphic process, a firm initiates HR practices imitating other firms' practices under uncertainty.

HYPOTHESES

Innovation Perspective

Firms with the innovation strategy prepare to adapt to competitive and rapid market change and technological advances. Seeking innovation strategy, their employees need to be creative and to be able to pursue long-term objectives (Shipton et al., 2005) The benefits of an autonomy-supportive working environment for individuals' creativity have been lightened in the organization research (Amabile, 1988, 1996; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Zhou, 1998)

And creativity is the essential antecedents for firm's innovation (Amabile, 1988; Amabile et al., 1996; Anderson et al., 2004; Sarooghi et al., 2015). In this regard, the HR practices which are able to foster employees' freedom and flexibility are adopted for innovative culture leading firm's innovative performance and accomplishing a firm's innovation strategy.

The explanation that such a new HR policy has emerged along with the innovation strategy in Korean companies can also support this hypothesis. In the past, Korean companies' strategies were mainly the cost-reduction strategies and the fast-follower strategies, and for this purpose, HR practices to select and operate a large number of standardized human resources were suitable. However, as Korean companies like Samsung have gradually become to play a leading role with the high development of electronic communication and semiconductor technology, corporate strategies were revised to lead innovation. Accordingly, the culture has changed along with the strategy respecting employees freedom, autonomy, and personal growth rather than managing standardized talent.

For this reason, HR practices for freedom and flexibility can be a proper way to achieve the innovation goal. For example, the practice of simplification/abolition of staff level and formal title or separation between staff level and the post supports an innovative work environment. Since it is based on individual abilities rather than seniority or position, individual autonomy for work and freedom for showing ability can be maximized. As a result, innovative results can be brought about in job and culture based on autonomy and freedom. The practice of self-directed training and development system through online or external institution learning provides innovative culture. Free from the uniform training system led by the HR department, which had been traditionally conducted, it enables employees' creative thinking with various learning opportunities. An in-house job market system is also helpful for the innovation strategy. By providing opportunities to work in other departments for who has the will and meets certain

criteria, innovative results can be achieved based on diversity of knowledge from various job experiences. Year-round evaluation or 360° evaluation enables employees to take account of their career for the long term considering personal development keeping pace with a company. Since innovative performance is not achieved for a short period, building a long term vision for employees is crucial for innovation strategy.

In this respect, the firm pursuing the innovation strategy adopts and implements the HR practices for employees' freedom and flexibility.

H 1: Firms pursuing the innovation strategy are likely to adopt the HR practices for freedom and flexibility.

Cost-Reduction Perspective

Firms that utilize a cost-reduction strategy should strictly control and minimize their expenses, and make an effort to achieving economies of scale (Schuler & Jackson, 1987). Therefore, efficiency and reducing expenses is important for firms to succeed. Most firms strive for reducing their costs through revising the product development process (Spence, 1984). However, revising the HR culture and atmosphere could be a proper way for cutting costs and improving work efficiency. Generally, from the literature of strategy, the HR management related to the cost-reduction strategy is about control employees with strong rules and guided policies (Porter, 1980; Wright & McMahan, 1992), which is a quite opposite concept to the HR practices for freedom and flexibility. Despite the general understanding, this study argues that there could be a possibility for firms to use these HR practices achieving the cost-reduction strategy, especially from long term perspective.

In this sense, HR practices with freedom and flexibility characteristics facilitate a

firm's cost-reduction strategy. For example, an in-house job market that enables employees to work at the preferred position reduces the recruitment efforts and operates the labor force more efficiently. Rather than recruiting a new member outside when necessary for a certain position, it is useful for firms to exploit an existing member if employees want. The practice of self-directed training and development system through online or external institution learning builds efficiency for training employees. Because it is not a large-scale training development led by the HR team, it is possible to reduce the cost of newly planning or operating every year. In addition, through development opportunities by individual's choice, effective personalized training is possible for each employee and the HR team simply supports costs. For the long term, a training system depending on an individual's will is a more efficient way for dealing with the development of employees. The weakened linkage between staff level and reward or abolition of annual salary table provides flexibility for operating personnel expenses directly in the long run. Although it is not possible to cut wages right away, it will be a way to curb the rise in wages in the future, and it will be possible to adjust the wages of managers by establishing a channel for selecting low-level people as managers. Support program for spin-off and start-up is helpful for retire management increasing staff efficiency. Considering the rigid employment contract system of Korean firms, there will be an effect of reducing labor costs through advance retirement plans with such a program.

