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An Investigation into How Line Managers Shape and Influence HRM Practice During the Implementation Process

By

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DECLARATION

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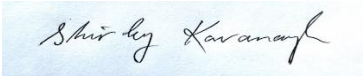
Signed:  (Shirley Kavanagh) ID No. 81100698

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FDRS	Forced Distribution Rating System
FLM	Front Line Managers
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
LM	Line Manager
SHRM	Strategic Human Resource Management

ABSTRACT

Human resource research has extended beyond the *types* of practices implemented to *how* practices are implemented by line managers who hold people management responsibilities (e.g., performance management) to their direct reports. Scholars agree that implementation of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices is as important for HRM effectiveness as the formulation and design of these practices. Line managers play a central role in HRM practices, and line managers are deeply involved in shaping the outcomes of HRM practices for their team members and in delivering those outcomes to their employees. However, research and theory on how their role is enacted still remains underdeveloped.

This thesis is rooted in the line manager HRM implementation and focuses on how and why line managers implement HRM practices. As a contribution to this debate the researcher uses a multi-theoretical lens to understand the phenomenon of line manager implementation of HRM practices. Translation theory an underutilised theoretical lens within HRM studies is used to help further our understanding of how practices are changed or edited by managers. Through a qualitative study the researcher provides new insights into the decisions managers make in choosing how to implement HRM practices. Using the practice of performance management and specifically performance appraisal, the study explores the decisions managers make in implementing (or not), this practice that is devolved by the Human Resources (HR) function. The study explores how and why line managers choose to enact HRM practices and how they shape or influence that process. For the purposes of the study, line managers are defined as people managers who hold responsibility for direct reports.

The findings suggest line managers respond in three ways to the implementation of HRM practices. The first category labelled *championing* reflects how managers choose to

actively implement and take ownership for the HRM practices devolved by the HR function. The second category labelled *curtailing* describes how managers choose to slow down implementation by actively avoiding or passively avoiding implementation. A third categorisation labelled *translating* illustrates how managers adapt the practice by altering forms and altering content, in order to improve local implementation and also how they behave towards HR when they make those changes.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Context

This study is posited within the realm of line manager implementation of HRM practices. Within organisations, line managers play a central role in implementing HRM strategy. To be consistent with existing research on line manger HRM implementation (e.g., Fu et al., 2020; Keegan et al., 2012; López-Cotarelo, 2018; Piening et al., 2014; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018) line managers in this study refer to managers who hold people management responsibilities for their direct reports. This responsibility includes motivating developing and having responsibility for the overall performance management of these employees. They could be supervisors, front-line managers, assignment managers, project managers, and direct managers for team members. These could be managers at different levels of the organisation.

It is usual in organisations for HRM policies to be formulated by the HR function based on a model of devolved responsibility and that responsibility for implementation is delegated to the line managers. This is supported in the academic literature by writers who assert that the role of line management is central to the successful implementation of HRM practice (Brewster et al., 2013, 2015; Currie & Procter, 2001; Nishii & Paluch, 2018). There are numerous practices that are devolved by the HR function, and these include practices such as recruitment, goal setting, and talent management activities including developing and training of staff.

In the field of strategic HRM, several theoretical perspectives and models have been proposed to understand the relationship between HRM and performance. One of those perspectives in the literature has pointed towards the critical role of line managers mediating the HRM–performance relationship (e.g., Alfes et al., 2013; Harney & Jordan, 2008; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Specifically, process models of strategic HRM (see Appendices A.1

and A.2) have drawn attention to the distinction between intended HRM (policies developed by decision makers), actual HRM (implemented human resource practices), and perceived HRM (employee perceptions of HRM practices) (Huselid, 1995; Wright & Nishii, 2013). The overall suggestion is that line managers are in charge of actually implementing the intended HRM practices in order to influence the attitudes and behaviours of employees, which in turn results in individual and organisational performance outcomes.

The evidence suggests that while line managers have considerable responsibility for HRM, they can be a source of poor HRM implementation (Evans, 2017; McGovern et al., 2007). In addition, research has found that line managers are often the source of gaps between intended and actual HRM (Piening et al., 2014) as they adapt, or even replace, an organisation's intended HRM practices (Kehoe & Han, 2020). In doing so, they become a source of variance not only in the HRM process, but also in the content of HRM practices within and across organisations.

Research also shows that managers and employees perceive the same high-performance work practices differently (Liao et al., 2009) and, whereas managers' perceptions are informed by factors such as whether the practice helps them (Kuvaas et al., 2014) and can be adapted to their needs (Conway & Monks, 2010) employees' perceptions are filtered through their line manager's implementation (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007) and their idiosyncratic values and beliefs (Piening et al., 2014). Despite the considerable breadth of HRM content research, it has been suggested that more research needs to be conducted on the roles that line managers play in an organisation's adoption of this content (Steffensen et al., 2019). This research study provides insights into how managers apply process but also how they work with the content of HRM practice.

Research also reveals (Sikora et al., 2015) that positive workplace outcomes, such as lower intention to quit, higher job performance, and higher participation in decision making,

are evident among employees whose line managers made more frequent use of HRM practices. The role of the line manager in implementing HRM practices is also important in terms of generating favourable employee outcomes, the non-implementation of which, has an impact on employee perceptions and their attitudes (Alfes, et al., 2013; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). In other words, through performing their HRM role, line managers are crucial in translating the policies created by HR, into the workplace. All in all, this highlights the importance of line managers' HRM implementation in explaining the overall HRM–performance link.

To date, in the research on line manager HRM implementation, scholars have often focused on the HRM-related abilities, motivations, and opportunities (AMO's) that lead to better HRM implementation results (e.g., Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gilbert et al., 2015; Trullen et al., 2016). Despite the various AMO initiatives made available by the organisation, line managers may still lack the recognition of the HRM role as an important part of their jobs, which prevents them from implementing the HRM practices as expected (Op de Beeck et al., 2016; Ryu & Kim, 2013).

However, despite the scholarly discourse of line manager responsibility for the implementation of HRM practices and the importance to both the performance of the firm (Huselid, 1995; Huselid et al., 1997) and employee perceptions (Alfes et al., 2013), we still know very little about how these practices are implemented by line managers and what constitutes effective implementation processes (Bondarouk et al., 2018; Fu et al., 2020; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). More recently, there is a view that insufficient work has taken place in relation to the role of line managers as leaders and sense-givers of HRM practice (Nishii & Paluch, 2018). Although there has been much emphasis in the literature on HR's contribution to firm performance (Guest, 2011) research is still developing with regards to line manager's decisions to enact HRM practices and the conditions that facilitate such

enactment. There have been specific calls for a greater focus on implementation through empirical study within the literature (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; McGovern et al., 2007; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Russell et al., 2018) and calls for more elaborate theory about the translation of practices by managers and what that entails (Nishii & Paluch, 2018).

From a review of the literature regarding line manager enactment of specific HRM policies, it has been observed by some that the prognosis appears bleak (Townsend et al., 2022). HRM training is rarely adequate for line managers (Townsend et al., 2012); line managers suggest their most disliked activity is performance appraisal (Redman, 2001); they are sceptical of the motives of performance-related pay (Harris, 2001); managing tensions between informal and formal systems is challenging for line managers (Lee et al., 2021; Bos-Nehles, et al., 2022); handling employee voice can be neglected by line managers (Townsend et al., 2012); trade union dialogue is marginalised and/or actively resisted by line managers, often for ideological anti-union motives (Kilroy & Dundon, 2015) and HR intervention in grievance and disciplinary matters is often inadequate (Rollinson et al., 1996).

It is often observed that there is a gap between what is formally required in HR policy and what is actually delivered by front line managers (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). It is also observed that the way line managers enact these practices can be influenced by their leadership behaviour and that of senior management in establishing an appropriate organisational climate (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Research has shown that the involvement of the line does not necessarily mean that policies are implemented consistently by all line managers within the organisation. Furthermore, even where they are carried out, the quality of practice is frequently not of the kind which is expected from the prescriptive models designed by the HR function (McGovern et al., 2007). It is clear from the literature that managers are heavily involved in shaping the outcomes of HRM practices and for delivering

them to their staff (Wright & Nishii, 2013) and they play a crucial role in the HRM causal chain (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Scholars have also explored the linkage between HRM and firm performance (see Appendix A.3 and Appendix A.4), when HRM practices are enacted by managers (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2013).

1.2 Research Gaps

HRM practices are designed to support the organisation's strategy such that employees know what is expected, valued, and rewarded by the organisation (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii et al., 2008). However, as outlined above, despite the scholarly discourse of line manager responsibility and the importance to both the performance of the firm (Huselid, 1995; Huselid et al., 1997) and employee perceptions (Alfes et al., 2013), we still know very little about how HRM practices are implemented by line managers and what constitutes effective implementation processes (Bondarouk et al., 2016; Fu et al., 2020; Woodrow & Guest, 2014).

More recently, it has been suggested that line managers alone are no longer passive recipients of HRM practices (Kehoe & Han, 2020) and that HRM practices are designed to support the organisation's strategy such that employees know what is expected, valued, and rewarded by the organisation (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii & Wright, 2008). Many HRM practices however, are devolved to line managers (Guest, 1987; Hall & Torrington, 1998) who use their discretion in adopting HRM practices (López-Cotarelo, 2018) which may bolster (Kuvaas & Buch, 2018) or compromise the legitimacy and validity of HRM practices (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017). Although there may be clarity in terms of the intended HRM practices, those that are ultimately implemented by managers and how they are perceived by employees may differ (Nishii & Wright 2008).

Studies to date contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on line manager implementation of HRM practices. However, what we do not know is *why* managers choose

to behave the way they do, and we do not understand specifically *how* line managers respond to HR requests, and the choices they make, the reasons for those choices and the impact of those choices from an emotional perspective. Obtaining greater understanding of these factors is important, as line managers are recognised as a critical linchpin that enacts intended HRM policies (Khilji & Wang, 2006) and translates paper plans into operational reality (Child & Partridge, 1982). This 'critical linchpin' role is an especially important facet of HRM and organisational effectiveness, and the findings from this thesis can help inform HR functions though creating greater understanding of the emotions experienced by managers, thus enabling better outcomes for the manager, employees and ultimately the organisation.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

The research questions addressed in this study are: (1) what are the choices managers make in response to the implementation of HRM practices? (2) why do managers act in the way that they do? (3) how does this impact their implementation of devolved HRM practices?

In exploring how line manager implement HRM practices, a key decision in this study was the determination of which HRM practice would be chosen for examination and whether one practice or multiple practices would be appropriate. After much consideration, a single practice broadly termed performance management and within that domain performance appraisal, was selected. One practice was chosen rather than multiples for two reasons: firstly because the intention was to conduct a deep rather than broad study and secondly previous scholars (Kuvaas et al., 2014; Steffensen et al., 2019) have suggested that studying single HRM practices allows for more accurate understanding of the factors affecting line manager implementation.

1.4 Methodology and Research Design

To investigate this phenomenon of line manager implementation and answer the research questions, a qualitative exploratory study was conducted to develop insights into line manager implementation of HRM practices. As outlined earlier, one practice was chosen, the practice of performance management and specifically, performance management appraisal. Performance management is defined as the "continuous process of identifying, measuring, and developing the performance of individuals and teams and aligning performance with the strategic goals of the organisation" (Aguinis, 2009: 43). It is also defined as "a formal process, which occurs infrequently, by which employees are evaluated by some judge (typically a supervisor) who assesses the employee's performance along a given set of dimensions, assigns a score to that assessment, and then usually informs the employee of his or her formal rating" (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017: 421).

The researcher chose one practice in order to ensure a deep focus on the reasons and subsequent behaviours of the manager. The researcher was given access to three organisations to conduct the study that took place from September 2020 to August 2021. The researcher adopted a purposeful and criteria-based sampling approach, and this method created a diverse pool of 34 managers who formed the sample across three organisations. The instrument used for investigation was the qualitative non-structured interview and an inductive approach was used, as is usual with qualitative research. The data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2020) and a reflexive and iterative approach was used to develop the themes.

Based on the open nature of this project, i.e., *how* line managers implement performance management, the underpinning research philosophy is interpretivism. When imported into the social sciences, interpretivism is concerned with the theory and method of the interpretation of human actions (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Interpretivism is directed at

understanding phenomena from an individual's perspective, "investigating interaction among individuals, as well as the historical and cultural contexts which people inhabit" (Cresswell, 2013: 8)

1.5 Research Contribution and Importance of this Study

Research has identified certain HRM practices that are commonly transferred to line managers, including performance appraisal (Maxwell & Watson, 2006). The implementation of such practices by line managers introduces the possibility that the enactment may differ from what was intended (Nishii, & Wright, 2008; Wright et al., 2005), because the way in which they are actually implemented may be shaped by line managers themselves (Bondarouk et al., 2009). As such, they constitute a variable between the intended and experienced that may influence performance outcomes (Wright et al., 2005), potentially resulting in the practice either being implemented poorly or not at all (Guest, 2011). Given the significant influence managers can have, it is necessary to understand the effects managers can have on the adoption, implementation, and effectiveness of HRM practices and systems to advance knowledge regarding managers' roles in HRM.

Although the literature regarding line manager implementation has increased in abundance over the recent years, there are still calls for studies to focus on *why* and *how* line managers make the decisions they do regarding implementation of HRM practices (Steffensen et al., 2019). Existing studies do not examine in detail *how* and *why* intended HRM practices change when implemented by managers (Makhecha et al., 2018). This study will add to the body of empirical studies by exploring the decisions that line managers make in implementing HRM practices (Brewster et al., 2013) or using their discretion in what they choose to implement (López-Cotarelo, 2018).

1.5.1 Key contributions

This study contributes to strategic HRM research and makes contributions in four specific areas of research: (1) by adding to the causal chain of HRM performance through

categorisation of line manager implementation (2) by shining a light on managers championing HRM practice (3) by informing the under-explored area of line manager attributions (4) by contributing to the discussion on HRM process through the use of the theoretical lens of translation theory. In addition, the study makes valuable contributions to practitioners to help them engage managers in effective implementation that will lead to favourable organisational and employee outcomes. These contributions are important as there have been calls for empirical studies of line managers' downward HRM involvement as well as an examination of the specific antecedents, processes, and consequences surrounding the HRM delivery behaviours of managers (Kehoe & Han, 2020).

The study advances theory in the area of line manager implementation by taking a multi-theoretical lens through the exploration of attributions most commonly researched from the employee perspective (Hewett et al., 2018; Hewett & Shantz, 2022; Shantz et al., 2016) and by applying a relatively underused theory of translation, (Callon, 1980, 1986; Czarniawska, 2013; Latour, 1986) to this domain of study. The findings of this study contribute to line manager implementation and advance our knowledge of the decisions managers make in implementing HRM practices. It has been suggested that current HRM implementation research remains scattered and, more importantly, lacks a clear definition of the phenomenon of study (Steffensen et al., 2019). As a result, the field lacks consolidation as well as its own specific agenda that guides future research efforts (Trullen et al., 2020). Those studies that do address the implementation of practices primarily relate discussion of findings and main stated contributions of the studies to the HRM functional domain literature, rather than to line manager implementation studies, for example performance appraisal (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018) or flexible work practices (Budjanovcanin, 2018; Straub et al., 2018).

This study is rooted in the field of HRM line manager implementation studies and also contributes to the literature by responding to calls for more in-depth qualitative studies of how line managers are involved in the implementation of performance appraisal (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Pichler et al., 2020) and HRM activities in general. (Baluch, 2017; Fu et al., 2020; Kampkötter, 2017; Op de Beeck et al., 2016; Steffensen et al., 2019).

1.5.2 Key findings

The findings from the thematic analysis, revealed three main topics for how line managers implement HRM practices. These topics are labelled: 1) *championing,* which describes that line managers enthusiastically embraced the performance management practice; (2) *curtailing,* which describes that line managers reluctantly accepted responsibility for implementation or sought ways not to implement the performance practice and (3) *translating,* which describes that line managers made changes during implementing to make the practice more suitable for their environment. Across each of the three topics, there are common patterns within the data, and these are labelled *behaviours* and *reasons,* and these form the main themes within each topic. Within these main themes are sub-themes providing further detail. The data structure therefore, was formed from the analysis, and consisted of the three aforementioned topics, six main themes and within each main theme several sub-themes. Reviewed together, these provide a thorough understanding of how the line managers within this study implemented HRM practices and their reasons for these choices. A summary of the themes and sub-themes for each topic are as follows.

Topic 1 Championing: Within this topic are two themes, *behaviours of championing* and *reasons for championing*. For those managers who actively implemented, two sub-themes were identified in the analysis, these were labelled “actively implementing” and “owning the process.” For the second main theme i.e., *reasons for championing*, six sub-themes were identified, and they are (1) alignment with company goals, (2) responsibility

or obligation to their team members, (3) the perceived usefulness or functionality of the practice and of HR in supporting the practice, (4) a passion for people, (5) positive experience with HR, and (6) line manager competence.

Topic 2 Curtailing: The thematic analysis produced two main themes that illustrated how line managers reluctantly accepted responsibility for implementation or sought ways not to implement the performance practice. These themes are labelled *behaviours of curtailing* and include the two sub-themes of: (1) Passively avoiding, which includes the behaviours of de-prioritising, disowning and ticking boxes and actively avoiding which includes the behaviour of avoiding. The second main theme, the *reasons for curtailing* includes seven sub-themes namely (1) lack of training and instructions from HR (2) time consuming (3) dysfunctional systems, occurring because of a lack of consequence in the event of non-implementation, (4) dysfunctional systems associated with the design of the performance management practice or the content (5) powerlessness up (6) powerlessness down (7) cynicism.

Topic 3 Translating: This third topic is comprised of the main theme called *behaviours of translating*, which includes the sub-themes of (1) altering forms and templates, (2) altering the process they were required to adhere to, (3) responding to HR when they altered the process. The second main theme within this topic was identified as *reasons for translating* and included (1) localisation (2) inconsistency across managers and (3) improving effectiveness.

Overall, the findings indicate that line managers demonstrate different behaviours when implementing HRM practices and have distinct reasons for doing so. This study provides unique insights into the choices line managers make and thus adds to the body of literature on line manager implementation

1.6 Limitations of the Study

As with all research there are some limitations to this study that need to be considered in evaluating the contributions and affect the formulation of the implications drawn from its findings. For the purposes of this study, the practice selected was the performance management practice. Further exploration of more emergent HRM practices e.g., wellbeing, mental health, diversity practices, menopause support, would all shed more light on the role and perceptions of line managers and the competing challenges they face in delivering business results and supporting initiatives which are of a more pastoral nature. This type of practice will also draw on different skills of the line manager, providing more interesting insights into their coping mechanisms if these skills have not been developed sufficiently.

The managers in this study, came from three Irish organisations and they operated in similar economic environments. Choosing from different countries with informants who operate within different economic and legislative fields may also yield valuable insights. We already know from prior research that devolution to the line is increasingly assigned to line managers across countries, (Holt et al., 2003) however the extent of such assignment varies from country to country (Brewster et al., 1992).

This study was conducted in a hierarchical, 'traditional' organisation, other studies have started to examine practices in non-traditional settings for example project based organisations (Keegan et al., 2012; Keegan & Den Hartog, 2018). The research for this thesis was conducted during the pandemic and since then, hybrid working has become more normalised. Although they were operating within a hybrid environment due to the pandemic, most of the managers would have not been accustomed to hybrid working prior to this study. Choosing samples from different forms of organisations may yield more knowledge and insights from non-traditional work environments. For example, the aforementioned Keegan and Den Hartog (2018) examined project based organisations for

their studies, where traditional dyadic relationships were replaced with polyadic arrangements. Research has been conducted into hybrid organisations and some light has been shed on conflicting HRM practices within the hybrid structure through the work of Conway et al. (2016).

A final limitation is that the research is based on retrospective accounts from line managers who recounted their experiences in the middle of the performance management cycle. This may have impacted their recall in relation to certain events and it is difficult to completely mitigate retrospective influences in reflective accounts.

1.7 Researcher's Motivation

This study area is of interest to the researcher as she has had the good fortune of having the experience of moving from a business role into a strategic HRM role, which has provided an insight into two perspectives. On the one hand, as a line manager and a customer of HR within the organisation, and then from a different perspective, as a provider of HRM services into the organisation including both the functional and the revenue generating areas of the business. This career path has enabled the researcher to witness first-hand the evolution of the HR function over a 25-year period from the 'personnel' model to a contributor to organisational strategy. It has been beneficial from a career development perspective to have had the experience of both being a receiver and a giver of HRM services. This move from the commercial customer facing role to the HRM domain has been helpful in creating understanding and building relationships that are outcome focused, whilst at the same time creating understanding of the dilemmas facing line managers. It has provided the researcher with a deep understanding of the need for HR functions to provide solutions that line managers understand and are willing to implement and will support the delivery of organisational strategy.

As a consequence of this experience, how line managers enact their people management role and integrate people management activities into their day job has always been a key interest of the researcher. Conscious of the multiple pressures that managers face, and the demands placed on them by corporate functions, the researcher has witnessed the tensions that this demand to deliver, can create for line managers. Having encountered in the past, both enthusiastic implementers of HRM practice and other line managers who are 'reluctant heroes' the researcher's curiosity has been piqued into developing greater understanding about managers and the choices they make in relation to implementing HRM practices that have been devolved from the HR function.