Putting together, the trendy HR practices seem to build employees' freedom and system's flexibility, however, the real intention of firms can be controlling the expenses for cost-reduction strategy. Thus, the HR practices providing freedom and flexibility can a proper method to achieve the cost-reduction goal. In this respect, the firm pursuing the cost-reduction strategy adopts and implements the HR practices for employees' freedom and flexibility.

H 2: Firms pursuing the cost-reduction strategy are likely to adopt the HR practices for freedom and flexibility.

Mimetic Isomorphism Perspective

When capturing the motivation and process of diffusion, the logic of mimetic isomorphism has been applied by institutional research. In the era of the fourth industrial revolution in Korea, the uncertainty of a market and dynamics have risen. And this situation is a trigger that mimetic isomorphism occurs when adopting a practice and a structure used by other organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). By imitating neighbor organizations, a firm tries to conform to the dominant tendency in its institutional environment and secures a social legitimacy for survival. As mimetic isomorphism occurs, the concentration level of a certain practice in the same field (e.g. industry, age, and size) increases. This phenomenon occurs to get legitimacy, even though a firm does not have special motivation or information on the results of a specific practice. Furthermore, there is a safety-in-numbers effect suggesting that the deviant behavior can be a source of criticism from other firms around (Ahmadjian and Robinson, 2001).

Practically, so-called leading IT companies such as Netflix and Google issued contents with their HR philosophy. And Korean IT companies such as Naver and KaKao followed their philosophy and applied some practices in their firms somewhat experimentally even if the business and legal environment of Korea is distinct from that of the U.S. This kind of mimicry explains the fad-like HR practices in Korea. In this sense, this study points out the possibility of a mimetic isomorphism mechanism for the adoption and the implementation of trendy HR practices.

H 3: The adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility is associated with a greater likelihood that other firms' history of adoption in the same industry, of a similar age, and of a similar size.

METHODS

Data

I used the Human Capital Corporate Panel (HCCP) survey dataset which is a multi-year national survey in South Korea. These data have been collected biennially since 2005 by the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET) which is for studying vocational education, training, and human resource development in Korea funded by a government. In this study, I used the data from the fourth-round to the seventh-round (from 2011 to 2017). Generally, each round of data is about 450 companies with a response rate of 25 percent. The survey is asked for diverse firms in terms of industry, size, and age and both a corporate level and an employee level surveys are included. In a corporate survey section, the panel data covered the company's characteristics such as basic information (establishment year, industry, etc.), strategy, HR policies, and financial performance. In an employee survey section, the dataset included employee's opinions such as perceptions of HR policies, organizational culture, and the role of the top management team.

A critical piece of information for this study is in the part of a corporate survey section. Therefore, I used the data from a corporate survey section only. Since an issue related to the measure of the dependent variable that is all 10 HR practices selected by the researcher as the HR practices characterized by freedom and flexibility were included from the survey conducted

in 2011, therefore, I used a dataset from the fourth-round to seventh-round which is the latest one. Total 508 firms are included providing 1323 cases in the analysis. To achieve causality better, I separated the sources for independent variables and the dependent variable (Wright et al., 2005). Information for the independent and control variables, including firm's strategy, basic information such as an establishment year, the scale of an employee, the industry was provided from the t year, while information for the dependent variable about HR policies for freedom and flexibility was obtained from the year lagged by two years ($t+2$).

Measures

Dependent variable. In order to measure the dependent variable, the HR practices for freedom and flexibility were first defined in the data set. Among the results of the survey asking about HR policies, 10 policies could represent freedom and flexibility were selected; e-learning, self-learning group, setting goals by an employee, desired job placement, in-house job market, the difference in compensation level, flexible promotion system, feedback to the result of evaluation, 360° feedback, and suggestion system. The utilization level of 10 practices in each company could be counted from 0 to 10, and based on this utilization intensity the cases were classified into 3 types; lower group type (type1, using 0 to 2 policies), middle group type (type2, using 3 to 5 policies), upper group type (type3, using 6 to 10 policies). Each type of group was classified based on the interval roughly divided into bottom 30%, top 30%, and middle 40%. The introduction of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility was measured by the change of type which means the case of change from type 1 to type 2 or type 3, or from type 2 to type 3. These cases of the type change were regarded as such adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility and the adoption cases were coded 1, otherwise coded 0.

The type classification created for the measurement of the dependent variable is also

used for the measurement of the independent variable to test hypotheses related to isomorphism.

Independent variables. As for the corporate strategy whether pursuing innovation strategy or cost-reduction strategy, the item asking for the company's top priority strategy was used from the HCCP dataset. As for the data, the company's strategy was divided into three categories following the classification by Schuler and Jackson (1987): innovation strategy, cost-reduction strategy, and quality enhancement strategy. To prove in-depth that the HR practices for freedom and flexibility were adopted to pursue the unique strategy, beyond simply using the strategy for year t , I considered whether to modify the strategy from year t to year $t+2$. As a result, the independent variables for testing Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were measured as nominal variables classified into four categories: no strategy modification, modification to the innovation strategy, modification to the cost-reduction strategy, and modification to the quality-enhancement strategy. The only variables related to the hypotheses are the innovation view and the cost-reduction perspective, however the quality-enhancement strategy was not excluded for a more comparable analysis while maintaining the total number of samples.

The hypothesis test related to isomorphism was basically conducted with three perspectives. It was measured how broadly the HR practices characterized by freedom and flexibility were used by companies in the same industry, similar size, and similar age. According to the HCCP data classification, the industry sectors were classified into manufacturing, finance, and others (broadcasting/communication and technical services) and the ratio of using type 3 in year t was calculated in each industry sector. In the case of firm size, the proportion of using type 3 in year t was also calculated by using classified results from the HCCP data with employee scale; 299 or less, 300-999, and 1000 or more employees. In the

case of firm age, the ratio of using type 3 was calculated by classifying firms as young firms (15 years or less), middle, and old firms (40 years or more) referring to related studies (Huergo & Jaumandreu, 2004; Coad et al., 2016; Coad et al., 2018). For classifying firm age, I tried to follow the classification used in the existing studies about the relationship between firm age and performance or innovation, however, in the case of young firms, the number of companies under 5 years were remarkably small so a slightly wider range was set to 15 years.

Control variables. I controlled for some variables at the firm level, as they can influence the adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility regardless of firm strategy. First, the firm age is controlled. Old firms may be reluctant to change therefore less likely to introduce a new practice. On the contrary, old firms can easily try to introduce a new practice because they have acquired social legitimacy. Firm age was measured as the difference between the t year and the establishment year. Second, the firm size is controlled because a larger company can hesitate to face a new practice, as changes require greater effort. Firm size was measured as the number of employees in year t (transformed with natural logarithms).

RESULTS

Discrete-time event history analysis using logistic regression is utilized to test the effects of the firm strategy and isomorphism factors on the adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility. Table II shows the number of firms with the potential to adopt the HR practices for freedom and flexibility and the number of adopting firms among them. Over the years, I observed 195 adopting events among 1323 total events. In this sample, a total of 508

firms are included and 180 firms adopted the HR practice for freedom and flexibility. Since the HCCP panel data survey was conducted every two years, the exact year of adoption could not be confirmed, but it would have been introduced in t+1 or t+2 years.