A final motivation for undertaking this PhD, which commenced on a part time basis in 2017, was the desire to complete an in-depth evidenced based study that would help build understanding of the choices managers make as they implement HRM practice. Rather than rely on the researcher's own 'practitioner hunches' on what she believed to happen, the researcher wanted to conduct rigorous research to develop understanding and to share the outcomes and findings with others (academic and practitioners) who may be interested in the dilemmas and frustrations so often expounded by both sides of the coin, line managers and HR professionals. It was gratifying that this research was selected for presentation at the Irish Academy of Management Conference 2021, and the researcher will continue to champion the importance of the link between practitioners and academics into the future.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter one introduces the research, and in this chapter the researcher introduces the motivation for the study and the rationale for conducting the study. In addition, the research objectives are clarified, and the importance and contribution of the study is presented.

Chapter two reviews what is known. In this chapter a summary of the literature regarding line manager implementation is presented and as the practice of performance

management is the practice being explored, this chapter also reviews literature pertinent to this practice. The chapter summarises and analyses previous research and theories, identifies areas of controversy and contested claims and highlights gaps in existing research to date. In this chapter the theoretical positions are discussed.

Chapter three presents the methodology underpinning this study and the philosophy of the researcher is introduced outlining how the researcher makes sense of the world. This is a qualitative interpretive study and in this chapter the methods are explicated, and the process of data analysis is presented.

In Chapter four, the findings of this qualitative study are presented, providing the main themes from the semi-structured interviews that formed the method of the study. The researcher is conscious that in presenting qualitative findings it is important that they make sense and have impact and therefore qualitative researchers must attend to the balance among description, analysis, and interpretation.

Chapter five is a discussion of the stories that have emerged and the implications for research and practice as well as the limitations of the current study and directions for future research. Chapter six provides a conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature pertaining to line manager implementation of HRM practices. It summarises the key debates regarding line manager implementation and presents the theoretical perspectives that have underpinned the scholarly discussion regarding line manager HRM implementation. Following that, a review of literature on performance management as a key HRM practice implemented by line managers, which is the subject of this study, is provided. The chapter concludes by presenting the research gaps and objectives.

2.2 Line Manager Implementation of HRM: Research Context

Scholars have recently focused their attention to the enactors of HRM practices, i.e., line managers who have direct responsibility to manage and develop team members (Kehoe & Han, 2020; Sikora & Ferris, 2014). They are also called front-line managers, supervisors, project managers, and people managers etc. Despite different titles, they are all organisational agents who implement HRM practices towards their team members, e.g., evaluating performance and providing performance feedback. When implementing HRM, line managers can determine what and how much of HRM content is adopted and have considerable influence over the process through which it is implemented (Steffensen et al., 2019).

Line managers are considered a crucial factor in understanding the relationship between HRM and performance as they bring HRM practices to life. In doing so, they influence employees' perceptions about the HRM system in place as well as their attitudes, behaviour, and performance (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). From this point of view, the effectiveness of line managers' HRM implementation is of crucial importance and a key process linking HRM to employees and organisations (Nishii & Wright, 2008). Given that

the focus of this thesis is on line manager HRM implementation, a more detailed review is presented in following sections.

Line manager implementation of HRM is not something completely new. In Guest's (1987) initial reconstruction of the core tenets of HRM within the British context, he identifies the role of line managers as one of its central components. At a later date, Legge, (1989), in her review of US and UK models of HRM, concluded that HRM is "vested in line management as business managers responsible for co-ordinating and directing all resources in the business unit in pursuit of bottom line profits' (Legge, 1989: 27). Successful implementation of HRM practices is viewed as a key process to link HRM with organisational effectiveness and it is now widely acknowledged that line managers play a key part in the HRM causal mechanism (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007) and an increasingly important role in effective implementing of HRM practices, (Fu et al., 2020; Keegan et al., 2012) and the topic has received increasing attention in the past decade (Brandl et al., 2022; Evans, 2017; López-Cotarelo, 2018; Vermeeren, 2014) as analysed in the previous sections. The role of the line manager in the implementation of HRM has emerged as a key element in understanding HRM because "it is line managers not HR managers who implement HR" (Guest, 2011: 9)

As managers of employees, line managers are responsible for the people management in their teams and management's involvement in HRM can positively affect employee commitment (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). Although they are identified as being responsible for HRM implementation they are also reluctant to do so (Hall & Torrington, 1998; Harris et al., 2002) and some researchers believe managers have failed in this role (Hailey et al., 2005; McGovern et al., 2007). Line managers can support and accelerate implementation, or reduce the quality of implementation, delay, or even sabotage it completely (Raes et al., 2011). In addition, if their commitment is low, they can

create significant obstacles (Guth, & MacMillan et al., 2016). In the following subsection, the devolution of practices and the role of line managers is further explored, and context is provided for the line manager implementation of HRM.

2.2.1 Devolution of HRM practices to the line managers

HRM devolution involves the allocation of tasks from the HR department to line managers (Cascón-Pereira et al., 2006). A notion that lays the foundation, that line managers occupy important but varied roles in HRM practice delivery (Kehoe & Han, 2020). In recent decades, areas of the HRM literature have converged on this line of inquiry related to the frontline management debate regarding, the specific devolution and consequential enactment of human resource practices (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020; Conway & Monks, 2010; Hall & Torrington, 1998; Perry & Kulik, 2008; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Vermeeren, 2014).

The successful involvement of line managers is considered valuable for several reasons. For HR specialists, high quality managerial involvement can liberate them from operative routine work (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999) and is a prerequisite in order to focus on strategic HRM work. Managerial responsibility for HRM duties means that responses to HR challenges can be more immediate and can reflect local conditions (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003) and line managers' skills at handling HRM, influence employee commitment to the employer and the job (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Research also suggests that devolution has a positive effect on HR respondents' perceptions of people management effectiveness. In their study, Perry and Kulik (2008) surveyed respondents working in organisations where line manager involvement in people management had increased over the last five years and respondents rated the effectiveness of people management in their organisation more positively than respondents working in organisations where line manager involvement had not increased.

Devolving HRM practices is crucial to effective implementation of HRM because line managers understand the core business objectives and their direct impact on subordinates' motivation, commitment, and discretionary behaviour (Andersen et al., 2007). For example, Ryu and Kim (2013) demonstrate that line managers' authority to make HR-related decisions within their units was associated with higher firm-level HR effectiveness, as measured by the combination of perceived increases in employee skills and motivation, labour productivity, and in the organisation's attraction of top talent and increased employee retention. In another study, Mitchell et al. (2013) demonstrated that HRM devolution supports a more strategic role of the HR function, and this adoption of a more strategic perspective for HR was more positively related to organisational performance when the administrative burden associated with day-to-day HR activities was devolved to line managers. As such, line managers occupy important roles in HRM practice delivery (Kehoe & Han, 2020) and can shape the way that employees experience, and therefore form perceptions about HRM practices (Den Hartog et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2009), which ultimately influences individual and organisational performance (Perry & Kulik, 2008; Steffensen et al., 2019).

The devolution of HRM to the line managers also brings challenges. HR devolution can imply a more complex role for line managers and a higher workload (Maxwell & Watson, 2006). Some scholars have raised concerns that the devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers may foster an excessive emphasis on short-term financial outcomes (Storey, 1992) and perceptions of inequity across employee groups who are managed differently (Leach, 1995). Since role stressors lead to negative work attitudes, less wellbeing, and reduced individual performance (e.g., Jones et al., 2007; Tubre & Collins, 1985), these facets may have negative consequences for the implementation of HRM by line managers, and subsequently for the contribution of HRM to employees' attitudes and

performance (Gilbert et al., 2011). Furthermore, it is not HRM practices alone that influence employee responses, but also how they are implemented (Nishii & Wright, 2007) and it has been argued that implementation is "the key mediating variable between the HR architecture and firm performance" (Becker & Huselid, 2006: 903).

2.2.2 Defining line managers

Line managers have different titles in different organisations, such as supervisors, team leads, managers, assignment managers, project managers and people managers. Throughout this thesis, the term line manager is used for consistency while noting that the literature also comprises different terms. Line managers typically consist of three distinct levels: senior line managers, middle line managers and frontline managers (Harney & Lee, 2022). In defining line managers, this study follows the definition provided by the CIPD where line managers are described as having responsibility for directly managing individual employees or teams. In turn, they report to a higher level of management on the performance and well-being of the employees or teams they manage (CIPD, 2017). In this regard, line managers can cover all levels: top, middle, and first-line management who have direct responsibility to manage their team members and they are all considered to have people management responsibility (Evans, 2017; Hall & Torrington, 1998; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

The complexity of the role of the line manager is uniquely examined through Althusser's model of interpellation where the role of managers is considered within the organisational hierarchy as "controllers who are also controlled and resistors who are also resisted" (Harding et al., 2014: 1232). This complexity and duality of roles is further explored as they are described as both recipients and deployers of plans and also required to fulfil mediating, delegating, interpreting, and negotiating roles (Wooldridge et al., 2008). Furthermore, the line managers are found between the divergent interests and expectations

of strategic management executives and members of a given workgroup (Hales, 2007). As an organisational agent, line managers may have divergent interests from the organisational strategic priorities.

Line managers are described as being situated "between the strategic apex and operating core of the organisation" and thus they are the ones who "mediate, negotiate, and interpret connections between the organisation's institutional (strategic) and technical (operational) levels" (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997: 466) and are also described as *linking pins* in the implementation of strategy (Currie & Procter, 2001; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Raes et al., 2011). They are described as a semi-permeable organisational membrane (Doorewaard & Van Bijesterveld, 2001) and as both sense-makers" and "sense-givers to employees who report into them (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). This is because line managers at all hierarchical levels can influence HRM due to their people management responsibility (Guest, 1997; Lado & Wilson, 1994; Lepak & Snell, 1999; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Wright & Nishii, 2013).

Line managers can influence the effectiveness of HRM practices as they have an impact on employee perceptions about HRM (Nishii & Wright, 2007) and the attributions that employees make about their organisation's HRM practices (Nishii et al., 2008). However, they have been portrayed as robotic conformists, (Bos-Nehles, 2010) doing what they are told (Marchington & Grugulis, 2000) and also suffering from the master and victim conundrum (Townsend et al., 2022) where they are viewed as master of the shop floor, but lose agency and become victims of other departments policies. In essence, the job of the line manager involves concurrently engaging in the role of manager, colleague, team member and employee, often fulfilling the roles of technical expert, coordinator, leader, innovator and change facilitator (Gilbert et al., 2015).

The response of line managers to HRM duties has been presented in a positive light by (McConville, 2006) who found from research in public sector organisations that line managers welcomed HRM activities and viewed those duties as part of their role. However, as described in the sections above, managers also experienced a sense of being caught in the middle between their senior managers' directives and the demands of their customers on the other. The concept of partnership between HR and line managers receives attention from Currie and Procter (2001). In their study of the relationship of middle managers and HR functions, they propose that relationships can be made more productive by setting down a HR strategy with broad themes rather than prescriptive activities. Thus, realising HR strategy through negotiated evolution.

2.2.3 Defining line manager HRM implementation

HRM implementation is seen as actual and perceived HRM practices (Nishii et al., 2008), the translation of intended into actual practices (Chow, 2012; Khilji & Wang, 2006), or bridging the intended and perceived HRM practices (Makhecha et al., 2018; Piening et al., 2013; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Wright & Nishii, 2013). Some scholars view it more broadly where the design phase of HRM practices and policies is also seen as part of HRM implementation (Woodrow & Guest, 2014). For example (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013) present a model of HRM implementation consisting of four stages: (1) the decision to introduce HRM practices is made by HR managers and senior executives, suitable to their operational and geographic context, (2) issues such as local legislation or the choice to link practices to values are relevant at this stage, (3) actual implementation of practices by line managers is considered and so too are the controls and support required by HR, (4) the actual quality of the implemented practices and whether they are approached as rituals or key value-added activities is elucidated. This definition is further expanded by (Trullen et al., 2020) who describe implementation as a more dynamic process placing emphasis on

the role of line managers and specific actors such as HRM specialists who " engage with it, interacting among themselves and attempting to shape it to fit their requirements and needs, until the policy or practice becomes routinised" (Trullen et al., 2020: 155).

Even though HRM scholars generally concur that HRM implementation involves a process, precisely what the implementation process comprises is unclear. Trullen et al. (2020) present a summary of the different perspectives presented in the literature (see Appendix C). Some see line manager HRM implementation as a process (Woodrow & Guest, 2014), whereas others tend to emphasise a state or result (Sikora & Ferris, 2014). Some see implementation as performed mainly by line managers (Kehoe & Han, 2020; Sikora et al., 2015), whereas others include a wider variety of factors such as Keegan & Den Hartog, (2018) who extend implementation to project managers in professional service firms. More recently, Hewett & Shantz, (2021) challenge the linear perspective of implementation, i.e. HR designs practices and managers enact, by proposing a co-creation perspective. In this proposition, they assert that increasing value at the firm level can be achieved by the involvement of managers in the creation of practices.

Many scholars agree that line managers are crucial for the HRM implementation process (Bondarouk et al., 2018; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018), and that the implementation of HRM practices is as important for HRM effectiveness as the formulation and design of these practices (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Not only HRM scholars, but also HRM practitioners understand that HRM implementation is not a 'theoretical convenience that follows almost automatically' (Barney, 2001: 643) but that poor implementation of high-quality HRM practices can lead to ineffective HRM (Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Conversely good implementation by line managers can even rescue poor HRM practices (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). This study follows the research widely used in the line manager HRM implementation (Fu et al., 2020; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013;

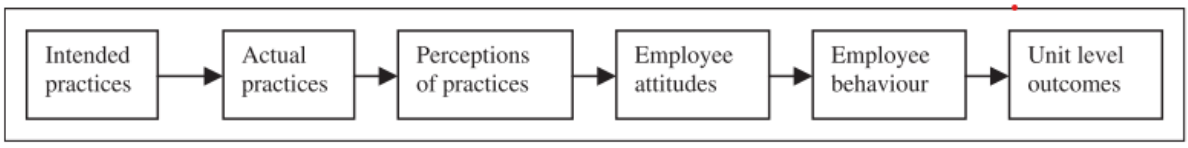
Khilji & Wang, 2006; Wright & Nishii, 2013) and focuses on the enactors of HRM, i.e., line managers, as well as on how and why they implement HRM.

2.2.4 Line manager HRM implementation - Intended to experienced

The foundation of line manager HRM implementation is mainly derived from the conceptual work of Purcell and Hutchinson, (2007) and Wright and Nishii, (2007) who developed the three levels of HRM, Figures 2.1 and 2.2 present their theoretical models. The three levels of HRM refer to the intended HRM practices/policies, actual HRM practices implemented, and the HRM practices experienced by employees (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Wright & Nishii, 2013). Building on Nishii and Wright (2007), McDermott et al. (2013) developed a model of linking the intended, implemented, and perceived HRM practices to individual performance via psychological contract mode as shown in Figure 2.3.

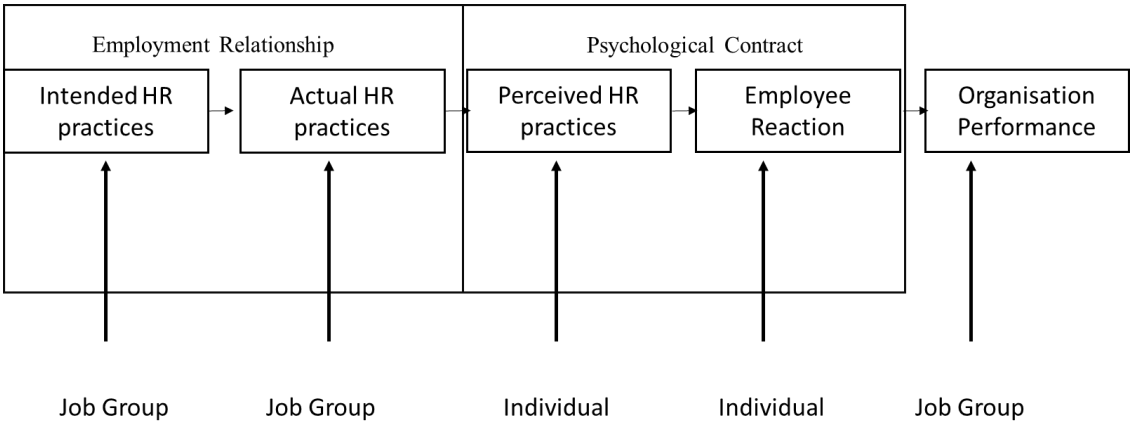
Line managers are key agents in the delivery of HRM (Nishii & Wright, 2008) are highly influential in employee performance outcomes (Alfes, et al., 2013; Gilbert, et al., 2011; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007) and are critical in the delivery of HRM practices. Therefore, understanding how and why managers execute their HR responsibilities can help create understanding of the known gap between intended and implemented HRM (Evans, 2017).The intended, actual, and experienced HRM elements are described in detail in the following sections.

Figure 2.1 Three Levels of HRM 1



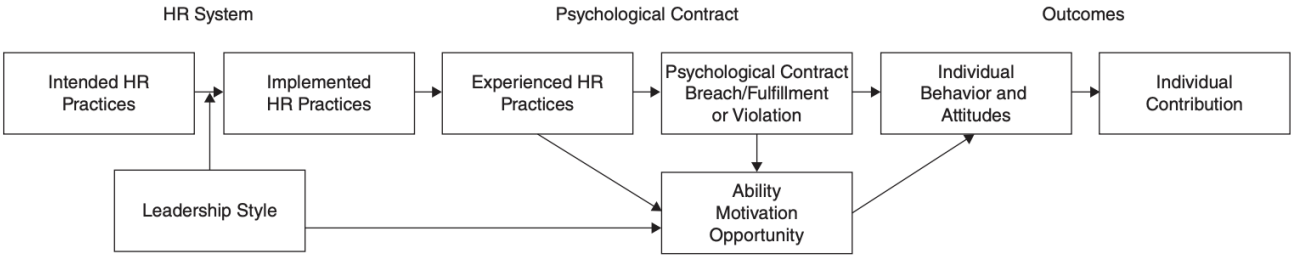
Source: Purcell and Hutchinson (2007: 7)

Figure 2.2 Three Levels of HRM 2



Source: Wright and Nishii (2007: 24)

Figure 2.3 Linking HRM Practices to Individual Performance via Psychological Contract Mode



Source: McDermott et al. (2013: 298), built on the work of Wright and Nishii (2007)

2.2.4.1 Intended HRM

Intended HRM practices represent the HRM policies, systems and practices that the firms decision makers believe will effectively elicit the employee responses desired (Wright & Nishii, 2013) and it refers to the HRM content, comprising the "what" of HRM (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016). Intended practices have also been defined as HRM policies that are designed by the organisation to contribute to the achievement of business strategy and meet tenets of social legitimacy (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). Organisational values can influence intended practices (Boon et al., 2018) for example, the organisation may intend that each employee receives an annual performance appraisal that offers them an opportunity to showcase how they enact the organisation's values. This practice is intended to be implemented in the same way across the workforce, regardless of individual differences among employees.

Early HRM–performance-oriented research retained a focus on 'intended' HRM practices, founded on the assumption "that simply having the appropriate HRM policies inevitably means that they will be effectively implemented and will produce the intended results in terms of individual behaviour and, at one remove, firm performance" (Truss, 2001: 1126). The previously mentioned strategic HRM practice bundles, such as HPWSs

and HIWPs are examples of intended HRM. In most research studies, organisational leaders or HR professionals report the extent to which different HRM practices are used in organisations, however these respondents are unlikely to know whether the practices are implemented as they were intended. Regardless, research suggests that intended HRM practices are positively associated with firm performance, as described in section 1.1.

2.2.4.2 Actual HRM

The causal chain between intended and experienced HRM is the actual HRM (see Figures 2.1-2.3). The actual HRM refers to the HRM that is implemented by line managers (Nishii & Wright, 2007). It is these practices and the way they are implemented (i.e., people management) that employees perceive and to which they react. The implementation of such practices by line managers introduces the possibility that the enactment may differ from what was intended (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Wright et al., 2005), as the way in which they are actually implemented may be shaped by line managers themselves (Bondarouk et al., 2009). As such, they constitute a variable between the intended and experienced practices that may influence performance outcomes (Wright et al., 2005), potentially resulting in the practice either being implemented poorly or not at all (Guest, 2011).

Line managers are expected to implement practices that have been devolved from the central HR function (Hall & Torrington, 1998) and they are considered to be heavily involved in shaping the outcomes of HRM practices and for delivering outcomes for their staff (Bondarouk et al., 2016; Wright & Nishii, 2013). The actual HRM implemented by line managers plays a crucial role in the HRM-performance causal chain (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). However, this performance impact of HRM cannot be realised if the HRM practice is not implemented, or not implemented effectively (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Sikora & Ferris, 2014). As stated in section 2.2.3., line managers at all levels can influence HRM practices (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Purcell &

Hutchinson, 2007; Wright & Nishii, 2013). In their study in a call centre context, Harney and Jordan (2008) revealed that frontline managers can serve as critical intermediaries, ameliorating the negative consequences of HRM practices. In their study, team leaders reacted by ignoring some of the edicts from the HR function and instead implemented positive people practices to improve the environment for their teams. Scholars have also identified positive outcomes for the firm when HRM practices are implemented by managers (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2013).

The actual HRM implemented by line managers also directly influences employees' experienced HRM. According to Nishii and Wright (2007: 16), "employee perceptions of the broader organisation, including HRM practices, are partially a function of experiences with, and attitudes toward, the focal supervisor". In particular, the relationship between an employee and his/her line manager may influence their perceptions of the practice (Brewster et al., 2013). These views are reinforced by Sikora and Ferris (2014) who found positive workplace outcomes among employees whose line managers made frequent use of HRM practices. More recent scholarly work suggests that there is a positive relationship between the consistent implementation by line managers and individual employee performance (Fu et al., 2020).

Line manager HRM implementation can help to bridge the intended and experienced HRM gap. Examples of this are illustrated by (Makhecha et al., 2018). Using a case study design within a multi-unit hypermarket chain in India, they identify *intended-actual-experienced* gaps across nine HRM practices in seven retail units. These gaps arise from implementers' adaptation of HRM practices due to different understandings of the intent of HRM practices, the importance given to their contents and the processes adopted in their implementation. In another study, Khilji and Wang (2006) attest to a large gap between what HR departments rhetorically believe and what is actually taking place in various

organisations. Implementation of practices described during the first phase of the interviews with HR respondents was sketchy in nine of the twelve organisations surveyed. This confirms that in many organisations, intended HRM practices are not properly implemented. Evidence suggests the benefits that can be derived from the implementation of HPWSs are not realised if the practices adopted by HR functions are not implemented, or not implemented effectively (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Sikora & Ferris, 2014), as scholars have suggested that the effectiveness of HPWPs depends on more than just their adoption (Marescaux et al., 2021).

Despite its importance, line managers face challenges when they implement HRM practices. Furthermore, those practices that are implemented, may often be implemented in ways that differ from the initial intention, creating the gap between the intended and experienced HRM. It has been suggested that variance can also stem from the fact that the practices are often implemented by multiple individuals (supervisors, interviewers, trainers, etc.) who may be the touchpoint between the employer and the employee as recipient and may not take a uniform approach in their implementation efforts (Zohar, 2000). This is where line managers are assigned a major responsibility, holding a vital position between the HR decision makers and the employees (Harris et al., 2002).

Studies have highlighted the importance of management behaviour during implementation. Several studies have found that line managers HRM implementation behaviour positively affects employees behavioural and performance outcomes, including individual job performance (Fu et al., 2017; Pak & Kim, 2018), participation in decision-making (Sikora et al., 2015) and team performance (Pak & Kim, 2018). Successful implementation of HRM practices appears to depend on line managers' active involvement in the implementation process (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Nielsen, 2013; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Sikora & Ferris, 2014).

2.2.4.3 Experienced HRM

Several studies have shown that it is employees' perceptions and experiences of HRM practices rather than actual HRM practices or manager-rated HRM practices that have a closer relationship with employees' behaviours and outcomes (Aryee et al., 2012; Den Hartog et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2009), reinforcing the need to include employees' perceptions in strategic HRM research (Jiang et al., 2017). The HRM practices perceived or experienced by employees will be those delivered or enacted by line managers, especially front-line managers. This is especially relevant to this thesis as the subject under investigation is line managers enactment of HRM practices and variability in employees' perceptions of HRM practices may undermine organisations' efforts to use HRM practices to manage employees and achieve strategic objectives (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Wright & Nishii, 2013).

HRM practices communicate the firm's values and the type of behaviours that are expected from employees (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Thus, experienced HRM constitutes an important element in overall organisational climate (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). How employees perceive the practices (e.g., as helpful, or hurtful, supportive, or exploitative, constructive, or destructive) directly impacts how they react (Brewster et al., 2013). Nishii & Wright, (2008), found that the experienced HRM practices are likely to increase employee commitment and reduce employee turnover. Specifically, when employees perceive that the underlying intentions of an organisation's HRM practices translate into positive and beneficial circumstances for them, they feel an obligation to reciprocate in positive and beneficial ways, as evidenced by higher levels of commitment, job satisfaction, and citizenship (i.e., unrewarded) behaviours that benefit the organisation (Organ, 1988).

Unlike intended practices that are reported by senior managers or HR professionals, experienced HRM is reported by the employees who receive the practice themselves and

therefore the effectiveness of HRM is commonly investigated by examining employee perceptions (Huselid et al., 1997; Wright, et al., 2001). Each HRM practice has a functional purpose and employees judge them in terms of utility or satisfaction, as well meeting standards of fairness or legitimacy (Van Mierlo et al., 2018) This is likely to vary across the workforce, which is why there is often a gap between intended and experienced HRM practices.

Returning to the impact of line managers on perceptions, employee perceptions of HRM practices have been found to be impacted by how line managers implement those practices. In their study of employee perceptions of line management performance Bos-Nehles et al. (2013) found that line manager ability, i.e. skills and knowledge, positively impact employee perception of the practice. In their study Den Hartog et al. (2013), found that clear communication from the line manager can impact employee perceptions of HRM practices. If manager communication on organisational issues is unclear or inconsistent, employees receive confusing signals. Then, rather than having accurate information on intended or implemented HRM practices, employees rely more on their own subjective interpretations of what is offered in terms of HRM (e.g., Nishii et al., 2008).The employee experiences of implementation by line managers of performance appraisal is explored by Farndale and Kelliher, (2013) who focus their study on the impact on organisational commitment and they find that the way employees perceive line manager enactment can impact employee commitment. The importance of managers own perceptions of HRM practices are found to influence employees own interpretations of the organisation's HRM practices (Jiang et al., 2017).

2.3 Line Manager HRM Implementation: Research Overview

Research on line manager HRM implementation is on the rise. There has been increasing attention on this topic in the academic literature in the past decade. Table 2.1

presents a summary of 46 key studies on this topic. As shown in the table, the research is published in HRM journals such as *Human Resource Management (HRM), Human Resource Management Journal (HRMJ), and International Journal of Human Resource Management (IJHRM)*; psychology journals such as Journal *of Applied Psychology (JAP);* and general management journals such *as Journal of Management (JOM)* and *Organization Studies (OS).* These studies include reviews, conceptual papers as well as empirical papers that adopt various methods, including quantitative qualitative and mixed methods.

The publication of special issues on line manager HRM implementation published in academic journals also provides further evidence for the burgeoning amount of research on HRM implementation. (See appendix B for a summary of these articles). For example, in 2011, the *International Journal of Human Resource Management (IJHRM)* published a set of pioneering papers on 'Comparative Perspectives on HR and Line Manager Relationships and their Effects on Employees' edited by Sanders and Frenkel, (2011). This edition focuses on providing additional insight and knowledge regarding the relationships between HR and line managers and between managers and employees in different countries. Then in 2018, another similar special issue titled "Conceptual and Empirical Discoveries in Successful HRM Implementation" was published in IJHRM edited by Bondarouk et al. (2018). Papers selected for this HRM implementation issue, take perceptions and behaviours of multiple HRM actors into account, emphasise the dynamic nature of the HRM implementation process and acknowledge the progressive evolving nature of HRM implementation. In 2013, *Human Resource Management* published a set of papers on 'Human Resource Management and the Line' edited by Brewster et al. (2013) with the objective of exploring more deeply the relationship between HRM and the line manager.

In 2017, the *European Journal of International Management* published papers about "HRM Implementation Effectiveness in Europe". In addition, more recently, "The Research

Handbook on Line Managers" was published in 2022 edited by Townsend, Bos-Nehles, et al., (2022) which provides contributions on a variety of topics relevant to line manager implementation. Such research indicates the importance of HRM implementation and offers invaluable insights to better understand what, how, and why line managers implement HRM practices. Based on these key studies outlined above, this section reviews the research focus areas for line managers, by examining the key themes evident in the research.

Based on the summary of key studies in Table 2.1, three main research foci are found: (1) HRM content: the HRM practices that line managers implement; (2) the process: how line managers implement HRM particularly the variability in HRM implementation; and (3) the reason: why line managers implement HRM.

Table 2.1 Key Studies on Line Manager HRM Implementation

Study	Journal	Method	Participants/ sample	Theoretical lens	Relevance to line manager HRM implementation
Alfes, Truss, et al., (2013)	HRM	Quantitative research	1,796 employees	Social exchange theory	This study examines the relationships between line manager behaviour, perceived HRM and individual performance via the mediating role of employee engagement. The perceived line manager behaviours focus on the effectiveness, equity, and integrity (e.g., my manager is fair in performance management), which are found to improve employee engagement which in turn increases individual task performance and innovative work behaviour.
Bondarouk et al., (2009)	PR	Quantitative research	21 line managers and HR specialists	Social cognitive theory	This study starts with why HRM practices are not implemented effectively. Using a case study, it found that line managers and HR professionals actually experience and see HRM from different angles and therefore appropriate HRM innovations (e.g., a new HR program) differently, which explains why line managers implement HRM innovation differently.
Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, (2018)	IJHRM	Quantitative research	75 employees and 20 line managers	Social exchange theory	This study regards HRM implementation as a social process that depends on the social exchange relationships between line managers and both HRM professionals and employees. It found that line managers reciprocate perceived support from the HR department with greater motivation to implement HRM practices.
Bos-Nehles et al., (2020)	ER	Mixed-method research	471 line managers	Attribution theory	This study explores why line managers implement HRM by developing and validating the internal and external attributions of line managers HRM implementation. The internal attributions include desire and competence. The external attributions include support, capacity and policy and procedures.
Bos-Nehles et al., (2013)	HRM	Quantitative research	174 line managers & 1065 direct reports	AMO	This study examines the impact of ability on line manager HRM performance moderated by motivation and opportunity. Ability is the best predictor of a line manager's HRM performance. Motivation did not moderate the effect of ability on performance as predicted. Opportunity did enhance the effect of ability on HRM implementation effectiveness.

Study	Journal	Method	Participants/ sample	Theoretical lens	Relevance to line manager HRM implementation
Bos-Nehles et al., (2017)	EJIM	Mixed-method research	2 HR managers and 6 line managers	NA	This study explores why the subsidiary line managers of multinational companies (MNCs) implement HRM practices differently than intended by headquarters. Line managers engage in a range of behaviours: they ignore, deviate, imitate, internalise, initiate and/or integrate the delegated practices because they fail to see the value of the content of the practice and the process of execution.
Brandl et al., (2022)	HRMJ	Conceptual	n/a	Organisational institutionalism	This study contends that gaps in implementing HR policies can actually be productive, as they secure organisational legitimacy examines implementation within several institutional environments. The studies find that FLM HR implementation is variable depending on the institutional environment, where minimum, and moderate approaches exist, and a tight implementation is desirable.
Cassell & Lee, (2017)	Organization Studies	Qualitative research	49 subjects over 7 years	Translation studies	This study examines and examine and explicates the nature of the real-time translation work required to translate a trade union idea. Seeing the translation of ideas as a process of translation work, authors draw attention to the ongoing efforts required to sustain the successful translation of an idea.
Caza, (2011)	HRM	Quantitative Research	1222 units across 6 countries	Ecology, agency, & strategic choice theories	Greater perceived managerial discretion was linked to increased unit performance in a relationship moderated by managerial experience and limited by unit size.
Conway and Monks (2010)	PR	Qualitative Research	Interviews with 36 Line managers and 12 HR/union reps	Role theory	Decision making by both HR and middle managers was adversely affected by the increased layers of bureaucracy that had resulted from the restructuring process. HR managers were devolving FIR activities but were still retaining control of information systems and this was both slowing down middle management decision making and leading to the creation of new databases by the managers themselves. HR managers were emerging as regulators of HR activities
Dewettinck & Vroonen, (2017)	IJHRM	Quantitative Research	731 Line managers and 425 employees	Signalling theory, theory of planned behaviour and social exchange	Line manager's beliefs regarding the usefulness of performance management activities mediate the relationship between HR support and line management's implicit person theory, on the one hand, and PM enactment, on the other. This relationship is moderated by the manager' span of control. Furthermore, line managers enactment shows to be positively related to employee engagement and job satisfaction.

Study	Journal	Method	Participants/ sample	Theoretical lens	Relevance to line manager HRM implementation
Evans (2017)	IJHRM	Qualitative Research	75 interviews across all manager levels	Role theory	This study examines the relationship between front line managers work role stressors and their implementation of HRM. Front line managers were found to experience role overload, role conflict and role ambiguity. And role ambiguity, and in accordance with process role theory, engaged in role making as a response.
Farndale and Kelliher (2013)	HRM	Quantitative Research	4,422 employees	Signalling theory	The study shows that organizational units with high trust in senior management have both higher levels of commitment and show a stronger link between employee perceptions of fair treatment by their line manager during performance appraisal, and organizational commitment. This provides initial evidence that the impact of line manager actions is important for employee-level outcomes but is also constrained by the organizational
Fu et al. (2020)	JOM	Quantitative Research	171 employees and their line mangers	Equity theory, paradox theory	The study sheds light on the complex nature of LMs'' HR role, which necessitates treating all team members uniformly and offering unique individual responsiveness based on each member's contribution
Fu et al. (2022)	HRMJ	Qualitative research	15 participants	Institutional work	This study reveals that receivers of HR analytics engage in storytelling as showcasing, to gain legitimacy for HR analytics on a general level. New insights are also offered on how HR analysts engage in storytelling as curbing, HR analysts engage with these two seemingly contradictory aspects of storytelling to develop sustainable and legitimate HR analytics.
Gilbert et al., (2015)	HRMJ	Quantitative Research	122 LM's and 899 employees	AMO	This study finds a positive indirect effect of strong HRM processes on HRM implementation effectiveness via line managers' ability. In accordance with pluralist thinking, we find a negative direct relationship between strong HRM processes and HRM implementation effectiveness
Purcell and Hutchinson (2007)	HRMJ	Mixed Methods Research	40 managers	Social exchange	This study examines the influence that front line managers' leadership behaviour has on employee attitudes towards their job and their organization, and the effect employee perceptions of HRM practices have on these attitudes. The research shows that organizational units with high trust in senior management have both higher levels of

Study	Journal	Method	Participants/ sample	Theoretical lens	Relevance to line manager HRM implementation
					commitment and show a stronger link between employee perceptions of fair treatment by their line manager during performance appraisal.
Katou et al., (2021)	HRMJ	Quantitative Research	1112 respondents including 50% line management	Attribution theory, signalling theory	This study examines the impact of HRM content on organizational performance. The paper supports theoretically and empirically that line manager implementation mediates the relationship between HRM content and employee HR attributions.
Keegan & Den Hartog, (2018)	HRMJ	Qualitative Research	25 Project managers	Social exchange, LMX	This study draws attention to the drawbacks of current theorising on appraisal to predict and explain outcomes from appraisal systems that are not premised on stable line manager/employee dyads. Theorising based primarily on social exchange theories needs to be reconsidered in this context and new theories developed.
Kehoe & Han, (2020)	JAP	Review	n/a	n/a	This study integrates insights from research on HRM practice implementation, workforce differentiation, and autonomous strategic behaviour to develop a more complete understanding of line managers' downward involvement in HRM. Identifies the importance of future research on LM's involvement downwards and laterally
Khilji & Wang, (2006)	IJHRM	Mixed method	168 interviewees incl. 67 LMs	HR-performance Relationship (Walton 1985)	Implemented HRM may be substantially different from intended HRM; consistent implementation increases employee satisfaction with HRM, which is positively related to organisational performance.
Kilroy & Dundon, (2015)	Employee Relations	conceptual	46 employees	n/a	This study explores the potential variation of front line manager types and attendant causal links between front line manager style and employee outcomes
Kilroy et al., (2022)	HRMJ	Qualitative research	613 employees	Signalling theory	Front-line managers are not a homogenous entity who act as robotic conformists, but rather evolve and become important agents shaping organisational performance outcomes and worker effort.
Kurdi-Nakra & Pak, (2022)	HRM	Qualitative research	20 interviews with line managers	Social exchange	This article explores interactive processes involving three key actors: HR managers, senior managers, and front-line managers. Drawing on a political lens, the authors find that the way in which front line managers enact HRM practices depends on the relative power of the enforcing actors (i.e., HR managers) and the endorsing actors (i.e., senior managers).

Study	Journal	Method	Participants/ sample	Theoretical lens	Relevance to line manager HRM implementation
Kurdi-Nakra et al., (2022)	HRM	Conceptual review	n/a	n/a	Develops the concept of front-line manager's HR role identity and proposes it as an antecedent to effective HR implementation.
Kuvaas et al., (2014)	JMS	Quantitative research	89 line managers & 631 employees	Self-determination theory	This study found the relationship between front line managers' perceptions of enabling HRM practices with employees' intrinsic motivation, affective organizational commitment, and turnover intention which was mediated by employees' perceived supervisor support.
López-Cotarelo, (2018)	HRMJ	Qualitative research	44 managers and 5 HR managers	Managerial discretion theory	This study proposes that line managers make an important contribution to the effective implementation of HRM systems through exerting their cognitive and political abilities to bring about decisions that are well suited to their local situations.
Makhecha et al., (2018)	IJHRM	Qualitative research	8 HR 21 managers 128 Employees	Agency theory, social exchange theory	This study identifies 'Intended-Actual-Experienced' gaps across nine HRM practices in seven retail units. Due to different understandings of the intent of HRM practices, the importance given to their contents and the processes adopted in their implementation.
McGovern et al., (2007)	HRMJ	Mixed Methods Research	6 organisations, 12 LM's and 1500 employees	n/a	Line manager implementation of HRM practices tend to vary significantly in the consistency of implementation across the organisation (e.g., business units and departments) and in the quality of practice between managers
McDermott et al., (2013)	HRM	Conceptual review	n/a	n/a	This study highlights the intervening role of local leadership behaviour and psychological contracts in realizing the promise of SHRM.
Nehles et al., (2006)	Management Review	Qualitative research	30 line managers	n/a	This study explores the challenges facing LM's. They explore challenges identified in previous literature and test the salience of the assumptions.
Nilsen & Sandaunet, (2021)	Journal of Change Management	Qualitative research	Observation of an eight-person team	Translation studies	Translation competence is an important element for the implementation of new practice.
Op de Beeck et al., (2016)	IJHRM	Quantitative research	901 line managers and 26 HR managers	Role theory	Results show that the HR-line discrepancy on the degree of HR devolution is rooted in differences in perception on several other factors, including organisational support, (personnel) red tape, the line's individual capacity and age.

Study	Journal	Method	Participants/ sample	Theoretical lens	Relevance to line manager HRM implementation
Op de Beeck et al., (2017)	IJPA	Quantitative research	500 line managers from 2 companies	Role theory	HR, supervisor, and co-worker support are relevant in explaining line managers' HR role performance. In addition, younger line managers and those with greater supervisory experience are found to perform better in their HR role.
Op de Beeck et al., (2018)	Public Personnel Management	Quantitative Research	2 companies,372 middle managers and 850 front line managers	Role dynamics	This study is to compares middle and first-line managers' experiences of their human resource (HR) role and the factors explaining effective HRM implementation at each managerial level. First-line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness is related to organisational support, autonomous motivation, and co-worker support. And for middle managers personnel red tape, length of service, and supervisory experience contributes to their HRM implementation effectiveness
Pak, 2022)	HRMJ	Quantitative research	586 responses from 12 companies	Theory of planned behaviour	FLM HR implementation is not only dependent on their HR-related competencies but also their values, and perceived HR implementation climate.
Piening et al., (2014)	HRM	Qualitative research	25 interviews	RBV	This study takes a multi-level perspective – intended, actual and experienced and specifies the conditions under which congruency between intended, implemented, and perceived HRM is likely to occur. They highlight an organisation's ability to leverage its resources as playing a crucial moderating role.
Ryu & Kim, (2013)	HRM	Quantitative research	215 companies and 400 respondents (line and HR)	HR strength	This study takes account of the cultural context of emergence of HPWS in Korea. Found that the association between FLMs' HR involvement and HR effectiveness is weak when a company employs an institutionally emerging HR system. The negative combined effect of FLMs' HR involvement and emerging HR systems on HR effectiveness can be moderated by the provision of HR knowledge to FLMs.
Sikora et al., (2015)	JAP	Quantitative research	507 line managers and 109 subordinates	Social context theory, HRM strength	LM's' HPWP implementation perceptions fully mediate relations between HPWP and employee outcomes. Line managers' human resources competency and political skill affect their HPWP implementation perceptions.
Steffensen et al., (2019)	JOM	Conceptual review	n/a	n/a	Importance of multi-level perspective at manager level. More research needed in this area.