Table II. Adoption by year

Year	Number of firms with potential to adopt	Number of adopting firms	Percentage of adopting firms
2011	459	67	14.6%
2013	437	85	19.5%
2015	427	43	10.1%
2017			
Total	1323	195	14.7%

Table III provides means, standard deviations, and correlations for all the variables except a nominal variable for the modification of the strategy. Instead, the binary fact that modified (coded 1) or unmodified (coded 0) was included in the descriptive statistics.

Table III. Descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables

Variables	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility	0.15	0.36						
2. Modification of the firm strategy	0.30	0.46	0.08					
3. The ratio of using type 3 in t year - Industry	31.15	12.31	-0.07	-0.03				
4. The ratio of using type 3 in t year - Size	30.92	19.25	-0.03	-0.03	0.22			
5. The ratio of using type 3 in t year - Age	31.40	4.41	-0.03	-0.01	0.11	0.13		
6. Firm size	5.90	1.12	0.01	-0.05	0.18	0.84	0.08	
7. Firm age	34.76	17.05	0.03	0.03	-0.16	0.18	0.13	0.15

Notes: n = 1323.

Model 1 in Table IV reports the results of the discrete-time event history analyses for the adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility. The model was significant overall. Regarding to strategy change, when the firm determined to pursue innovation strategy or quality enhancement strategy compared to unmodified strategy, the adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility existed in support of my prediction (Hypothesis 1). Yet, as to strategy modification to cost-reduction strategy, no significant influence on the adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility is confirmed, failing to support Hypothesis 2. Model 1 and model 2 partially explain the effect of mimetic isomorphism in terms of the same industry showing a curvilinear relationship. For testing hypothesis 3, when all β values of model 1 showed a negative number, I presumed the possibility of a curvilinear relationship between the ratio of using type 3 for the same industry sector and the adoption. Accordingly, for confirming whether or not there is a curvilinear relationship, the squared term of the ratio was involved. Confirming the curvilinear relationship, the point at which the slope becomes 0 is 50.5%. Up to a certain level, even if the HR practices for freedom and flexibility are widely used within the same industry, it has rather a negative effect contrary to Hypothesis 3, however, it is significant when more than half of the companies in the same industry use the HR policies. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is partially supported.

Table IV. Results of the analyses for the adoption of the HR practices characterized by freedom and flexibility

Variables	Model 1: Adoption		Model 2: Curvilinear Relationship	
	β	Exp(β)	β	Exp(β)
No strategy modification				
Strategy modification to cost-reduction	0.16	1.18	0.17	1.18
Strategy modification to innovation	0.75*	2.21*	0.77**	2.17**
Strategy modification to quality enhancement	0.52*	1.69*	0.55*	1.74*
The ratio of using type 3 - Industry	-0.02*	0.98*	-0.10*	0.90*
The ratio of using type 3 - Size	-0.01	0.99	0.01	1.01
The ratio of using type 3 - Age	-0.02	0.98	0.21	0.23
The ratio of using type 3 - Industry - Squared			0.001*	1.001*
The ratio of using type 3 - Size - Squared			0	1
The ratio of using type 3 - Age - Squared			-0.003	0.997
Firm size	0.251	1.29	0.19	1.21
Firm age	0.00	1.00	0.003	1.003
-2 log-likelihood	1084.44		1079.74	
$\chi^2(df)$	22.01(8)**		26.71(11)**	
R ²	0.029		0.035	

Notes: n = 1323. * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For the past decade, HR policies with fresh and new characteristics that did not exist previously have been introduced to many Korean companies. This study conceptualized the characteristics of such HR practices as respecting employee freedom and improving the system's flexibility and simultaneously organized the distinct characteristics different from

those of HPWP and HIWP that were studied in the existing academic field. In addition, the adoption of certain systems in companies is generally done by a discretionary choice of a firm with specific motivation and goals. In this regard, I examined the motivation for the HR practices for freedom and flexibility from various perspectives. The research looking into the motivation of the specific practice's adoption is important because each practice will have impacts to an organization expected or unexpected and has potential linkages to organizational outcomes. Therefore, it is necessary by priority to examine the motives of introduction in order to predict such impact or to investigate the decoupling issue on some resulted effect. This study looked at the motives of introducing the HR practices for freedom and flexibility from two major perspectives explaining the organizational adoption.