Study	Journal	Method	Participants/ sample	Theoretical lens	Relevance to line manager HRM implementation
Townsend, Bosnehles, et al., (2022)	APJHR	Conceptual review	n/a	Social exchange, agency	This study compares the actions of HR departments in both effective and ineffective implementation processes in different firms. Linking them to the AMO framework, offers a view of what HR departments can do to have their proposals effectively implemented by line managers. It identifies different roles played by FLM's and how they perform the role is dependent on the structure of the HR system in place and the level of agency that structure allows the FLM.
Trullen et al., (2016)	HRMJ	Qualitative research	8 companies in Spain and 29 implementation initiatives	AMO	This study examines the role played by HR in increasing AMO for LM implementation. The HR department may indeed play a role in boosting an implementation-friendly environment for LMs.
Tyskbo, (2020)	ER	Qualitative research	10 HR, 8 managers, and 5 employees	Social exchange theory	This study examines how line managers contribute towards divergence arising between intended and implemented. The findings illustrate how line managers faced three types of complexities during implementation, i.e., dilemmas, understandings, and local adaptations.
Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, (2018)	IJHRM	Quantitative Research	71 line managers and 31 employees	AMO	This study draws on AMO and concludes implementation is more effective when the front line managers have the ability to enact the activities, are motivated to perform these activities and have the opportunity to fulfil these activities on top of the demands
Vermeeren, (2014)	IJHRM	Quantitative research	315 employees and 41 line managers	AMO	This study tested whether HRM practices, as implemented by line managers, affect employees' perceptions of HRM and whether these perceptions in turn relate to perceived unit performance. The analysis shows that implemented HRM practices differed between work-units. More specifically, our study shows that these differences can be explained by a line manager's leadership style.
Vossen & van Gestel, (2019)	Scandinavian Journal of Management	Qualitative research	21 manager employee dyads	Translation studies	This study is focused on how social interactions between local managers and employees contributed to the translation of the macro- idea of 'activation' in micro-level practices of sickness absence management.

2.3.1 HRM content: The HRM practices implemented by line managers

Line managers play a central role in implementing HRM practices as they are important conduits of organisation strategy (Hope-Hailey et al., 1997) and are expected to implement practices that have been devolved from the central HR function (Brewster et al., 2015; Currie & Procter, 2001; Nishii & Paluch, 2018). These include practices such as recruitment, goal setting and other talent management activities including developing and training of staff. Managers are therefore heavily involved in shaping the outcomes of HRM practices and for delivering outcomes for their staff (Wright & Nishii, 2013) and they play a crucial role in the HRM causal chain (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

HRM content comprises the "what" of HRM (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016), and includes the organisational practices, policies, and systems related to the management of employees (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 1988) and organisational goals (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). These include high-performance work practices (Han et al., 2015; Pak & Kim, 2018; Posthuma et al., 2013), systems (Lado & Wilson, 1994), or bundles of HRM content (Do et al., 2018; Jiang et al., 2014; Lepak & Snell, 2002; Sikora et al., 2015). Following the content perspective, research has identified certain HRM practices that are commonly transferred to line managers. For example, Maxwell & Watson, (2006) identified that line managers mostly implement performance appraisals and provide performance feedback.

Other scholars use different HRM practices in line manager HRM implementation driven by the context. In studying line manager HRM implementation in management consulting teams, Fu et al., (2020) identified six HRM practices implemented by line managers: selection, informing, and encouraging team members learning opportunities, mentoring/coaching team members, managing performance on the project, planning job rotations, and promoting a culture of participation.

2.3.2 HRM process: Consistency and variability in line manager HRM implementation

Consistently implementing HRM is a challenge organisationally and individually (Wright & Nishii, 2013). At the organisational level, the challenge is to ensure that managers execute the same set of HRM processes in their work units. Doing so requires that line managers understand the intended HRM practices, a condition attained through managerial communication and training.

There are competing views on the importance of consistency. Consistent implementation has been posited as favourable for the organisation and Fu et al. (2020) proposed a concept of consistency in line management HRM implementation asserting that HRM practices should be consistently applied across all team members. Examples include that line managers recruit employees into the team through similar systematic procedures, keep all members informed of training opportunities, and provide each member with developmental feedback and support. The consistency of line manager HRM implementation is important for employees. When managers implement HRM in a consistent way, members perceive a clear, coherent, and fair message regarding the organisation's values, processes/procedures, and expectations (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Inconsistent messages regarding the firm's HRM practices can lead employees to become dissatisfied and less engaged (Li et al., 2011), thereby reducing their commitment to the organisation (Sanders et al., 2008) and increasing intentions to quit (Liao et al., 2009).

In contrast, some scholars perceive lack of consistency as a productive element. For example Brandl et al. (2022) draw on organisational institutionalism (Dobbin, 1994) and contend that gaps in implementing HRM policies can actually be productive, as they secure organisational legitimacy, thus enabling organisations to operate viably within several institutional environments. These authors suggest that different approaches to implementation are needed, some of them premised on accepting sustained implementation

gaps. They introduce minimum and moderate implementation approaches, rooted in the notion of decoupling to complement approaches that are aimed at tight implementation. The authors see the role of HR managers as enabling purposeful flexibility in the interpretation of HRM policies.

Existing research explores the variability in line manager HRM implementation and it has been asserted that in order to understand the variability in HRM implementation, more insight into line managers' leadership behaviour is needed (Den Hartog et al., 2004; Paauwe et al., 2013). Managers' roles across the organisational hierarchy make them responsible for much of the observed variability in the adoption, implementation, and effectiveness of HRM practices (Nishii & Wright, 2008), as line managers engage in a range of behaviours: they ignore, deviate, imitate, internalise, initiate and/or integrate the delegated practices because they fail to see the value of the content of the practice and the process of execution (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017). This considerable variation across and within organisations accounts for significant differences in many of the intended outcomes of these practices, including job performance, turnover intentions (Sikora et al., 2015) and team performance (Pak & Kim, 2018). Some consider that variability captured from inconsistent implementation is a critical management challenge that must be addressed effectively (Pak, 2022).

Nishii and Wright, (2008) suggested that examining such variability is important, as sources of variability may operate as moderators in the HRM practices to performance link. That is, holding all else constant, variability in any one or more of these factors across organisations may be the cause for meaningful variability in the HRM practices and might lead to incomplete or inaccurate conclusions regarding the HRM practices to performance relationship. Therefore, explicit consideration of these reasons for variability is important.

Variation in the actual practices implemented can be affected by the motivation of the line manager. The fulfilment of line managers' people management role often relies on the manager's own sense of motivation and commitment, which may distort and possibly even undermine the contribution which HRM policies are supposed to make towards organisational success (Trullen et al., 2016; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018; Vermeeren, 2014). Moreover, managers who consider HRM duties important need less extrinsic motivation and control to perform these activities. Variations in implementation can be explained by differences in line manager's leadership style. In their study, Harney and Jordan (2008) found that task oriented leaders focus on numbers and pay little attention to development, as a result, limited attention was given to HRM practices focusing on employee development.

In contrast to this leadership style Vermeeren, (2014) found that line managers who adopt a more transformational leadership style place a focus on using more commitment-oriented HRM practices within their work unit. Role stress has also been shown to contribute to variability of practice and occurs where line managers are found to experience role overload, role conflict and role ambiguity (Evans, 2017). This can result in line managers deviating from intended HRM whereby role overload and conflict often brought about a renegotiation of the more intangible or costly HRM policies, whereas role ambiguity undermined their ability to consistently and confidently implement HRM (Evans, 2017). Line managers may become the source of variance not only in HRM process, but also in the content of HRM practices within and across organisations, to achieve congruence between their capabilities, the surrounding environment, and their management activities.

López-Cotarelo (2018) applying managerial discretion theory (Hambrick & Finkelstein, 1987) seeks a fuller understanding of line managers' role in the implementation

of HRM practices. In his study of a fashion retailer, he identified three ways in which line managers engage with HRM policies and procedures and he proposes that line managers make an important contribution to the effective implementation of HRM systems through exerting their cognitive and political abilities to bring about decisions that are well suited to their local situations. He finds that line managers could decide and propose within the prerogatives designed in formal processes; or they could ask and negotiate with other stakeholders beyond the provisions of policy; and they could avoid or circumvent formal policies for the benefit of their own situation.

Line managers' perceptions of HRM practices are informed by the extent to which the practice helps to make their job easier (Kuvaas et al., 2014) and is suitably adaptable to their needs (Conway & Monks, 2010). Managers have the ability to spend more time on activities they consider important and less time on those they find unimportant (Konrad et al., 1997). Thus, perceived importance may trigger other factors that typically hinder managers from HRM delivery, such as actual priority setting and work overload (Brandl et al., 2009). In Whittaker and Marchington's (2003) study of perceptions of involvement of 13 senior/board-level line managers in a food manufacturing company in the UK, they found that line managers' perceptions of HRM duties vary across managerial levels, whereby senior line managers are feeling more supported by HR specialists because of their higher level position.

2.3.3 Factors impacting line manager HRM implementation

It has been proposed that line manager HRM implementation is driven by organisational support, autonomous motivation, and co-worker support (Op de Beeck et al., 2016, 2018). Researchers have identified a number of factors or antecedents that impact the implementation of HRM practices by line managers and these include:

Capabilities and resources: Studies have pinpointed line managers' lack of HRM-related knowledge and skills as one of the major obstacles to successful HRM practice

implementation (Gilbert et al., 2011; Kurdi-Nakra & Pak, 2022). The extent to which a line manager implements HRM practices is dependent on whether they have sufficient HRM-related competencies (Bos-Nehles, 2010), but it is argued that line managers lack sufficient competency to conduct their HRM responsibilities (Gilbert et al., 2011; McGovern et al., 2007; Renwick, 2003), nor do they get sufficient support from HR partners to aid implementation (Bond & Wise, 2003; Trullen et al., 2016). This is exacerbated by organisations that do not support line managers in their HRM activities, such as through knowledge transfer (Ryu & Kim, 2013) including formal training (Townsend et al., 2012), or incentives (Teague & Roche, 2012). HR departments can better support line managers according to Trullen et al. (2016) and their findings show that HR departments can make a difference by taking initiatives that foster line managers implementation abilities, motivation and opportunities, such as deploying in-the-field HR specialists, framing practices in appealing ways, involving line managers in the development of HRM practices and seeking CEO support. Furthermore, environmental, or external factors such as the necessary support from senior managers to perform their HRM roles effectively and the existence of clear policies and procedures for applying their HRM responsibilities can assist managers in their implementation of HRM practices (Trullen et al., 2016).

Maxwell and Watson (2006) propose three necessary elements to promote line managers' active involvement in HRM implementation, namely, conceptual understanding of the rationale for their involvement, role clarity and capability, and affective commitment in believing in the value of their involvement in the intervention. Training that explains the rationale behind the intervention may additionally enhance intervention out-comes (Mattila et al., 2006; Nielsen, 2013). In other words, HR managers should provide supervisors with clear and adequate instructions on policies and procedures to enable the necessary and

relevant knowledge needed to execute the expected supervisory role (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013).

Capacity: A significant factor is line managers' failure to fully engage in their HRM duties, due to conflicting priorities, or time pressures (Brewster et al., 2015; McGovern et al., 2007). Studies have revealed that managers may not have sufficient capacity to spend time on both operational and HRM matters (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003; McConville, 2006). Research on HR in a leading consortium of companies identified several constraints impacting the delivery of HRM by frontline managers, not least short-term pressures for performance, limited institutional support, and lack of pragmatic limits on time and resources (McGovern et al., 2007).

Line Managers Values and motivation: Managers may lack the motivation and desire to implement HRM practices and therefore prioritise operational matters ahead of HRM duties (Brewster & Larsen 2000; Bos-Nehles, 2010). Line manager HRM implementation is not only dependent on their HRM-related competencies but also their values. For example Pak (2022) posited that line managers appraise the attributes of intended practices against their own value sets.

***Perceived climate*:** It has been suggested that there is a relationship between transformational leadership and the implementation of commitment-oriented HRM practices (Vermeeren, 2014). This is because the activities that transformational leaders carry out to enhance individual and organisational performance accord with those HRM activities that the HRM literature views as important. Galang et al. (1999) argue that a lack of HRM practice use may be the result of practices that were adopted for symbolic reasons, where firms are less concerned with the actual implementation of the practice than with the positive signal the stated adoption of the practices provides.

2.4 Line Manager HRM Implementation: Theoretical Perspectives

Lack of diversity of theoretical perspective in HRM research has been highlighted by Jiang and Messersmith (2018). In their meta-review they find a substantive dominance of five internally focused theories (the resource-based view, the behavioural perspective, human capital theory, social exchange theory and ability-motivation-opportunity). As shown in Table 2.1 and indicated in a recent review by Townsend et al. (2022), although there is a preponderance of the aforementioned theories there is an increasing range of theoretical frameworks adopted to explore how and why line managers implement HRM. Other theories include role theory and role dynamics (Conway & Monks, 2010; Evans, 2017, 2022; Op de Beeck et al., 2016, 2017, 2018); attribution theory (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020; Katou et al., 2021); signalling theory (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Farndale & Kelliher, 2013; Katou et al., 2021); agency theory (Makhecha et al., 2018); social exchange theory (Keegan & Den Hartog, 2018; J. Kilroy et al., 2022; Kurdi-Nakra & Pak, 2022; Makhecha et al., 2018; Townsend, Bos-Nehles, et al., 2022; Townsend, Dundon, et al., 2022; Tyskbo, 2020); AMO (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gilbert et al., 2015; Trullen et al., 2016; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018a; Vermeeren, 2014); institutional and translation theory (Brandl et al., 2022; Cassell & Lee, 2017; Fu et al., 2022; Nilsen & Sandaunet, 2021; Vossen & van Gestel, 2019); paradox theory (Fu et al., 2020) and managerial discretion theory (López-Cotarelo, 2018). The dominant theories and the implications for line manager HRM implementation are reviewed below.

2.4.1 Social exchange theory and line manager implementation

Social exchange theory is among the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behaviour (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Theorists agree that social exchange involves a series of interactions that generate obligations (Emerson, 1976). Within social exchange theory, these interactions are usually seen as interdependent and contingent on the actions of another person (Blau, 1964). In the field of strategic HRM,

social exchange theory focuses on the motivational component of employee–organisation relationships and provides insights regarding the implications of the fit between the provided inducements and expected contributions in an employee–organisation relationship (Tsui et al., 1997). Social exchange theory can explain the link between HRM and organisational performance. According to social exchange theory, employees gauge their contribution to the organisation based on what they perceive the organisation to be providing them, i.e. the norm of reciprocity; (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Schmit & Allscheid, 1995; Whitener, 2001).

Within the realm of social exchange, leader member exchange (LMX) theory can explain differences between how people are managed at work (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). LMX theory suggests that leaders and followers develop unique relationships based on their social exchanges, and the quality of these exchanges within an organisation can influence employee outcomes (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). According to the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and social exchange perspective (Blau, 1964), when organisations value employees' contribution and care about their well-being via investment in HR systems, employees are expected to reciprocate by exerting positive work attitudes and behaviours towards organisations. LMX was first posited as a multi-dimensional construct by both Dienesch and Liden (1986) and Liden and Maslyn (1998) who identified the potential for "currencies of exchange" for supervisors and subordinates aside from their work behaviours.

Bos-Nehles and Meijerink (2018) use social exchange theory to examine to what extent exchange relationships influence HRM implementation as reflected in employees' perception of the HRM practice and their affective commitment. Collecting data from both line managers and employees, their study reveals that employees will more strongly perceive the presence of HRM practices if their line managers are motivated to take HRM

practices and their implementation seriously and have invested in establishing a good relationship with their subordinate. Line managers, in turn, reciprocate perceived support from the HRM department with greater motivation to implement these practices. In such a situation, employees will, according to social exchange theory, reciprocate for receiving such benefits with affective commitment. Guided by social exchange theory, Kilroy et al. (2022) propose the concept of a 'zone of reciprocity' to explain how and why different types or styles of line managers affect the implementation of human resource policies at the point of production. When viewed as a zone, they theorised that the zone of reciprocity represents a new space of social workplace interactions, that is, the different styles of line managers, and how they enact and/or re-configure organisational-level HR intended policy.

The importance of line managers in current theorising on appraisal is linked with assumptions that employees' experience of these practices is inexorably linked with their relationship with their line manager (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). As line managers are not HRM specialists, they will rely on support, encouragement, and advice from HR professionals to effectively implement their HRM responsibilities (Perry & Kulik, 2008). Recent studies confirm this assumption and find that HR support is positively related to effective HRM implementation (Bos-Nehles, 2010) and negatively related to HR role stressors (Gilbert et al., 2011). In general, line managers expect HR "to provide the right people, at the right time, with the right skills; to advise on problem cases and difficult issues; and to encourage long-term staff development, nurturing skills within current roles and preparing workers for future advancement" (Baldwin, 2007: 8). Nevertheless, previous studies identify a lack of support or a sense of distance between line managers and HR (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; McGuire et al., 2011; Nehles et al., 2006), showing that successful HR support also requires willingness of HR to help line managers and provide accurate information.

2.4.2 AMO and line manager implementation

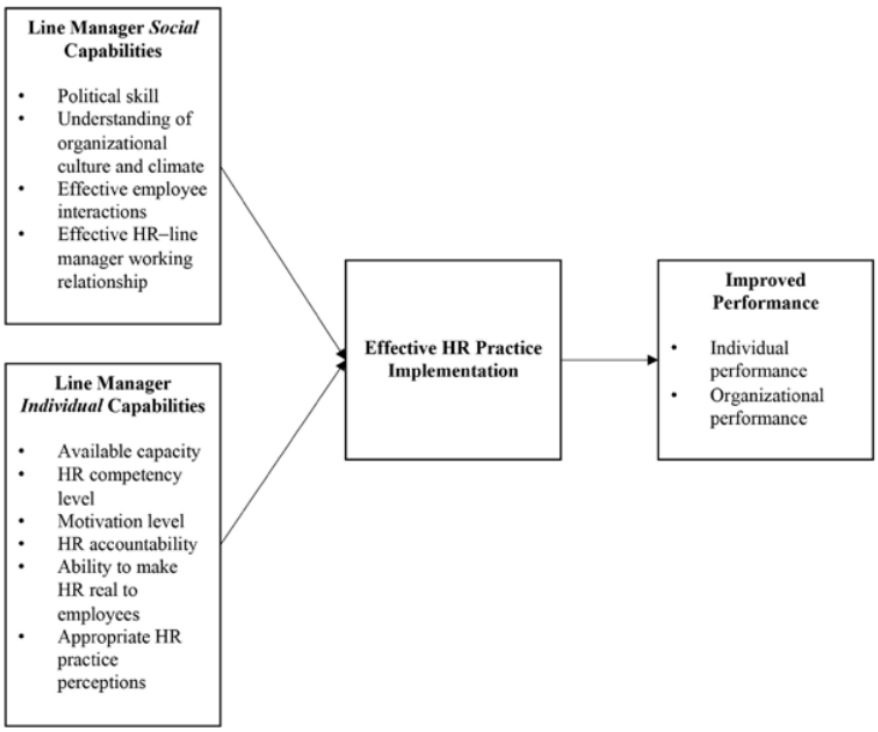
Strategic HRM emphasises the design of HRM systems, policies, and practices, and, how employees can be recruited with the right competencies, how rewards can be effectively targeted toward critical contributions, and how employees can be retained at rates sufficient to capture the benefits of their skills and development. These HR-related decisions seek to realise what has been called human capital advantage (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). Underpinning this perspective is the notion that HRM practices provide employees with the ability, motivation, and opportunity to perform (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Line managers too play a part in this process, as through their own leadership styles they can influence employee behaviours and attitudes through their impact on ability, motivation, and opportunity for employees to perform (McDermott et al., 2013; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018; Vermeeren, 2014). But AMO can help us to understand why line manager implementation can lead to positive or negative outcomes, as similarly to the application or AMO to employees, the key components apply to managers also.

Ability: In the AMO model, as applied to line managers, ability is defined as the HRM-related competencies necessary to successfully implement practices on the work floor (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). Abilities may be related to knowledge about relevant legislation, trade union relationships, people management skills or procedures on how to use practices (Nehles et al., 2006). However, it is argued that line managers' skills and competences in HRM practices are inadequate and that a lack of training undoubtedly affects line managers' effectiveness (Hailey et al., 2005; Maxwell & Watson, 2006; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). It is commonly assumed that abilities to effectively implement HRM practices can be developed through assistance and guidance from HR specialists (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Harris et al., 2002). This is interesting, as it has been suggested in research that training provided in HRM is rarely adequate for line managers (Townsend et al., 2012). Previous research evidence shows that line managers' HRM-related knowledge and skills

significantly influence HRM implementation effectiveness (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Kellner et al., 2016; Kuvaas et al., 2014; Ryu & Kim, 2013). More recently, line manager capabilities have been conceptualised as existing of social and individual capabilities leading to effective HRM practice implementation and improved individual and organisational performance (Sikora, 2022). See Figure 2.4 Line manager capabilities, HR implementation and improved performance.

Motivation*:* Previous research has indicated that an important antecedent of effective HRM practice implementation is the motivation line managers have, to take on HRM responsibilities (Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006; McGovern et al., 2007). However, there are differing views on the relevance of line managers' motivation for HRM implementation and suggestions of a linkage between ability and motivation. As HRM responsibilities are a source of additional work for line managers (Vermeeren, 2014) they may actually pay little attention to the proper implementation of HRM practices by prioritising operational tasks over HR issues (Woodrow & Guest, 2014). It has also been stressed that line managers often consider HRM practices to be irrelevant and unhelpful bureaucracy, and therefore ignore them (Guest & King, 2004). An alternate view is that devolution of HRM duties may be rewarding for line managers as it allows them to focus on strategic issues besides business targets (Trullen et al., 2016). Kellner et al. (2016) found that ability and motivation are interdependent in such a way that line managers who are highly motivated to implement HRM practices effectively usually also make sure that they possess the skills to do so, and line managers who lack ability to implement HRM practices effectively usually also lack motivation to invest in HRM implementation effectiveness.

Figure 2.4 Line manager capabilities, HR implementation and improved performance



Source: Sikora (2022: 142)

Opportunity: If line managers only have the necessary HRM skills and are motivated to implement HRM practices effectively, they may not succeed if they find few opportunities to do so within the organisation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). In other words, the organisational context must allow managers to fully deploy their individual skills and motivation. For instance, Trullen et al., (2016) found ability to be the best predictor of a line manager's HRM performance. Motivation did not moderate the effect of ability on performance as predicted, and the authors suggested further research but, opportunity did enhance the effect of ability on HRM implementation effectiveness. Therefore, they conclude that HR departments should aim to enhance line managers' abilities and provide adequate opportunities for them to carry out the expected HRM duties. Gilbert et al., (2015) in a study of five organisations found positive links between line managers' perceptions of strong HRM processes and AMO, (the strongest links with ability and motivation) suggesting that with clear signals about HRM in the organisation, line managers feel better equipped to perform their HRM role.

2.4.3 Attribution theory and line manager implementation

Attribution theory has its roots in social psychology, and its central tenet is that attributions are causal explanations that individuals make about events, actions, or behaviours to make sense of their experiences, and these attributions inform their response (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1985). Behaviour depends on two sets of conditions, namely, factors within the person and factors within the environment (Heider, 1958) or, otherwise stated as internal and external attributions (Kelley, 1973). "At the heart of attribution theory is the assertion that people are on a continuous quest to explain events that they encounter" (Hewett et al., 2018: 87). An example of the application of attribution theory in HRM research is provided by Nishii et al. (2008) who argue that the attributions that employees make about the reasons why management adopts the HRM practices has consequences for employees' attitudes and behaviours, and ultimately, firm performance.

Applying HRM attributions are important for understanding managers' implementation of HRM practices because attributions help us to understand the relational context of those practices (Hewett & Shantz, 2022). In their review of studies addressing attributions and referring to the mechanisms that are involved in the relationship between HRM practices and performance, Hewett et al. (2018) draw attention to the study conducted by Beijer et al. (2019) of line managers and employees in a Netherlands organisation. They show that line manager HR attributions are positively related to employee HR attributions. This relationship is stronger for the commitment-focused HR attribution and union compliance HR attribution than the control-focused HR attribution. This suggests that employees are more open to signals of the line manager which connote positive consequences for employees rather than signals of the line manager which connote lower levels of concern for employees and a more cost-driven control focus. This is important, as it helps us understand the impact of line manager implementation of HRM practices on employee perceptions.

Line managers are involved in the attribution process because they "draw the attention of followers to particular aspects of the broader HR and organisational structure and transform cues that are ambiguous, implicit, loosely coupled, and complex into a concrete pattern of meaning for followers" (Nishii & Paluch, 2018: 320). When HRM stakeholders feel that line managers do not implement HRM practices effectively, they can ascribe this to internal attributions of the line managers, such as a lack of ability to implement HRM effectively, or to external attributions of the line managers, such as a lack of support from HRM professionals (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020). This provides HRM professionals and senior managers with information about how to better select, prepare or train line managers to safeguard effective HRM implementation.

Factors within the environment (external attributions) explain peoples' behaviour (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020). Most importantly, line managers need HRM skills and competencies (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Mirfakhar et al., 2018; Trullen et al., 2016; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003) as well as desire and willingness to use HRM practices to manage subordinates effectively (Nehles et al., 2006; Renwick, 2003), which usually comes down to line managers' ability and motivation to engage in HRM implementation effectiveness (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Kellner et al., 2016; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018). Research evidence shows that line managers' HRM-related knowledge and skills significantly influence HRM implementation effectiveness (Kellner et al., 2016; Kuvaas et al., 2014; Ryu & Kim, 2013).

2.4.4 Role theory and line manager implementation

Role theory can help us to understand line management implementation, as organisational role theory views businesses as systems of roles, whereby a role comprises a set of normative expectations corresponding to the incumbent's position, (e.g., line managers), within the organisation (Katz & Kahn, 1978). A role is associated with expectations that generate behaviour to induce conformity, and involves interactions with

individuals occupying other related positions, referred to as role partners (Biddle, 1986). Given the importance of effective HRM implementation, several factors constraining line managers' execution of HR tasks are identified in the (devolution) literature. For example, based on role theory three factors are identified by Op de Beeck et al. (2016) that influence HR's role expectations of the line manager HRM role. These are organisational, individual, and interpersonal factors and the findings from their research suggest that the strongest effects are found on the organisational level, more specifically in the different perceptions of organisational support given to line managers by HR departments. This is where the theory on role dynamics by Kahn, provides an interesting framework. As such, it states that a person's role behaviour is determined by the broader organisational conditions surrounding and defining that person's role, as earlier applied by Op de Beeck et al. (2016), in the context of HRM implementation by line managers. Furthermore, it says that a person's predispositions (individual factors) will function as conditioning variables in relation to that person's role behaviour. Finally, they account for the patterns of interaction between a person and his or her role senders and how these relationships may affect that person's role behaviour (Kahn, 2017).

In applying role theory to line managers' HR implementation, research has identified work role stress to be a contributing factor in variability and inconsistency between intended and implemented HRM in organisations (Evans, 2017; Gilbert et al., 2011; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003). This can be attributed to line managers informally renegotiating their HRM role and responsibilities by adapting HRM policies. The theory distinguishes between different sources of role stress, comprising role conflict, role overload and role ambiguity. A wide range of responsibilities and increasing workloads makes line managers predisposed to multiple sources of role stress. It is therefore important to consider sources of role stress to identify their influence on line managers' implementation of HRM.

One of the potential problems is the occurrence of these role stressors, i.e., perceptions of (enhanced) role ambiguity and role overload. Gilbert et al. (2011) in their study, found that both the level of support received from the HR department and the level of HRM competencies influence line managers perceptions of HRM role ambiguity and overload. As such, line managers' perceptions of "personnel" red tape are believed to reduce their motivation and diminish their flexibility and autonomy in performing their tasks (Suhail & Steen, 2021). For example, line managers may experience difficulties in recruiting, motivating, and retaining employees due to legislative and procedural limitations (e.g., lack of control over rewards) (McConville, 2006). As a result, formal rules and regulations may sharply constrain line managers in performing their HR role, which will in turn affect their HRM implementation effectiveness. (Op de Beeck et al., 2018).

Other reasons for role stress have been articulated by (Evans, 2022). She conceptualises role stressors emerging from several sources: 1) The multiple roles and responsibilities of line managers; 2) The various organisational actors with whom line managers interact, shape the expectations of behaviour, and influence their role behaviour. 3) Hierarchical levels of line management and boundary spanning nature of managers roles can create role stress 4) individual factors such as ability to conduct the role.

Role conflict relates to inconsistencies in the expectations of role incumbents, such that compliance with one expectation would make it difficult or impossible to fulfil other requirements of the role. Role overload occurs when there is an incompatibility between the volume of work and the resources available to complete the work. Role ambiguity follows when there is little or no information about role expectations, or the role expectations lack clarity (Turner, 1978).

2.4.5 Paradox theory and line manager implementation

As organisations operate in increasingly complex and turbulent environments, tensions and paradoxical phenomena are intensifying (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2010; Lewis,

2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Paradox is one of five key constructs relating to contradictions in organisations; these have been identified as tensions, dualisms/dualities, contradictions and dialectics (Putnam et al., 2016). Paradox refers to the contradictory features in organisations that exist simultaneously and synergistically over time, and become seemingly irrational or absurd (Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Smith, 2014; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Paradoxes differ from contradictions in that they create situations of almost impossible choice, hence the seeming irrationality or absurdity of the situation. They are often linked to surprising or ironic outcomes and inconsistencies,. In dealing with paradox within organisations, Lewis and Smith (2014) elaborate on paradox and introduce two basic and distinct ways to respond to paradox: defensive or strategic. Defensive responses encompass avoiding, suppressing, or ignoring tensions (Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Smith, 2014). Whilst strategic on the contrary, attempts to engage the competing forces by seeking to embrace, to cope with, and thrive through tensions. These strategies include acceptance, confrontation, and transcendence of emerging tensions, attempting to capture their inherent power for creativity and change (Lewis, 2000). Depending on the responses to tensions, paradoxes might result in vicious or virtuous cycles (Link & Müller, 2015).

Accepting the different logics and existing polarities (Clegg et al., 2002) allows for the development of coping strategies to deal with the tensions and to capture the inherent potential of the paradox (Lewis, 2000). Paradox studies have had limited application in HRM studies. However in their study of line managers, Fu et al. (2020) recognised the paradox and associated tensions that face line managers in applying HRM practices as they aim to apply those practices consistently and at the same time recognise individual differences. A line manager's individual responsiveness in HRM implementation reflects recognition of differential team member contributions and the need to treat them equitably and contribute to their individual development needs.

2.4.6 Institutional work and line manager implementation

The study of institutional work is concerned with the practical actions through which institutions are created, maintained, and disrupted. The concept of institutional work describes "the purposive action of individuals and organisations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 215). The conceptual foundations of modern organisational institutionalism were established in the works of Meyer & Rowan, (1977). “A significant part of the promise of institutional work as a research area is to establish a broader vision of agency in relationship to institutions, one that avoids depicting actors either as "cultural dopes" trapped by institutional arrangements, or as hyper-muscular institutional entrepreneurs” (Lawrence et al., 2009: 15). Organisational institutionalism seeks to explain why and how organisations and their characteristics (formal structures) co-evolve with the institutions prevailing in the community of organisations of which they belong. Applying an organisational institutional lens (Den Hartog et al., 2004) argue that where policies are minimally implemented, this can lead to subsequent lowering of employee commitment. Their study examining performance management found that in the case of performance ratings, those employees receiving lower ratings may feel unfairly treated and may publicly challenge inconsistencies or ask for closer inspection, and thereby bring arrangements that serve legitimacy in competing environments into question. They also propose that moderate implementation can be appropriate in organisational environments.

2.4.7 Translation theory and line manager implementation

Although the theories outlined above contribute in different ways to our understanding of the implementation role of the line manager in organisations, they do not consider the temporal and spatial movement of HRM practices as they move through the line. Translation theory can provide a more veridical account by creating understanding of how practices are implemented, rather than whether they are implemented or not. Existing

micro-HR research has only scratched the surface of why and where intended HRM practices change when implemented by managers (Makhecha et al., 2018)

Translation has been described as “the spread in time and space of anything – claims, artefacts, goods, - in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it” (Latour, 1986: 267). It is described as the process within which an idea is objectified, travels from one context to another within organisations, and is ultimately enacted, or indeed may not (Callon, 1986). Translation implies that actors do not simply accept and enact an idea, they act by “modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it” (Mueller & Whittle, 2011: 188). The concept has also been defined as the effort to embed in a given work context (e.g., an organisation, a team or unit) ideas that have originated elsewhere (Radaelli & Sitton-Kent, 2016). Therefore, the concept of translation occurs in the space and time between when an idea is conceived to when it is institutionalised (Mueller & Whittle, 2011) and the metaphor “travel of ideas” has been used to describe the activity of translation (Czarniawska, 2013).

A further consistent interpretation is that “translation essentially concerns movement and difference, usually involving the translation of an entity of some sort from a source context to a receiving context” (Lamb et al., 2016: 352). The concept has also been defined as “the effort to embed in a given work context (e.g., an organisation, a team or unit) ideas that have been originated elsewhere” (Radaelli & Sitton-Kent, 2016: 322).

According to Cassell and Lee (2017), the studies of translation have broadly taken two paths in the literature. The first path focuses on the idea and how it changes, demonstrated in Erlingsdóttir and Lindberg's (2005) review of quality assurance implementation and Morris and Lancaster's (2006) study of lean manufacturing in the construction industry. The second broad approach identified is focused upon the processes

by which translation happens as exemplified in the study of IT implementation by Doorewaard and Van Bijesterveld (2001). Linguistic forms of translation work have also been used to understand this process perspective such as Mueller and Whittle's (2011) work on discursive devices and the re-telling of myths in Zilber's (2006) study of the Israeli high-tech industry. He posits that "institutionalization involves the translation of generic rational myths into specific ones, which change over time in relation to material fluctuations and depends on the dynamics of local institutional spheres" (Zilber, 2006: 281).

Cassell and Lee (2017) asserted that the two broad approaches are not mutually exclusive and can be used to understand the translation process in greater depth. An example of this blending of approaches is evident in the study conducted by Nielsen et al. (2014) on the implementation of IT practices within a Danish hospital. The findings from this study demonstrate complex institutional practices, where ideas were first seen as positive improvements but then became subjects of controversy as the translation process progressed and implementation became imminent. This study also revealed that ideas were translated into different local arrangements and also took different linguistic and material forms across the organisation.

Translation theory has potential to provide a new perspective on line manager HRM implementation and provides an opportunity to frame and understand what happens as HRM practices leave a source, travel and ultimately are experienced by the final recipient. It is appropriate to distinguish between diffusion and translation. The diffusion model rests on the assumption that practices are adopted intact, and thus it holds a somewhat reified and static notion of the process (Zilber, 2006). Examples of diffusion within the realm of HRM includes online benefits systems where the target is often the employee who directly accesses the benefits with no need for line management implementation at all. However

other practices do require line manager implementation and there is a need to for the manager to translate and they may also edit.

Four studies connected to HRM practices use translation as the key theoretical underpinning of the study in question. Firstly, Boxenbaum (2006) studied the implementation of diversity initiatives originating in two US firms within a Danish context. She found that core to successful implementation was the process of framing and also strategic reframing as part of the sensemaking process for managers. Strategic framing is an interpretive lens through which individuals perceive and interpret the world (Snow et al., 1986). Strategic "frames" are cognitive schemes that guide the attribution of meaning to specific social situations and guide future action (Benford & Snow, 2000). Secondly, Cassell and Lee (2017) studied the translation of a union idea in a multi organisational setting over a period of seven years. They identified the importance of power in successful implementation within the deeply political unionised environment.

Vossen and van Gestel (2019) explored translation of macro practices in absence management within three hospital settings in the Benelux region. Their findings indicating that translation is an interactive and dynamic series of social exchanges in which interpersonal relationships perform a crucial role in the outcomes of translating macro to micro level practices. Nilsen and Sandaunet (2021) introduced the concept of translation competence, in an explanation of the implementation of a new model of workforce planning among doctors in a Norwegian health trust. They identified, three components: knowledge of the idea to be implemented, knowledge of the local practice where the new idea is being translated, and knowledge of the translation rules. This has relevance to line manager implementation in the context of devolved HRM practices.

2.5 Performance Management Implemented by Line Managers

At the start of this research study, performance management and specifically the performance appraisal practice was the HRM practice chosen as the focus for line management implementation of HRM practices. Performance management is shown to be an important lever for organisational success (Chuang & Liao, 2010; Crook et al., 2011; Liao et al., 2009; Takeuchi et al., 2007) and it is also considered to be one of the most important HRM practices (Boswell & Boudreau, 2002; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Kampkötter, 2017).

2.5.1 Performance management as a key HRM practice

Performance management is defined as the continuous process of identifying, measuring, and developing the performance of individuals and teams and aligning performance with the strategic goals of the organisation (Aguinis, 2009). Current models of the performance management process either outline how broad organisational practices lead to organisation performance improvement (e.g., Den Hartog et al., 2004; DeNisi et al., 2014) or specify how performance feedback leads to individual performance improvement (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Ilgen et al., 1979; London & Smither, 2002)

One element of the performance management activity in which the devolvement of work to line managers has particularly been noted, is the performance appraisal which is defined as "a formal process, which occurs infrequently, by which employees are evaluated by some judge (typically a supervisor) who assesses the employee's performance along a given set of dimensions, assigns a score to that assessment, and then usually informs the employee of his or her formal rating" (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017: 421). In addition to this more evaluative dimension, performance appraisal also consists of a developmental dimension that assists managers in making decisions regarding individual training and improvement (Kampkötter, 2017; Soltani & Wilkinson, 2020; Townley, 1997). In this way, the performance appraisal and performance management are two different yet connected

concepts, with the former being a relevant part of the much wider latter (Aguinis, 2009; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). This continuous process is guided by line managers who are responsible to set employees' goals, coach them along the way and provide ongoing feedback (Armstrong, & Taylor, 2017).

Within the appraisal process, employees are responsible for seeking honest feedback and using it to improve their performance (Jackson et al., 2014), whereas HR specialists are responsible for ensuring their organisation's performance management practices are internally aligned, meet the necessary legislative requirements and encompass best practice. Triads comprising line manager/employee dyads and HR special-multi-actor are seen as a key form of multi-actor HRM performance management systems (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018). These triads anchor a cyclical process with a central role for line managers who set and monitor performance of their subordinates and ensure follow-up with interventions to improve performance. Research supports the importance of appraisal to employee outcomes. Kuvaas (2011) found a relationship between satisfaction with performance appraisal and outcomes such as affective commitment and employee turnover intentions. On the other hand, dissatisfaction with performance appraisal is associated with negative outcomes including increased job dissatisfaction, lower organisational commitment, and higher intentions to quit (Brown et al., 2010).

Performance appraisal is a performance management mechanism that has broad implications for attitudes and behaviours in organisations. Fairness of performance appraisals has been identified as an important criterion in judging their effectiveness and usefulness for organisations. Scholars have discussed the importance of justice perceptions and it has been asserted that the antecedents of justice perceptions in performance management include system characteristics, rater behaviours, contextual factors such as organisational culture and interpersonal exchanges before the performance appraisals, and

performance ratings (Erdogan, 2002). Farndale and Kelliher (2013) found that equitable use of performance appraisals is related to higher employee commitment, but that relationship was stronger when employees trusted senior managers. Performance appraisal systems also fulfil practical, legal, and strategic purposes (Addison & Belfield, 2008; Noe et al., 2012) and help shape employees' behaviours and attitudes as well as their sense of fairness (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). However, management practices such as performance appraisal can potentially lead to an increase in employees' perceived work meaningfulness, if they focus on satisfying the three psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. It has been suggested that incorporating concepts rooted in the science of positive psychology in performance management practices could contribute to positive workplace outcomes such as well-being and performance (Kubiak 2022).

2.5.2 The Performance Appraisal process

In conventional models of appraisal, a triad composed of line managers, employees and HR professionals occupies a prominent position. Researchers have introduced a number of different performance management process models (Aguinis, 2009; Pulakos, 2009) . At the beginning of the process the manager and the employee must agree on what needs to be achieved during the performance period and how “good” performance is defined. In this step, goals as well as action plans to achieve the goals are established in a discussion between the employee and the manager. The second step is the evaluation of performance. The manager has to monitor and document the employee’s performance, assess the level of goal achievement and identify strengths and weaknesses of the performance execution. In the third step, the manager provides the employee with feedback regarding his or her performance and goal achievement. Usually, a so-called appraisal meeting is held to discuss the feedback and talk about possible performance consequences such as compensation changes. Because performance management is considered a continuous process (Aguinis, 2013), step three is then followed by step one. Although the process models differ regarding

the level of complexity, the number of process steps, and the terms used for naming the process steps, all models include similar elements.

However traditional models and processes of performance management more recently have been challenged. Keegan and Den Hartog (2018) draw attention to the drawbacks of current theorising on appraisal to predict and explain outcomes from appraisal systems that are not premised on stable line manager/employee dyads. They suggest that theorising based primarily on social exchange theories should be reconsidered in this context and new theories developed. Traditional performance management systems are also considered to be ineffective because they do not fit the needs of today's organisations (Levy et al., 2017). Today's organisations must function in a constantly changing environment (e.g., changes in technology, changes in customer expectations) in order to be successful. This presents a significant challenge for traditional performance management systems because they are often designed to review performance over an entire year. However, changing market demands can force organisations to suddenly change their strategic direction which can quickly make the goals set in the performance management process less relevant (Levy et al., 2017). Knowledge-based jobs which make up a significant proportion of advanced economies' workforces are dynamic and complex and therefore difficult to quantify with numeric rating scales which are traditionally used to evaluate performance (Markova & Ford, 2011).

Forced distribution rating systems (FDRS) are frequently used to appraise an employee's performance. The FDRS is a performance appraisal system that forces supervisors to distribute a pre-determined percentage of employees in categories based on their employees' performance relative to other employees' performance (Moon et al., 2016). There is however very limited empirical research in relation to the application of FDRS in appraisals and there are calls for more research in this area (DeNisi et al., 2014). Prior to

the synthesis provided by Moon et al., (2016) one research study specifically examines raters' reactions (Schleicher et al., 2009) and suggest that managers found it more difficult to rate using FDRS and considered the ratings less fair.

Given that execution is key in practices like performance management (Aguinis et al., 2011), the way in which organisation-wide policies and procedures are implemented by direct supervisors and frontline managers will determine its effectiveness. These recent developments highlight the increasingly important role that managers hold in modern performance management systems (Tseng & Levy, 2018). This is explored in the next section.

2.5.3 Line manager implementation of performance management

Line managers have been depicted as central actors of performance management (Schleicher et al., 2019). Acting as an interpreter of formal practices and influencing informal processes. DeNisi and Sonesh (2011) emphasised that the organisation's goal to improve organisational performance can only be achieved by managers fostering the same goal through the performance appraisal process with individual employees. The important role of line managers in performance appraisal is further illustrated by Van Waeyenberg and Decramer (2018) in their study of how line managers' AMO (Ability, Motivation, Opportunity) to conduct performance evaluations is positively related to employees' satisfaction with practices.