This empirical study relied on a sample of Korean firms proving the motivation of diffusion of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility. I found that while the adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility was significantly associated with the firm's innovation strategy especially when the strategy modification happened to innovation strategy and it showed imitative action of the firm in the same industry especially when the ratio is high above 50.5%.

First, firms with the innovation strategy tried to introduce the HR practices for freedom and flexibility rather than firms with the cost-reduction strategy. Especially, empirical results showed when firms decided to change their strategy to an innovation perspective they introduced the HR practices characterized by freedom and flexibility almost simultaneously. It means that they were moving quickly and strategically by introducing aligned HR policies for achieving their own goals. And it also means most companies expected these HR practices to be helpful in corporate innovative outcomes. In other words, it was confirmed that giving employees freedom and carrying systems' flexibility would have a positive impact on corporate

innovation based on increasing employee creativity and providing an open culture. The results of this empirical analysis were matched with the previous creativity and innovation researches.

However, the strategy modification to the cost-reduction was not related to the adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility. Based on Hypothesis 2, I presumed that although these HR policies were more intuitively and academically related to the innovation strategy they could be also affected by the firm's cost-reduction strategy with high possibility. This study postulated the HR practices for freedom and flexibility, in the long term, could lead to cost efficiency to the company in various ways for providing slack to adjust when operating workforces and the cost of labor. At the same time, since it is difficult for firms to directly announce to their employees that they would expect the effect of cost-reduction from the HR management, this study considered firms' hidden intention to achieve cost reduction strategy by adopting new HR practices for increasing freedom and flexibility on the surface. But, it was not confirmed, so another question about whether restructuring is the only action of HR management to reduce costs remains.

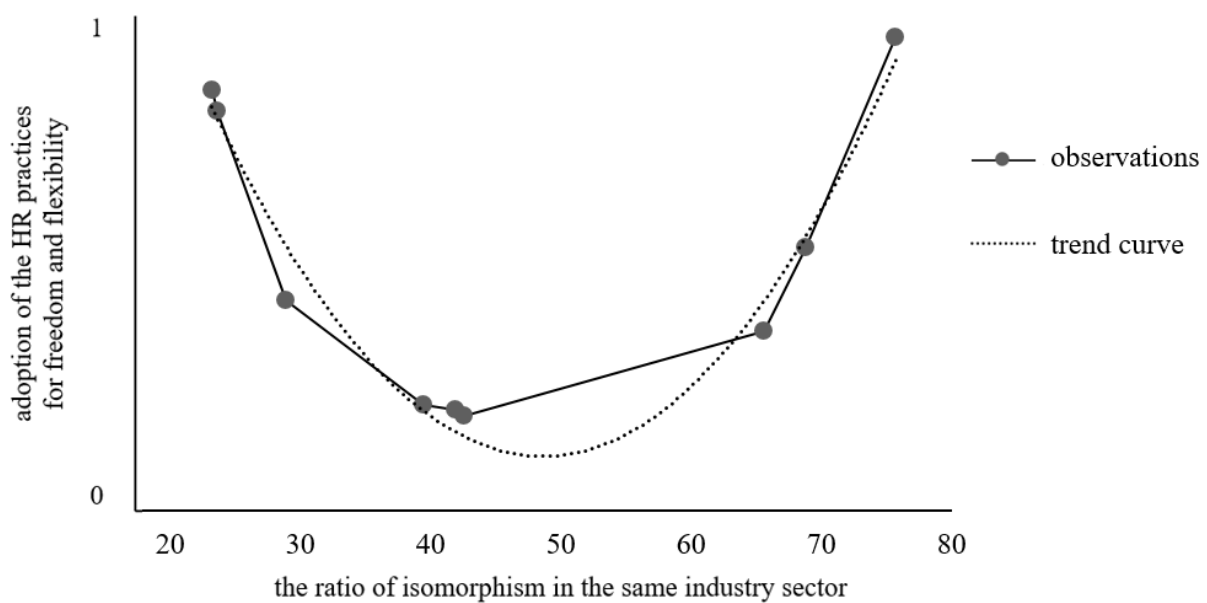
Additionally, I found that also firms changing to quality enhancement strategy introduced the HR practices for freedom and flexibility. I interpreted this result as in any form, it can be seen that the strategic decision-making of companies to advance their products or services is related to the introduction of these HR policies. According to the innovation literature, there are two kinds of innovation: one is radical innovation and the other is incremental innovation (Ettlie et al., 1984; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985; Gersick, 1991). Scholars defined incremental innovation as a slight improvement while almost maintaining the status quo and radical innovation as a completely different change from the existing one. Considering these explanations, the strategy of quality enhancement could be carefully interpreted as a form similar to incremental innovation. As a result, it was confirmed that