Traditional theorising on performance appraisal systems is framed by a social exchange perspective that emphasises the role line managers play in shaping employees' behaviours (Cropanzano et al., 2002) and highlighting the importance of LMX processes (Erdogan, 2002). During appraisal processes, line managers' actions in setting performance standards and evaluating outcomes are coupled with their ability to use valuable HRM resources such as increased pay and training which are valued by employees. Employees are assumed to reciprocate through their attitudes and behaviours. Based on more general

Social Exchange Theory, LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) more specifically holds that the quality of the leader–follower exchange relationship strongly influences employee perceptions including evaluations of HRM and decisions such as those emanating from appraisal processes (Den Hartog et al., 2004).

Appraisal is thus linked with strategic organisational outcomes through a causal chain where line managers implement performance appraisal and interact with employees to shape their attitudes and behaviour in organisationally important ways (Konovsky, 2000). Empirical evidence shows responsibility for enacting performance appraisal has largely shifted from the HRM department to line managers, and the behaviour of line managers is held to mediate the effect of most practices on employee perception and behaviour (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). The role of line managers is therefore core to conventional theorising on how employees perceive and react to processes such as performance appraisal.

Line managers are responsible for measuring, communicating, and helping subordinates to improve performance and they are in the best position to observe and evaluate his or her subordinate's performance (Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018)). This is because they are most familiar with the individual's performance and have the best opportunity to observe actual job performance (Cascio, 2014). Line managers are the most frequently used source of performance information, have extensive knowledge of the job requirements and opportunity to observe their employees, have the ability to rate their employees, have something to gain from the employees' high performance, and are motivated to make accurate ratings, (Noe et al., 2012).

Although performance appraisals are important, research suggests that they are not carried out uniformly across or within organisations. For instance, research has shown considerable variation between organisations, and few employees appear to have appraisals every quarter, even though policy suggests that they should (McGovern et al., 2007). In

addition to the variation in the frequency of practice, there were significant differences regarding the actual conduct of the appraisals. It is noteworthy that managers found it difficult to use the system because they felt that it lacked credibility. Other managers felt less inclined to conduct the reviews and when they did it was merely a paper exercise.

The increased use of projects by contemporary organisations to achieve strategic and operational objectives has been widely observed (Brady & Davies, 2004; Keegan et al., 2012). Recent research suggests that HRM practices are carried out beyond the HRM department through line managers but also carried out beyond the line. While the literature on devolving HRM responsibilities to line management is burgeoning, the HRM responsibilities of managers beyond the line organisation are neglected (Keegan et al., 2012). In their study of performance appraisal in project based organisations, Keegan and Den Hartog (2018) explored the implementation of performance appraisal in polyadic contexts (manager, employee and project manager). Their insights include: the central role of employees in orchestrating the appraisal process; the multiple actors that have input to appraisal including project managers; the distance between employees and their official line managers; and the weak coordinating role of human resource specialists in these systems. The authors conclude that theorising based primarily on social exchange theories needs to be reconsidered in this context and new theories developed. These include the central role of employees in orchestrating the appraisal process, the multiple actors that have input to appraisal including project managers, the distance between employees and their official line managers.

The AMO model inspired Van Waeyenberg and Decramer (2018) to examine HRM implementation as experienced satisfaction with HRM by line managers and employees. Focusing on one HRM policy, performance management, they show how line managers' AMO is positively associated with employees' satisfaction with the policy, which in turn is

mediated by perceptions that the performance management system is strong, hence building in turn on the concept of HRM system strength (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) to conceptualise effective implementation. The way a line manager carries out the appraisal process (procedural justice) and the personal communication between the employee and their line manager during this process (interactional justice) influences how fair the employee believes the appraisal process to be (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013).

Tyskbo (2020) conducted a multi-actor perspective study on the implementation of performance appraisal based on interviews with HR managers, line managers and employees, and organisational documents. The results showed that line managers faced three types of complexities during implementation, i.e., dilemmas, understandings, and local adaptations. These jointly contributed to a divergence arising between the performance appraisal as intended and the performance appraisal as implemented. This divergence became associated with how line management involvement was restricted to the local context and the initial stages of the Performance Appraisal process, highlighting how HRM practices can contain both devolved and non-devolved elements.

2.6 Research Gaps and Research Objectives

Despite the increased level of interest in line manager implementation over the past decade, the phenomenon remains under-explored and there are still gaps in our understanding and the next two sections illustrate the gaps and how they inform the focus for this thesis.

2.6.1 Line manager HRM implementation: Research Gaps

Gap 1: Notwithstanding the scholarly discourse of line manager responsibility for the implementation of HRM practices and the importance to both the performance of the firm (Huselid, 1995; Huselid et al., 1997) and employee perceptions (Alfes et al., 2013), we still know very little about how these practices are implemented by line managers and what constitutes effective implementation processes (Bondarouk et al., 2018; Fu et al., 2020;

Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Although there may be clarity in terms of the intended HRM practices, those that are ultimately implemented by managers and how they are perceived by employees may differ (Nishii & Wright, 2008). As stated by Sikora and Ferris (2014: 273), "the best HRM practices have little performance impact if the line managers can't or choose not to implement them".

Gap 2: Studies to date contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on line manager implementation of HRM practices. From the multi-level perspective Makhecha et al., (2018) and Vermeeren, (2014), show how their actions link to performance outcomes (Katou et al., 2021) the place of the line manager in the context of other actors i.e. employees or HR is also considered (Alfes et al., 2013; Bondarouk et al., 2016; Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018). We do know that managers vary in their implementation of HRM practices (Kurdi-Nakra & Pak, 2022; Kuvaas et al., 2014; Trullen et al., 2020). However, what we do not know is why managers choose to behave the way they do, and we do not understand specifically how line managers respond to HR requests, and, the choices they make, the reasons for those choices and the impact of those choices from an emotional perspective. Obtaining greater understanding of these factors is important as line managers are recognised as a critical linchpin that enacts intended human resource management policies (Bondarouk et al., 2016; Wright & Kehoe, 2012) and translates paper plans into operational reality (Child & Partridge, 1982). In this 'critical linchpin' role it is especially important as the findings from this thesis can help inform HR by addressing the emotions experienced by managers to enable better outcomes for the manager, employees and ultimately the organisation.

2.6.2 Research question and objectives

This research contributes to the literature by examining the line manager perspective to HR implementation, and therefore answers calls to investigate the lived experience of

line managers (Bondarouk et al., 2018; Fu et al., 2018). From a theoretical perspective, it is intended to take a multi-theoretical perspective and in doing so extend and integrate more theories to understand this complex situation. The study builds and integrates AMO, attributions and utilises translation theory to extend current theoretical approaches to line manager implementation. Therefore, as a result of the gaps identified, the objective of this study is to investigate how line managers shape and influence HRM practice during the implementation process. Addressing the specific questions of (1) what are the choices managers make in response to the implementation of HRM practices?; (2) why do managers act in the way that they do?; (3) how does this impact their implementation of devolved HRM practices?

2.7 Chapter Summary

The chapter reviewed and explored the literature of the line manager as implementer of HRM practice and then moved to review the theoretical perspectives. The chapter culminated in a review of performance management and the role of the line manager in the context of enactment. The objectives of this study were then presented.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology for this research study. Methodology addresses the how's, what's, and why's of the research procedures (Zhang & Shaw, 2012) and has been defined as "the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the methods or method adopted" (Saunders et al., 2015: 720). More concisely, it is the strategy or plan of action which lies behind the choice and use of particular methods (Crotty, 1998). Thus, methodology is concerned with why, what, from where, when and how data is collected and analysed (Scotland, 2012).

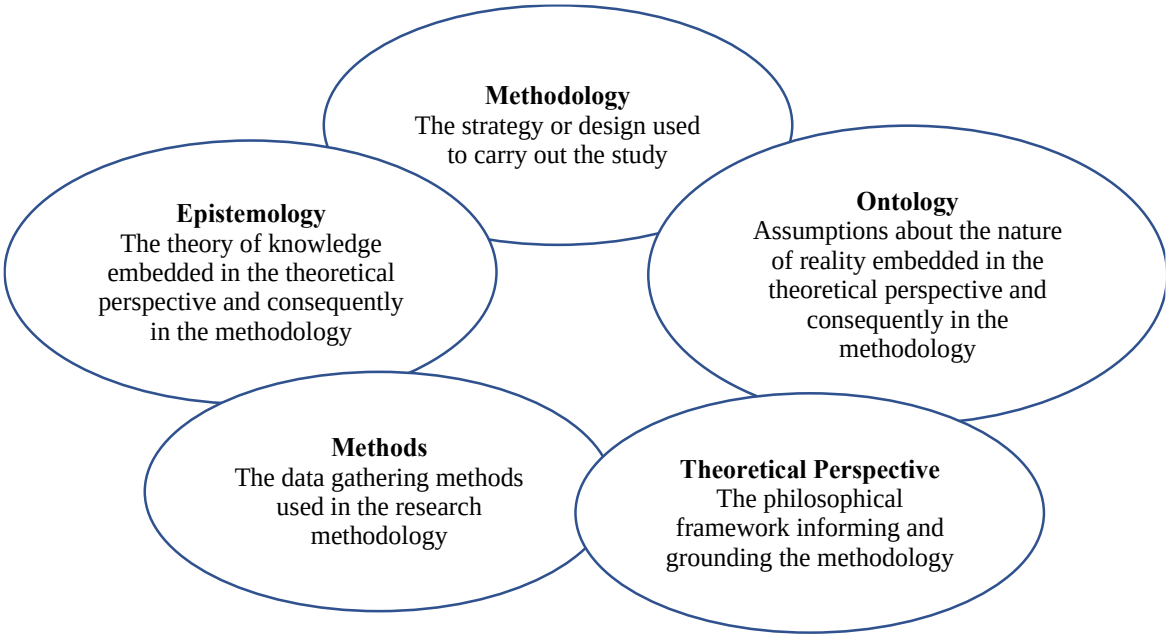
The chapter commences with an introduction to the research philosophy with a focus on interpretivism. Following that, the qualitative research design is provided. The next section includes the sampling process and sample profile. The process of data collection is then reported including the interview guide and data analyses process. Finally, a chapter summary is provided.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Social scientists approach the world through a set of assumptions based on the nature of the social world and how it can be interpreted (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Ontology, epistemology, and methodology combine to create a framework and a unified view that together can be called a paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Ontology refers to study of being, the nature of being and our ways of being in the world (Crotty, 1998). Epistemology relates to knowledge, what constitutes knowledge, and to the processes through which knowledge is created (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Epistemological and ontological assumptions should be embedded in the research, the theoretical perspective deployed in the research,

and in the research methodology used in the study, (Quinlan, 2011). This interconnectedness is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Elements of the research process



Source: (Crotty, 1998: 15)

This paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a world view that defines for its holder, the nature of the world, the individuals place within it and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It has been asserted that having a clear paradigmatic stance helps guide research design decisions and also helps justify these decisions (Maxwell, 2009). For others, the paradigms for social research are shifting beneath our feet and research is deemed a more creative craft than an "obsequious adherence to methodological rules" (Miles et al., 2014: 48). The researchers' views are aligned with the latter, and she is also aware that one of the important questions for any researcher to answer, is the paradigm within which work should be broadly situated. Consistent with the researcher's philosophical position, this study examines in detail how realities are experienced and thus

the researcher chose to conduct an inductive qualitative study, a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It "consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 4). In inductive exploration, the research setting is selected for its ability to reveal observable phenomena that generate novel theoretical insights (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Consequently, the researcher sought a context that would allow the researcher reveal observable phenomena that could generate theoretical insights into the implementation of HRM practices by line managers.

Based on the open nature of this project, i.e., *how,* and *why* line managers implement HRM practices and specifically performance management, the underpinning research philosophy is interpretivism. Interpretivism is derived from hermeneutics a term drawn from theology (Von Wright, 1971). When imported into the social sciences, interpretivism is concerned with the theory and method of the interpretation of human actions (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Interpretivism is directed at understanding phenomena from an individual's perspective, "investigating interaction among individuals, as well as the historical and cultural contexts which people inhabit" (Cresswell, 2013: 8). It also predicates that what passes as social reality does not exist in any concrete sense but is the product of the subjective and intersubjective experience of individuals. The interpretative social theorist, attempts to understand the process through which shared multiple realities arise, are sustained, and are changed (Morgan, 1980). Similarly, in management research, "interpretivism is based on a life-world ontology that argues that all observation is theory and value-laden and that investigation of the social world is not, and cannot be, the pursuit of detached objective truth" (Leitch et al., 2010: 69). It is argued that it is necessary to reclaim interpretivist methods for organisational research to portray more closely ''the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the

social world" (Van Maanen, 1979: 539). In other words, interpretivism views individuals as complex people, not merely objects to be measured by numbers.

The ontological position of interpretivism is relativism (Scotland, 2012). Relativism is the view that "reality is subjective and differs from person to person" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 110). In other words, individuals experience the same reality in varied ways, and they often behave in different ways. This study aims to understand how line managers implement HRM practices, and accordingly assumes that line managers will differ with respect to what they pay attention to and how they perceive and use HRM practices. This approach is consistent with similar research endeavours that focus on answering the question of *how* line managers implement HRM (Keegan & Den Hartog, 2018; López-Cotarelo, 2018). In addition, interviews, an interpretative research method, were applied in this study to generate qualitative data, yielding insight and understandings of behaviour, and explaining actions from the participant's perspective.

Qualitative research enables researchers "explore the material practices that make the world visible" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: 4). Concepts are explored and understood through interaction between researchers and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and qualitative research is essential for uncovering deeper processes in individuals, teams, and organisations, and understanding how those processes unfold over time (Bluhm et al., 2011). It has been argued that qualitative research has four defining characteristics: 1) it occurs in natural settings, 2) data is derived from the participants' perspective, 3) it is flexible/reflexive, 4) design can be fluid to match the immediate situation (Lee et al., 1979). In qualitative research, phenomena are not reduced to simplistic interpretations, but new layers of understanding are uncovered as phenomena are thickly described (Scotland, 2012). Thus, qualitative approaches are well suited to study complex subject areas and in particular "how" and "why" questions (Suddaby, 2006).

The researcher adopted a phenomenological focus, in order to explore the phenomenon of line manager implementation, openly and in-depth, acknowledging individual differences, whilst not placing value judgements on those differences. Phenomenology is an inductive qualitative research tradition rooted in the 20th century philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) a German mathematician and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Heidegger a student of Husserl developed interpretive phenomenology by extending hermeneutics the philosophy of interpretation, whilst Husserl was a proponent of a descriptive approach (Reiners, 2012). This differs from using phenomenology to philosophically justify methods of qualitative inquiry in line with the approach used by Husserl. (Patton, 2015). Applying a phenomenological focus (using the approach of Heidegger) to this study is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how they experience realities.

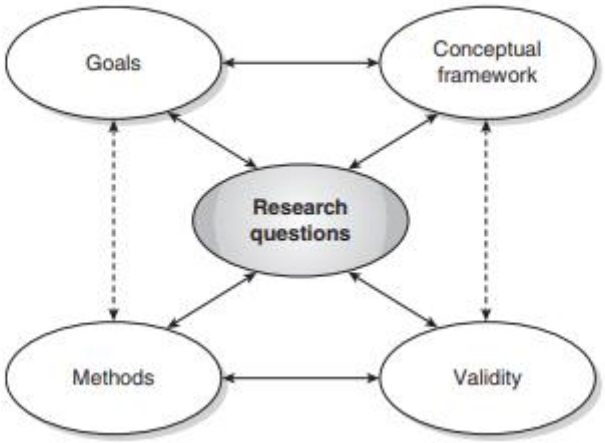
In order to answer the research question and explore how and why managers make decisions about implementing HRM practices, an exploratory qualitative research design was adopted using semi-structured interviews as the method for gathering data. This exploratory approach responds to the call for more research to empirically investigate the lived experiences of line managers (Bondarouk et al., 2018; Fu et al., 2018) and the choices they make in implementing HRM practices (López-Cotarelo, 2018). This study also enhances theoretical perspectives of line manager implementation of HRM practices and addresses the lack of theoretical development in this area (Steffensen et al., 2019).

3.3 Research Design

Research design describes the framework for the collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of data to answer the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Therefore, a carefully chosen and appropriate research design is crucial for bringing rigor to the research process and facilitates the production of new and relevant knowledge (Gioia et al., 2013).

The researcher has chosen the model of design proposed by Maxwell (2009) as a guide to help frame this thesis (Figure 3.2). There are numerous research design models that are similar (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Miles et al., 2014), but the model proposed by Maxwell creates an added valuable dimension by conceptualising the relationships between these elements and illustrating the interdependencies.

Figure 3.2. Interactive Model of Research Design



Source:(Maxwell, 2009: 217)

The model design displays five interactive design components that together are essential for a coherent research study and are represented in the chapters of this thesis. At the core of the study are the research questions, connecting and providing the anchor for all other elements. The upper triangle in the model is a closely integrated unit consisting of the goals and the context of a study and these are contained in Chapter 1 (the introduction) of this thesis. The *goals* have a clear relationship with three elements; firstly, with what is already known about the phenomena being studied, secondly the existing theoretical frameworks and thirdly the intended contribution, all of which are discussed in Chapter 2 (literature review) of this thesis.

The bottom triangle of the model is also closely integrated and includes the "methods" enabling the answering of the research questions, and also dealing with plausible validity threats to those answers (Chapter 3 and 4 of this thesis). The plausibility and relevance of particular validity threats, and the ways these can be dealt with, depend on the questions and methods chosen. Finally, the research paradigm (addressed in this chapter) reflects the philosophical beliefs of the researcher and influences how research should be conducted and how data are collected and analysed (Crotty, 1998; Danermark et al., 2002)

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3.3.1 Methodological rigor

In recent years there has been a renewed call to increase rigor of qualitative research (Harley & Cornelissen, 2020; Pratt et al., 2020). Within quantitative research, authors have focused on tests of confirmability, reliability, internal validity, external validity, and utilisation (Miles et al., 2014). It has been posited that the notions of reliability and validity applied in quantitative research are not directly comparable in qualitative research (Pratt et al., 2020; Van Maanen, 1979). However, this does not remove the requirement to adhere to the canons of quality and researchers have a responsibility to ensure they conduct good rigorous research (Patton, 2015). Research is deemed good if it adds to management knowledge (Lee et al., 1979). Within interpretative research, Angen (2000) posits that the concept of validity must be reconfigured. These new configurations of validity depend on

qualities inherent in the researcher and the research process and uses the term ‘‘validation’’ rather than ‘‘validity’’ to emphasise ‘a judgement of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research is a continuous process (Angen, 2000: 387). Validation within interpretivist research has implications for the three domains of the research process namely, research design and data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. In these domains the researcher explains the aim and rationale for the research, sets this in the context of prior knowledge of the topic, justifies the choice of interpretivist methods as the most appropriate, explains the research process in terms of case selection, gaining access and data recording, sets out the process of data analysis, and clearly identifies the implications of the findings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

Ethical validation of any interpretivist research encompasses the moral stance of the researcher and is reflected in the focus on understanding meanings in everyday existence and on supporting the development of self-awareness in the research participants (Leitch et al., 2010). It requires that the researcher provide ‘‘practical, generative, possibly transformative, and hopefully nondogmatic answers to the questions we pose as researchers’’(Angen, 2000: 389). Introducing the notion of *data trustworthiness* in qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest a set of criteria including: *credibility, transferability, dependability,* and *confirmability*.

- *Credibility* refers to the likelihood that credible findings and interpretations will be produced. From an interpretive perspective, rigor is about telling authentic and plausible stories (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). In this study *credibility* was enhanced by the inclusion of data validation (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Kornbluh, 2015). De-briefing with supervisors was also employed as a strategy to increase rigor and validate activity.

- *Transferability* refers to the generalisability of findings across social settings. Indeed, qualitative findings tend to be orientated in contextual uniqueness and whether or not findings "hold in some other context, or even in the same context at some other time, is an empirical issue" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 315). The burden of proof for such a comparison lies with those who want to compare findings to other contexts more than with the original investigator (Pratt et al., 2020). To aid other researchers in assessing transferability to other milieu, the researcher adhered to the advice to produce *"thick descriptions"* (Geertz, 1973) which are rich accounts allowing other researchers to make judgements about the possible transferability of findings (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In this study, the contextual detail and the richness of descriptions allows others to determine the transferability of ideas to other situations.
- *Dependability* refers to the rigor with how interpretations are made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, dependability was assured through 1) the iterative process of debate and negotiation about interpretations with the supervisors; 2) the researcher implemented regular checks with supervisors, recorded activities, maintained a research diary, and face validity checks on coding activities by supervisors were conducted, all supporting the dimension of building rigor in the analysis.
- *Confirmability* is concerned with ensuring that the researcher acts in good faith not allowing biases impact activities. As the researcher has a strong practitioner background, she was conscious of the need to minimise confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998) that could develop from her own lived experience. A number of iterations of interview protocol with a supervisor ensured the questions asked did not contain biases.