companies pursuing the innovation strategy in any form adopted the HR practices for freedom and flexibility as a motive for achieving that strategy.

Moreover, this empirical analysis captured the distinct phenomenon in the diffusion of practices caused by the isomorphism mechanism. In the design of the hypothesis, it was predicted that if companies of similar industry, similar size, and age utilized the HR practices for freedom and flexibility widely, other companies who didn't adopt the HR practices yet would imitate in order to obtain social legitimacy with easy justification for the reason of adoption. But, as a result of empirical analysis, it was found that it is only significant that the HR practices characterized by freedom and flexibility were used in the similar industry sector. In addition, I assured that the effect appears in both negative and positive directions with U shape, depending on the level of utilization of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility. Figure I shows the empirical relationship between the adoption and the ratio of how the HR practices for freedom and flexibility extensively used. It was interesting that until the 50.5% level although other companies in the same industry sector utilized the HR practices a lot, companies didn't imitate the practices. However, when more than half of companies in the same industry used the HR practices, the propensity changed to adopt them and followed other firms' decisions. These empirical results could be explained by Tolbert and Zucker (1983)'s observations of the isomorphism mechanism. They found that the early adoption stage has relation to organizational requirements, while the late adoption stage is related to institutional forces of legitimacy from the civil service adoption cases. Based on this strong supportive argument, I interpreted at a low isomorphism ratio such as 23.2% which means at the beginning of the diffusion process, the adoption of the HR practices was caused by the corporate's strategic choice expecting specific outcomes like innovation. And the fact that when the ratio of isomorphism was about 70% or more, the mimetic isomorphism by social legitimated

pressure occurred could be pointed out from this result. In other words, the later adopters considered the HR practices for freedom and flexibility as a necessary component of legitimized organization in that industry sector for their survival while the HR practices have become progressively institutionalized. This explanation brought to a conclusion that only more than a certain level of isomorphism affects the mimetic mechanism. Moreover, this led better fits with the institutional theory with a safety-in-numbers effect for getting social legitimacy (Ahmadjian & Robinson, 2001).

Figure I. Graph of adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility and the ratio of isomorphism in the same industry sector (Hypothesis 3)



While any predictions were not supported in terms of how intensively the HR practices for freedom and flexibility are used in similar age and size. In fact, depending on the age distribution of companies, there was no significant difference in the level of utilization of the HR practices characterized by freedom and flexibility. Regarding the firm size, there existed

substantial differences in the level of utilization of such HR practices, however, there's no effect on the decision whether a firm follows the other firms' decision with similar size.