3.3.2 Positionality of the researcher

Qualitative researchers need to 'position' themselves in their writings and a feature of good qualitative research is the expression of positionality by the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This is the concept of reflexivity in which the writer is conscious of the biases, values and experiences that they bring to the research study (Cresswell, 2013). At the start of this study, the researcher was aware that the explicit identity of the researcher within studies has received wider theoretical and philosophical support as a source of valuable insights (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Smith & Berg, 1987; Strauss, 1987). This is not a licence to impose assumptions but an opportunity to raise it to consciousness and use it as part of the inquiry process (Reason, 1988).

In order to manage this tension effectively the researcher adopted the specific strategy of creating a researcher identity memo (Maxwell, 2012). This activity involved reflecting on, and capturing in writing, the different aspects of her experience that were potentially relevant to the study. In Appendix H the identity memo the researcher recorded before embarking on field work is provided. This memo served as a continuing reference point and a reminder of the researcher identity and purpose to this academic exploration.

3.3.3 Practice selection and the unit of analysis

In exploring how line manager implement HRM practices, a key decision in this study was the determination of which HRM practice would be chosen for examination and whether one practice or multiple practices would be appropriate. Grouping HRM practices into broad categories, and thus jointly dealing with them as HRM bundles, is problematic since there are differences in how these practices take shape as they are implemented (Kuvaas et al., 2014; Makhecha et al., 2018; Steffensen et al., 2019) and tend to vary significantly (López-Cotarelo, 2018; Truss et al., 1997). This also means that the way in which line managers are involved in HRM is contextual and dependent on certain conditions, e.g., which HRM practice is being discussed (Brandl et al., 2009; Holt Larsen

& Brewster, 2003). It is suggested that therefore we can expect diversity to prevail as regards how line management involvement in HRM work takes shape (Keegan et al., 2012).

Thus, treating various HRM practices as an HRM system, instead of assessing individual practices, may not fully advance our understanding of how line managers are involved in, and implement, HRM activities (Steffensen et al., 2019; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018). Therefore, after much consideration, the practice broadly termed performance management but specifically performance appraisal was selected. A number of considerations helped to determine the final choice. Firstly, the practice should be familiar and widely applied; secondly, the practice is one that should be devolved to line managers for implementation regardless of industry; and thirdly, it needed to be a HRM practice that was considered to support the strategy of the organisation (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii & Wright, 2008).

Taking these factors into account, the practice of performance appraisal was chosen because of the importance to the organisation. The literature reveals a number of reasons for this importance. First, the degree to which organisations are successful in engaging and motivating employees, has shown to be an important lever for organisational success (Chuang & Liao, 2010; Crook et al., 2011; Liao et al., 2009; Takeuchi et al., 2007). Secondly, grounded in the notion that many other HR decisions, e.g., those related to promotions, pay rises and career developments, are based on the results of the performance appraisal process, it is one of the most important HRM practices (Boswell & Boudreau, 2002; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Kampkötter, 2017). Thirdly equitable use is linked to higher commitment of employees (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013).

Clarity about the unit of analysis is needed to select a study sample (Patton, 2015). The unit of analysis is that which is being analysed, or "a spatially bounded phenomenon observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time" (Gerring, 2004:

342). The unit of analysis is also dictated by the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Two choices existed in relation to deciding the unit of analysis for this study, the practice of performance appraisal or the line manager. As the performance management process differed slightly across the interview population due to different contexts: and as the aim of the study was to study in depth the choices and actions on individual line manager, the researcher concluded that the line manager was a more appropriate depiction of the unit of analysis. Focusing on the individual line manager, the qualitative interviewing method enabled the researcher "to learn about perceptions and reactions known only to those to whom they occurred" (Weiss, 1995: 10) in this case the individual responsible for enacting the HRM practice.

3.4 Sampling Process and Sample Profile

Sampling involves decisions about what people to interview and within what social events and settings (Miles et al., 2014). There are many types of sampling strategies and purposeful sampling is appropriate for this study. in the following sections the approach to sampling is described and justified.

3.4.1 Sampling process

Qualitative studies require a different sampling approach to quantitative studies and are differentiated by breadth and depth required. In comparison to the quantitative positivist perspective, statistical representation and scale are not considered key considerations in the qualitative paradigm (Patton, 2015). Random samples, a feature of the positivist paradigm, are not appropriate as they do not reflect the complexity of social processes that have their own logic and coherence (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Miles et al., 2014) Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalisations (Patton, 2002). It is however necessary to demonstrate rigor and precision in the sampling method by presenting the salient characteristics of the chosen sample (Miles et al., 2020).

The aim of this study is to understand how line managers implement HRM practices. Line managers are defined as people managers who hold responsibility for direct reports. This responsibility includes motivating developing and having responsibility for the overall performance management of these employees. For the purpose of the sample, line managers were selected who were responsible for managing performance (e.g., performance appraisal) for five or more team members. These could be managers at different levels of the organisation but who fulfilled the required sample criteria.

As stated, this study is interpretivist in nature, the purpose of which is to yield in-depth insights (Patton, 1990). In this regard, this study adopts purposeful and criteria-based sampling, which is a commonly used sampling method in qualitative studies (Miles et al., 2020; Bryman & Bell, 2018). The logic and power of this approach lies in selecting information-rich situations for in-depth study. These are situations from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus labelled, purposeful sampling.

The field work for this study was conducted between September 2020 and August 2021 when the world was still in the grips of the global COVID-19 pandemic. There was disruption in terms of the global economy, a threat to the viability of many organisations and also the challenges that remote working was presenting. During this period of instability, some organisations froze many HRM practices, including performance management. To ensure an appropriate sample, the researcher applied two criteria to identify and contact organisations that could participate in this study. Firstly, in order to minimize the impact of the pandemic on this project, companies that were in relative stable industries and not suffering the economic impacts of the pandemic such as downsizing or excessive fluctuation in customer demands, were identified to participate, i.e., insurance, financial service, and public sector. Secondly, it was important to establish if line managers

implemented HRM practices Therefore, the researcher contacted a number of HR managers in the identified industry sectors to understand their own context. In order to gain access to research sites, the researcher used her professional network, and directly approached HR leaders in those sectors defined above. She outlined the purpose of the research study and invited them to participate. Three organisations (COM_A, health insurance, COM_B financial services and COM_C, public organisation), agreed to involve their companies in the study.

After the HR managers had confirmed that their line managers implemented HRM practices in their organisations at the time of this study, the researcher sent a number of criteria to the HR managers and asked them to randomly select participants for this study using these criteria (i.e., use of criterion-based sampling). Two main criteria related to line manager HRM implementation: 1) participants needed to be line managers and have at least five team members reporting to them; and 2) participants must have the responsibility of conducting performance appraisal, i.e., reviewing team members' performance and providing feedback to their team members. These two criteria ensured that the participants would have extensive experience in implementing performance management in their organisations. This is important to verify i.e., the process of confirming, checking and being sure; (Morse et al,. 2002), the sample selection, supporting reliability and rigor in qualitative studies.

In addition, as maximum variation sampling was the method of sampling used (Patton, 2015); gender, tenure and function diversity were requested of the HR managers across the selected participant group. In addition, HR managers selected line managers who represent the management/Performance Management implementation spectrum rather than the top line managers who they perceived to be good at Performance Management implementation. In the invitation sent out by the HR managers to their line managers, the

introduction to the project and the assurance about confidentiality were included. The line managers who agreed to participate were advised to contact the researcher directly. Doing so reassured the participants of the confidentiality of their involvement.

HR managers were requested to provide a list of up to 15 line managers who met the above listed criteria. 37 line managers' names were returned by the HR managers, in which 11 from COM_A; 18 from COM_B and 8 from COM_C. After contacting the selected line managers, 3 withdrew their participation due to other work commitments and role changes, resulting in 34 line managers in the final sample. It is worthwhile to note that the sample size is comparable with other qualitative research projects related to managers HRM implementation e.g., 15 in Fu et al., (2022) and 24 in Keegan & Den Hartog, (2019).

There is little consensus among qualitative research scholars regarding an adequate sample size for interview based studies, i.e., the number of interviewees required (Sandelowski, 1995). Rather than focusing on the number of interviewees, contemporary qualitative researchers argue that quality trumps quantity (Pratt et al., 2020; Pratt et al., 2022). These methodological experts also suggest that sampling procedures and sampling decisions are fully justified, explained, and described (Patton, 2015), as accomplished above.

3.4.2 Participant profile

The final sample involved 34 line managers from diverse backgrounds, consistent with the criteria outlined earlier. Table 3.1 presents the profile of participants in this study. Among the participants, 64% were female, tenure ranged from under one year to over twenty years, with an average tenure in role of seven years. There was also diversity in the functional responsibilities of the sample with a number of functions and departments represented.

Table 3.1 Participant Profile

Participant ID	Title	Gender	Tenure (Years)
Com_A1	Finance Manager	M	16
Com_A2	IT Manager	M	2
Com_A3	Sales Manager	F	20
Com_A4	Operations Manager	F	10
Com_A5	Business Training Manager	F	5
Com_A6	IT Manager	F	16
Com_A7	IT Manager	F	15
Com_A8	Customer Service Manager	M	6
Com_A9	Customer Service Manager	F	9
Com_A10	IT Manager	F	19
Com_A11	Debt Manager	M	18
Com_B12	Finance Manager	F	20
Com_B13	Team Lead Accounts Payable	F	21
Com_B14	Cost Management Team lead	F	23
Com_B15	Finance Operations Manager	M	6
Com_B16	Business Change Manager	F	14
Com_B17	Operations Manager	F	18
Com_B18	Claims Manager	M	11
Com_B19	Fraud Manager	M	10
Com_B20	IT Manager	F	33
Com_B21	Systems Manager	M	20
Com_B22	IT Manager	M	15
Com_B23	Business Acquisition Manager	M	37
Com_B24	Customer Service Team Lead	F	13
Com_B25	Travel Services Manager	F	14
Com_B26	Customer Services Manager	F	9
Com_B27	Operations Manager	F	22
Com_B28	Business Retentions Manager	F	17
Com_B29	Customer Contact Manager	F	6
Com_C30	Corporate Services Manager	M	4
Com_C31	General procurement Manager	F	5
Com_C32	Print procurement Manager	F	1
Com_C33	IT Procurement Manager	M	6
Com_C34	Training Manager	F	7

Note: Com_A, Com_B and Com_C indicate that participants are from the three companies.

3.5 Data Collection

Qualitative inquiry collects data potentially from a range of different sources, e.g., in-depth interviews, focus groups, open-ended questions on surveys, social media postings and

direct observations. In this section a description is provided of the chosen method for data collection, the semi-structured interview.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

The interview method is widely adopted in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). It has been described as "a production site of knowledge" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2015). Such knowledge is socially constructed in the interaction of the interviewer and interviewee. This production process continues through transcription and data analysis. The interview therefore is key to eliciting valuable data and rich descriptions to help understand the phenomenon under investigation (Kvale, 1996).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method for this study, allowing reflexivity but within a guiding framework, thus allowing the interviewer to pick up on interesting things said by the interviewee (Bryman & Bell, 2007). They are defined as interviews with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale & Brinkman, 2015). Semi-structured interviewing enables the researcher to make better use of knowledge producing dialogues compared to structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In structured interviews, the interviewer uses a formal interview guide and is more visible in the process itself (Kvale, 1996). In preparing for the interviews, the researcher was cognisant of the power asymmetry in qualitative research interviews and also mindful that the interview is a means of providing descriptions and narratives for interpretative purpose. In order to elicit the view of the line managers on how they implement HRM practices, this study adopted a semi-structured interviewing method.

There are three reasons for the use of the semi-structured interviews as a mode of inquiry. Firstly, the researcher can make most use of the knowledge-producing potential of dialogues and the opportunities to follow up on angles that could prove interesting or illuminating (Patton, 2015). Secondly, semi-structured interviews provide access to

informants' inner perspective, including thoughts, beliefs, decisions, and emotions (Weiss, 1994), Thirdly, as an interviewer the researcher is a knowledge producing participant and therefore requires flexibility to follow lines of inquiry rather than be constrained by structure (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). This phenomenological approach to interviewing enables a focus on descriptions of how and what people experience in the real world, which is aligned to those proponents of phenomenology, a variation of interpretivism (Kvale, 1996; Melnick & Beaudry, 1990).

Researchers are expected to conduct their research with care, be truthful in the reporting of findings and be open to criticism (Hillebrand & Berg, 2004). The respect for ethical principles is required during the entire scientific research process, including the dissemination phase (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Most importantly, researchers are expected to maintain the confidentiality of respondents. To address these ethical aspects of this study, the researcher obtained explicit formal consent from prospective participants and strict ethical guidelines were followed. Each participant was provided with an information leaflet and introductory email in advance of the interview with a request for their confirmation and agreement to participate to be returned via email. Permission was sought to audio record the interview and all participants agreed. It is essential that those taking part in a study have a clear understanding of the research project and its risks, including what the researcher is doing in the field (Klykken, 2021). This study was approved by the internal ethics committee in Trinity Business School, Dublin.

3.5.2 Interview guide

The interview protocol for this study consisted of a consent form, an information leaflet and an interview guide. These documents are presented in Appendix E Interview Protocol. Participants were provided with the consent and information forms but were not privy to the interview guide. The interview guide was prepared to ensure consistency across each interview but allowed the interviewer the flexibility to probe further topics of particular

interest (Kvale, 2019). Interview guides reinforce the phenomenological and interpretivist approaches, and capture individuals' lived experiences (Van Maanen, 1995), with a view to evoking a comprehensive account of the experience of each person (King & Horrocks, 2012).

The interview guide was informed by the literature and theoretical work regarding line manager implementation of HRM practices. Table 3.2 presents the research focus, the questions in the interview guide, as well as the theoretical support for these questions. Questions were constructed to address the gaps identified in the literature and to probe the line manager perspective. Open questions were posed to allow the participants to share their insider perspectives and use their own terms to explain the processes. Specifically, these questions were posed to surface their understanding of the requests made by HR of line managers, their view of those requests, and how they implemented those requests. The interview guide also ensured that the same lines of enquiry were followed with each respondent and that the critical topics were covered in the interviews. The creation of a guide also allowed the interviewer to conduct the conversation in a spontaneous way, whilst probing and elaborating on particular subjects.

The construction of the guide involved a number of iterations to ensure that the questions would elicit views on the subject areas and to eliminate ambiguity in the phrasing of questions. The guides consisted of key topic areas and within those key topic questions, further points to probe were included. Each interview began with a standard set of questions establishing role and tenure. Prior to going live with the interview guide, it was piloted with two colleagues who were experienced with HRM research and the interview method, as well as an experienced HR professional. Some refinements were made to the guide. These refinements included subtle re-wording of questions, to ensure clarity for the participants.

Table 3.2 Theoretical Underpinnings of the Interview Guide

Research focus	Interview questions	Theoretical support
Background information	Tell me about yourself.	(Keegan & Den Hartog, 2018; Sikora & Ferris, 2014)
The purpose of performance management	In your opinion what is the purpose of the PM process? To what extent do you think the PM process achieves the intended purpose? And why do you think that is the case?	(Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Tyskbo, 2020; van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018)
Implementation process	Can you help me to understand how you implement the process, i.e., how the current performance review process is implemented?	(Khilji & Wang, 2006; Makhecha et al., 2018; Sikora et al., 2015; Trullen et al., 2016)
Potential varying of the process	Are there any circumstances where you might vary the process. If so, why? Do you let anyone know about any changes that you make? Can you give me an example of when that happened? What was the outcome?	(López-Cotarelo, 2018; Trullen et al., 2020; Vermeeren, 2014);
Impediments and challenges	Is there anything that prevents you from implementing any part of the annual process? What part do you not implement? Are there any challenges for you in implementing the process?	(Bondarouk et al., 2009; Fu et al., 2018)
Changes they would like to make	Are there any changes you would like to make to the process?	(Ryu & Kim, 2013; Suhail & Steen, 2021)
Perceptions of HR	Generally, how do you think people in the business respond to HR initiatives?	(Bos-Nehles et al., 2020; Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Currie & Procter, 2001)

3.5.3 Interview process

The data collection for this study was conducted between September 2020 to August 2021. Due to the lockdowns from the pandemic, meetings took place via Zoom. During the interviews, the researcher sought to establish rapport and build trust with the respondent via

reinforcing the confidentiality of the interview, and being non-judgemental (Byram & Bell, 2007). Meantime, in building that rapport, the researcher was conscious to maintain neutrality and achieve the correct balance in order that valuable time was not consumed with pleasantries.

There is some disagreement in the literature regarding the ease of establishing rapport using video-conferencing technology. On the one hand, it may be more challenging to establish rapport using online platforms when compared to face-to-face interviewing. This is because visibility of the full body is lacking, and possible physical cues, such as nervousness conveyed by hand behaviours might be missed (Cater, 2011). On the other hand, studies have found that online participants were typically more responsive, and built rapport more quickly, than face-to-face participants (Tuttas, 2015). This is because, in the online environment, respondents were found to be more comfortable in their own surroundings or more receptive to discussion (Tuttas, 2015). In another study, interviewees preferred online rather than face to face interviews due to rapport, convenience, and simplicity/user-friendliness (Archibald et al., 2019). It has been suggested that with our ever-growing digital societies, and with the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic, people have become familiar with various platforms and applications to transmit at least some of their daily interactions and communication online (Lobe et al., 2020). In this study, participants were already familiar with online meetings and remote working during the lockdowns. They were comfortable and accustomed to using their cameras and online interview platform such as Zoom. In this regard, participants were accessible, without any connectivity issues and the experience was time efficient.

When interviewing research participants, Alvesson, (2003) suggests a reflexive approach, i.e., an approach where there are multiple lines of thinking and ways to understand the subject matter are preferred. This approach allows interviewees to describe

their experiences and understanding using their own vocabulary. During the interviews, the researcher was alert to the importance of adhering to the topics in the interview guide as well providing the participants with flexibility and space, so as not to influence nor lead the interviewee, but to follow the informant and let them lead the investigation of the research question (Gioia et al., 2013). During the interview, the researcher used a combination of introductory, follow-up and probing questions ensuring a focus on open-ended questions to elicit interesting perspectives. The researcher was respectful of pauses in the conversation allowing the interviewee time to reflect and break the silence themselves.

3.6 Data Analyses

After each interview, the recordings were logged in a data log that included the creation of a reference code for the purposes of anonymity and details of the length of interview. The interviews ranged from 40 to 55 minutes. The next steps involved the transcription of recordings, and a review of the scripts against the tapes to ensure accuracy. They were then reviewed to assess the data quality emerging from the discussions prior to commencing of detailed analysis. At this stage, the researcher wrote memos to reflect on observations and capture ideas. Musings at this stage, although often inelegant, can contribute to the development of codes in the analysis stage (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016).

3.6.1 Thematic analysis

This study adopted thematic analysis as proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006, 2020, 2021) and this choice is consistent with the interpretivist orientation of this research. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes (Boyatzis, 1998) and those themes become the categories for analysis (Grodal et al., 2020). Braun and Clarke suggested six steps in thematic analysis: 1) familiarising oneself with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining

and naming themes and 6) producing the report. Further detail of these steps is included in Appendix D

Despite the six-step approach, thematic analysis is not a linear process but a flexible method "that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of "reality"" (Braun & Clarke 2006: 81). It is recursive, where movement is back and forth through the phases and like other approaches to thematic analysis, it is a process that develops over time (Ely et al., 1997). Further refinements of the approach have encouraged researchers to embrace reflexivity and creativity as assets in knowledge production (Braun & Clarke 2019, 2020). Taking a reflexive approach enables the creation of quality coding and theme development from the dual processes of immersion or depth of engagement, and distancing, allowing for time and space for reflection (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This flexibility is appealing as it has been suggested that conducting qualitative analysis using rigid templates can be detrimental, as strict adherence can mean that researchers do not recognise moves they should take that could contribute to enhancing theory (Pratt et al., 2020). Figure 3.3 illustrates how these phases were applied in this research; the framework was enhanced through reflexivity and iteration, which are discussed below.