Contribution

This study provides several contributions to research on strategic human resource management and firms' decision-making behavior explained by contingency theory and institutionalism. First, it contributes to organize the popular HR practices in Korea for the past decade and conceptualize the distinct characteristics as freedom and flexibility. Especially for the HR practitioners, this study can be a good material for understanding widely used HR practices recently and for considering the adoption of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility with the specific motive. On top of that, the firms' motivation to introduce such HR practices was investigated from various perspectives with the contingency theory and institutional theory. Therefore, a follow-up study such as the effect of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility can be conducted within detailed boundary conditions. Under specific boundary conditions, it would be possible to study whether the effects of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility on enterprises are significantly linked to motivation, and if not, what decoupling effects exist. Also, by investigating empirically and supporting some hypotheses with Korean firms' data it becomes a significant empirical study. In particular, the aspect that is in accord with the previous research implies that the innovation strategy may have a substantial relationship with the HR practices for freedom and flexibility. Therefore, this paper can be used for related research topics in the future for example the effectiveness of the HR practices pursuing innovative outcomes. Finally, this study shows the possibility that, in the isomorphism process, companies imitate other firms' behaviors above a certain imitating level, rather than simply imitate other firms' decisions made in a similar group at the early stage.

Considering these findings, a hypothesis from a new perspective can be established in the future model related to isomorphism.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

First of all, this study could not cover all the HR practices related to employees' freedom and system's flexibility currently used by Korean companies. This may be due to a limitation of the data, or due to the incorrect classification as the involvement of the researcher's subjected perspective. Also, although this research conceptualized the distinct features that differ from those of HPWP and HIWP as freedom and flexibility, the necessity of this work may not be agreed upon academically. If more diverse HR practices would be organized, there can be also a possibility that another characteristic discovered. In this respect, in the future, not only the HR practices of Korean companies but also new HR policies in various countries represented the Netflix's HR culture book can be summarized together to establish a new stream of HR management academic field.

On top of that, from a strategic point of view, all three corporate strategies were eventually covered by this study, however, there may be other isomorphism mechanisms to explain the imitative action. This limitation could be the subject of future research based on the curvilinear relationship revealed in this study. Although all perspectives were covered by this study, if there is cost-reduction effect of the HR practices for freedom and flexibility, it can be interest research how such an outcome occurred.

Finally, there are also some limitations regarding data collection and measurement. Although the survey had been conducted in 2019, unfortunately since the data had not yet been

released, it is unable to conduct a wider range of discrete-time event history analysis. And for the same reason, this empirical analysis did not reflect the latest data conducted in 2019. In terms of measurement, more specifically, about the age of the company, there are very few startup companies surveyed. Therefore, I couldn't classify the real young group of firms. For example, if I could investigate what startups utilized for their HR strategy, it would have been a more abundant and accurate empirical study. In the process of contemplating the measurement of the dependent variable, some difficulties without consent from other researchers exist.

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국 문 초 록

직장에서의 자유와 유연성을 특징으로 하는 HR제도의 기업 도입 동기에 관한 연구

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최 혜 정

본 연구는 국내 기업에서 최근 새롭게 도입되고 있는 HR제도들을 정리하고, 그 특징을 기존 HRM연구에서 주로 살펴보았던 고성과작업시스템 및 참여적 작업시스템과 다르게 직원의 자유와 유연성으로 정의한다. 이러한 새로운 특징의 HR제도가 여러 기업들에게 동시에 확산되고 있는 현상을 포착하여 개념화 한 동시에 기업의 도입 동기에 관하여 상황이론 및 제도주의 관점에서 살펴본다. 2011년부터 2017년까지 4회에 걸쳐 조사된 한국 직업 능력 개발원의 인적 자본 기업 패널 조사 데이터를 활용하여 실증분석을 실시했으며, 그 결과, 기업의 전략과 관련해서는 기업의 혁신 전략 추구가 자유와 유연성을 특징으로 하는 HR제도 도입을 하게 하였다. 제도주의 관점에서 모방적 동형화는 유사 산업군 내에 속해있는 경우 그리고 절반 이상의 기업이 해당 HR제도를 활용하고 있는 경우를 동시에 만족할 때, 자유와 유연성을 특징으로 하는 HR제도가 확산되는 경향을 확인하였다.

주요어: 인사관리, HR제도의 도입, 직장에서의 자유/자율, 유연성, 상황이론, 제도주의

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