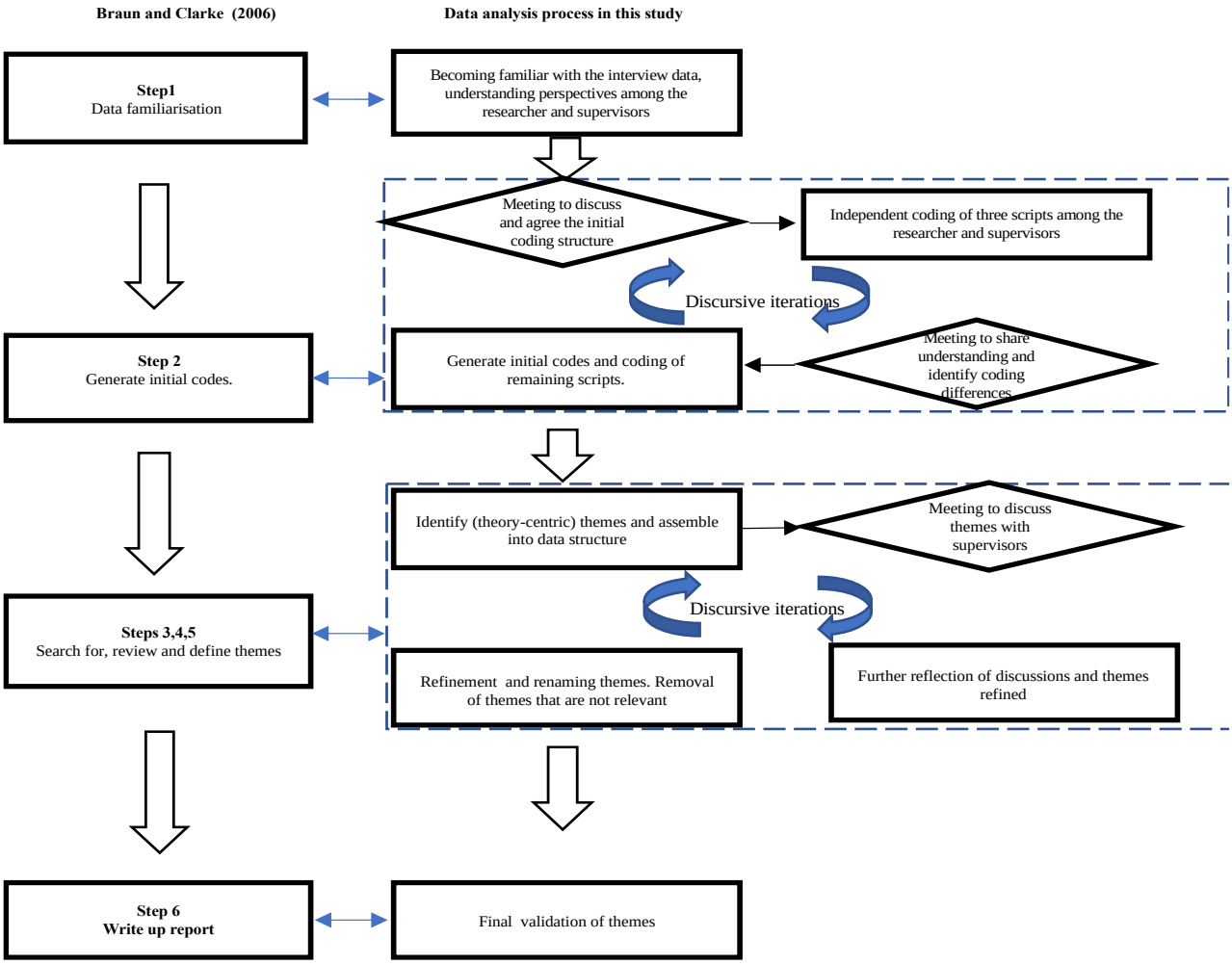
3.6.1.1 Familiarisation with data

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcription of scripts became an important familiarisation activity in this project (Reissman, 1993). Some researchers argue that transcription should be seen as a "key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology" (Bird, 2005: 227) and an opportunity for meanings to be created (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).

The researcher immersed herself in the data through repeated reading of a hard copy of the scripts and listening to the recorded conversation to ensure accuracy of transcribed material. This was also important to ensure colloquialisms were picked up in the

transcription process and that all scripts were accurate. During this phase, the process of memo writing commenced and marking ideas for coding that would be revisited in subsequent phases. Reading the scripts in this way gave the researcher a sense of the data corpus and also provided the opportunity to observe initial patterns.

Figure 3.3 Data Analysis Process



3.6.1.2 Using data analysis software

The use of qualitative analytical software logs the data movements and coding patterns that emerge through the study. Digital copies of all interview transcripts were entered into NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version R1, 2020). Using data analysis software has numerous benefits. The project was easily accessible for the researcher's supervisors and enabled the researcher to easily access the data, code the data, sort statements by themes and higher-order theoretical categories manifesting in the data.

The use of data analysis tools supports efficiency of data management and analysis but leaves the analyst firmly in charge (Fielding et al., 1998: 167). The software also can be used as a tool for transparency and audit purposes, both of which are important considerations of the trustworthiness and plausibility of the research study. The software supports but does not replace the researcher in the methodological principles of interpretation and the task of conducting analysis and drawing conclusions from the data. Once this stage was completed coding commenced.

3.6.1.3 Generating initial codes

A code is conceptualised as an analytic unit or tool, used by researchers to develop themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020). The process of coding is part of analysis (Miles et al., 2014), involving the organisation of data into meaningful categories (Tuckett, 2005). Coding refers to "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998: 63). To build trustworthiness in the analysis phase, three transcripts were independently coded at the start of the analysis process by the author and the supervisory team drawing from the grounded approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Once completed, the researcher and the supervisory team met to compare and contrast findings and calibrate units of meanings. This

was particularly useful as it highlighted areas of divergence, convergence and also was important as a learning exercise as for the researcher. Adhering to the flexible nature of thematic analyses, the researcher was regularly challenged during these coding phases by the supervisors and urged to step back and reflect on codes that were produced. It has been recommended that the researcher document their progression through iterations of coding in order to track the evolution of codes (Byrne, 2022) and the researcher followed this suggestion and created coding files within Nvivo to demonstrate the evolution of the coding process for this study. An extract from the coding book is available in the appendices (see Appendix E).

An example of how coding evolved through this iterative process is provided in this example relating to the reasons managers acted in particular ways when implementing the process. Through cycles of coding and discussion, the codes where shaped to provide sharper definitions, some codes were merged, and others consigned to a "car park" as these were deemed not relevant to informing the research questions. Following this process, the researcher commenced coding the remaining scripts and during this period further meetings took place with the supervisors, in order to challenge and review the researcher's analysis and discuss the early patterns in the codes. During this time, the researcher continued with memo writing as a method of questioning, reflecting, and also recorded decisions in a research diary.

3.6.1.4 Searching, reviewing, and defining themes

Themes are where the interpretative analysis of the data occurs, and in relation to which, arguments about the phenomenon being examined are made (Boyatzis, 1998). Themes can also be conceptualised as categories (Grodal et al., 2020). Similar to themes, they do not adhere to linearity but are characterised by iteration, detours, and regression (Boyzatis, 1998). During these phases of analysis, the aim was to identify interesting aspects

in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set. Employing a theoretically driven, semantic approach in which themes were identified within the explicit meanings of the data, codes were organised around a relative core commonality, or central organising concept (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The ultimate aim was to graduate from describing data to theorising the significance of patterns and broader meanings (Patton, 2015).

In this study, the researcher applied a reflexive approach and moved iteratively through the data either dropping, merging, or splitting categories . All the time, the researcher sought to ask questions, focused on puzzles that the data was revealing. Focusing on puzzles has been recognised as an important process when developing theory (Grodal et al., 2020) and the researcher considered how the data was telling the overall story in relation to the research question (Braun & Clark, 2006). In meetings with supervisors, more clarity emerged about the story the data was showing. Themes were robustly discussed, and the meetings provided an opportunity to clarify discrepancies. The theme development and generation cycle is provided in Appendix G.

A particular example of the iterative process that took place during this stage is exemplified by the discussions that took place around the interpretation of the data in relation to the sub theme of "reasons". Initially this was presumed to be applicable for just one clearly identified theme: *championing*, but the question was raised as to whether this was a valid interpretation. Further analysis and reflection revealed this to be relevant in other situations too. This iterative phase resulted in a series of themes, sub-themes, and finally three distinct topics that revealed how managers approach the implementation of HRM practices, i.e., championing, curtailing, and translating which are presented in the Findings chapter in details.

3.6.2 Research rigor in thematic analysis

In using thematic analysis, (Braun & Clark, 2006) advise that it is important to make a number of decisions to ensure rigor in the analysis. Firstly, researchers need to answer what counts as a theme, and maintain a consistent approach to the interpretation of themes across the study. In this study the 'keyness' of a theme was judged by its relevance to answering the research questions, for example, the analysis produced several examples of managers avoiding implementation and this is relevant and key to answering the research questions.

Secondly, researchers need to determine the type of analysis they wish to undertake, across a data set or exploring one particular theme in depth (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the researcher chose a rich thematic description of the entire data set. This enabled the identification of the predominant or important themes, rather than focusing on just one theme in depth. For example, in this study, by conducting analysis across the data set, the researcher was able to identify the diverse approaches taken by managers when implementing performance management practice.

Thirdly, the researcher needs to decide the 'level' at which themes are identified: it has been suggested that they should be identified either at a semantic level, or at a latent level and interpretation is exclusively associated with the latent approach to theme identification. (Boyatzis, 1998). However, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that interpretation is an important element of a semantic approach. This analytical process has involved a progression from *description* where the data has been organised to show patterns in semantic content to *interpretation* where the significance of patterns is placed in a theoretical context (Patton, 1990). The analysis identified how managers *feel* about the implementation of HRM practice; this finding was possible by adopting a semantic approach and moving to interpretation of significant patterns that became evident in the analysis.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the research design for this study which was informed by the epistemological and ontological assumptions with the interpretivist tradition. The sampling process and sample profile was provided. Detailed information was also provided for the data collection, including the use of semi-structured interviews, interview guide development, and the interview process. Lastly, thematic analysis was introduced, followed by the illustration of how it was adopted by this study.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

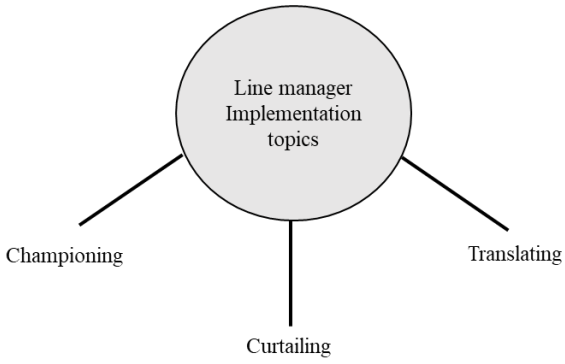
4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter describes the findings from the research study into how line managers implement HRM practices and the drivers for the decisions that they make. The chapter begins with an overview of the insights generated from the research phase. It is then followed by an explanation of each key theme that the data analysis has produced along with relevant supporting quotes. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

4.2 Overview of Findings

The focus of this study was to explore how line managers implemented HRM practices and the chosen practice for the purposes of the study was the performance management process. The results from the thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2020) as outlined in the previous chapter, revealed three levels in the data structure, that is, topics, themes, and sub-themes. The three main topics for line managers' implementation of HRM were labelled: 1) *championing*, which describes that line managers enthusiastically embraced the performance management practice; (2) *curtailing*, which describes that line managers reluctantly accepted responsibility for implementation or sought ways not to implement the performance practice; and (3) *translating*, which describes that line managers made changes to better suit their environment during the implementation of performance management for differing reasons (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Line Manager HRM Implementation Topics



The labels of *championing* and *curtailing* are used, as they are suitable descriptors and reflect the activities of the line managers appropriately. The label of *translating* is rooted in translation theory where management ideas are transformable constructs when in the hands of local actors (Callon, 1986) and are altered as they travel across space and time, as opposed to simply being diffused in a linear process (Czarniawska, 2004; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Across each of the three topics, there were common patterns within the data, and these were labelled *behaviours* and *reasons*, and these form the main themes within each topic. Each main theme was created from a number of sub-themes which were identified during the analysis. Figure 4.2 presents the data structure for the topics, themes, and sub-themes for line manager performance management implementation. Table 4.1 presents the definitions for each sub-theme.

4.3 Topic 1: Line Manager Championing Performance Management

The data analysis revealed a topic that was labelled *championing*. In this study, *championing* is used to describe line managers who enthusiastically embraced the performance management practice. This label was chosen as it depicted how managers described their experience with the practice, i.e., they were vigorous in their implementation and enthusiastic in their reporting of how they implemented the practice. The managers who "championed," were managers who diligently followed the process, adhered to the requirements of the HR function, and conducted performance management with their team members. Within the championing topic, there were two themes that came to light in the analysis that describe how line managers championed the implementation of the practice. They are labelled *behaviours of championing*, which has two sub themes and the second theme, *reasons for championing* which has six different sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes are now described.

Figure 4.2 Overview of the Thematic Analysis Results

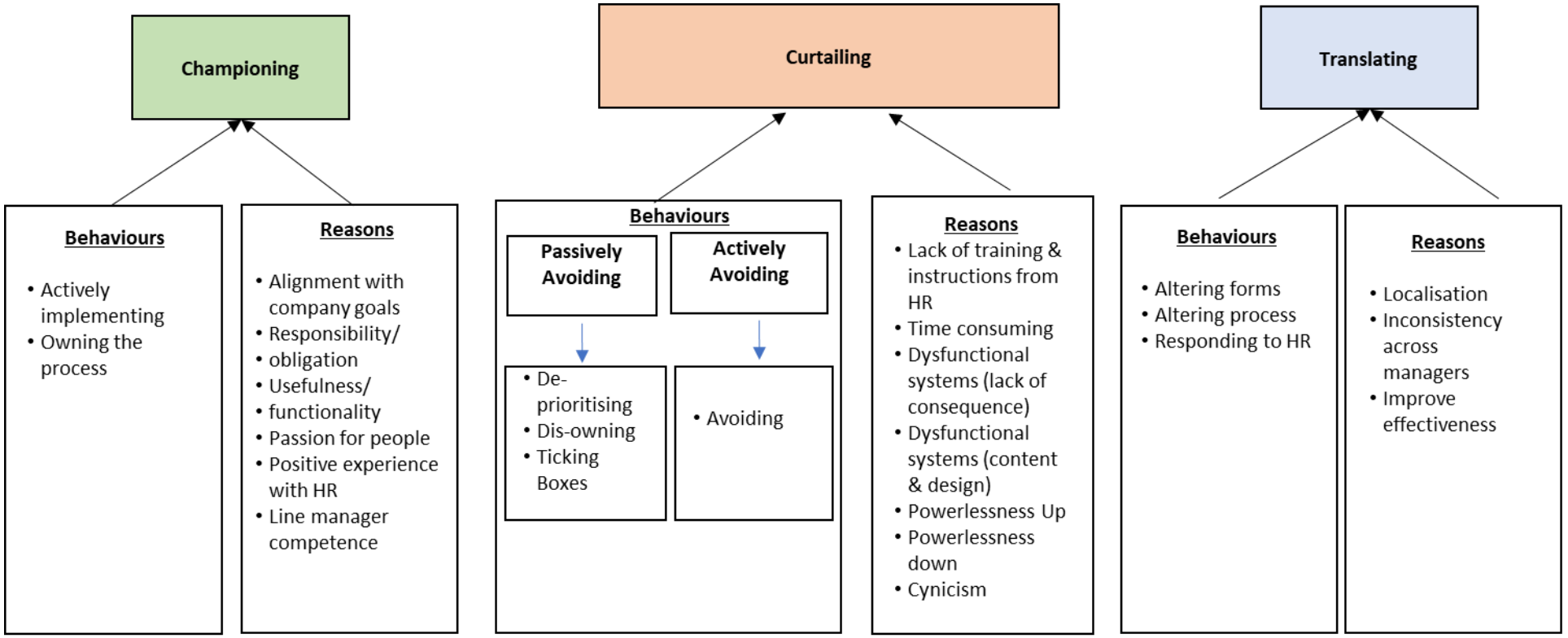


Table 4.1 Definitions of Subthemes

Topic	Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Championing *Enthusiastically embracing the performance management practice*	Behaviours of championing	Actively implementing	Adhering to HR requirements
		Owning the process	Being accountable and responsible for performance management practice
	Reasons for championing	Alignment with company goals	Drawing connections between performance management with the company goals.
		Responsibility/obligation	Perceived responsibility and obligation to develop employees
		Usefulness/functionality	HR resources make implementation possible
		Passion for people	Caring for and showing interest in employees
		Positive experience with HR	Expressing trust , faith, and belief in HR
		Line manager competence	Self-assurance in implementing the practice
Curtailing *Reluctantly accepting responsibility to implement or choosing not to*	Behaviours of Curtailing	**Passively Avoiding**	Finding ways to eschew the practice
		De-prioritising	Deflecting
		Dis-owning	Not taking responsibility
		Ticking Boxes	Going through the motions
		Actively Avoiding Avoiding	Going through the motions without commitment
	Reasons for curtailing	Lack of training or instructions from HR	Lacking adequate skills, experience, or instructions from HR
		Time consuming	Implementation involves too much time & work
		Dysfunctional systems – (Lack of consequence)	Sanctions not in place for non-implementation & no link to compensation
		Dysfunctional systems – (Content and design)	Hard to implement forms.
		Powerlessness up	Feeling impotent and powerless to improve the performance management practice
		Powerlessness down	Inability to deliver positive outcomes for employees
		Cynicism	Expressing scorn, pessimism, or disparaging
Translating *Line managers making changes during implementation to better suit their environment*	Behaviours of Translating	Altering forms	Altering forms and templates provided by HR
		Altering process	Altering the process outlined by HR
		Responding to HR	Managers responses to HR about the alterations
	Reasons for translating	Localisation	Improving relevance to the local context
		Inconsistency across managers	Existing managers doing it inconsistently
		Improve effectiveness	Managers taking control to improve efficacy

Behaviours of championing: Describes how line managers adhered to the practice and implemented the practice within their teams. How they did this, is described in two different ways and these sub-themes are labelled; (1) actively implementing, i.e., adhering to HR requirements and (2) owning the process. i.e., being accountable and responsible for the performance management practice.

Reasons for championing: The data revealed that line managers had six reasons for championing and these reasons which are-sub themes, are labelled: (1) alignment with company goals, (2) responsibility or obligation, (3) the perceived usefulness or functionality of the practice, (4) a passion for people, (5) positive experience with HR and (6) line manager competence. Figure 4.3 presents the illustrative quotes, sub-themes, and themes for the topic of championing. Table 4.2 presents additional illustrative quotes for these sub-themes and themes for the championing topic. In the following sections, the themes of behaviours of and reasons for championing are discussed in detail.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Behaviours of championing

In this study the data analysis revealed that line managers behaved in two different ways when championing the implementation of performance management, (1) actively implementing, and (2) owning the process. In other words, some line managers adhered to HR requirements and actively implemented the performance management practice whilst others behaved in a way that suggested they took ownership by being accountable and demonstrating responsibility for the performance management practice. In other words, these managers not only implemented but took active ownership of the practice. Both perspectives, illustrate behaviours of championing.

4.3.1.1 Actively implementing

Line managers indicated that they actively implemented the performance management practice within their teams, ensuring that expectations were clarified at the start of the process. In this extract, the manager describes in detail, the actions that he/she takes in the

implementation process, focussing on clarity and regular meetings with his/her team members:

> *"We have a clear performance contract. I meet with all my team members. As I said, the third week in January, and we set it out and we agree it. So that there is no ambiguity. They are clear. They are measurable, they are realistic [goals]. They [team-members] understand it. And then that forms part of our performance monthly meetings every month to make sure we are on track with our goal setting, and they are on track with our KPIs." (V16)*

Line managers provided accounts of how they systematically completed the key components of the performance management practice, e.g., objective setting, arranging, and completing mid-year and end of year reviews. They also furnished the practice by incorporating fortnightly one to ones, as is the case for this manager:

> *"For me as a manager, I would complete [performance management for all of them [team members]. I would complete the objective setting, mid-year review, end year review. I also have fortnightly one-to-ones with each of my team members." (P9)*

Similarly, another line manager described how they adhered to the instruction and training she had received from HR in terms of the best approach to conducting the one to one reviews with her team. HR had suggested that he/she adopted a sequential approach to the implementation of one-to-one meetings.

> *"I would have my one-to-one with my manager and then I would have my teams' one-to-ones." (V21)*

This manager (O32) uses the phrase "firmly believe", suggesting that they are internalising the belief that the practice is important.

> *I also firmly believe in constructive and appreciative feedback*." *(O32)*

This same manager reinforced the importance of actively implementing the personal development features in the application of the practice. They refer to the employee involvement who may be "pointing out areas" where the employee wished to progress.

> "*So, I, see a PMDS [organisational performance management tool], or performance review process, as personal development for the individual…so if they want to progress and they are pointing out areas. (O32)*

In this interview manager (P4) described to the researcher how he actively ensured performance levels are made really clear and that there are "no surprises" at any stage throughout the performance management process. He illustrates desire to help his team members to achieve what they would want in terms of their own aspirations for performance.

> *"I do think that the key part of the one-to-ones in between the performance rate review, is to really make sure that there's absolutely no surprises and like I said at the outset, that the expectations are really, really clear as to what they need to do to get what they want." (P4)*

4.3.1.2 Owning performance management

This sub-theme reflects line managers being accountable and taking responsibility for practice implementation. 'Owning' differs from the previous sub-theme, 'actively implementing' as we now see a different level of engagement of the practice, with managers being confident in terms of their implementation, indicating that they 'own' or indicating that they have co-ownership of the practice. These sentiments are illustrated in this example from manager (O31), in this quote they clearly demonstrate that they see the implementation of the practice as part of their management role. Here they describe owning the practice and taking responsibility for communicating, giving feedback and meeting development needs. Similarly with managers (P10) and (P6) they clearly indicate their responsibility for performance. Manager (P10) links it to performance of the business and also suggests that they perceive a responsibility even when the person is involved in projects or other initiatives and manager (P6) indicates that they invest personally in the process.

> *"It's my role as a manager to make sure that I'm communicating and getting updates and meeting their developmental needs*." *(O31)*

"I am responsible for ensuring those people deliver policy, business requirements [their job] in a timely fashion, and on all of the various company projects and initiatives that they also work on." (P10)

"I personally invested a lot of time and making sure it works to that purpose." (P6)

Figure 4.3 Illustrative Quotes, Sub-theme, and Themes for Championing

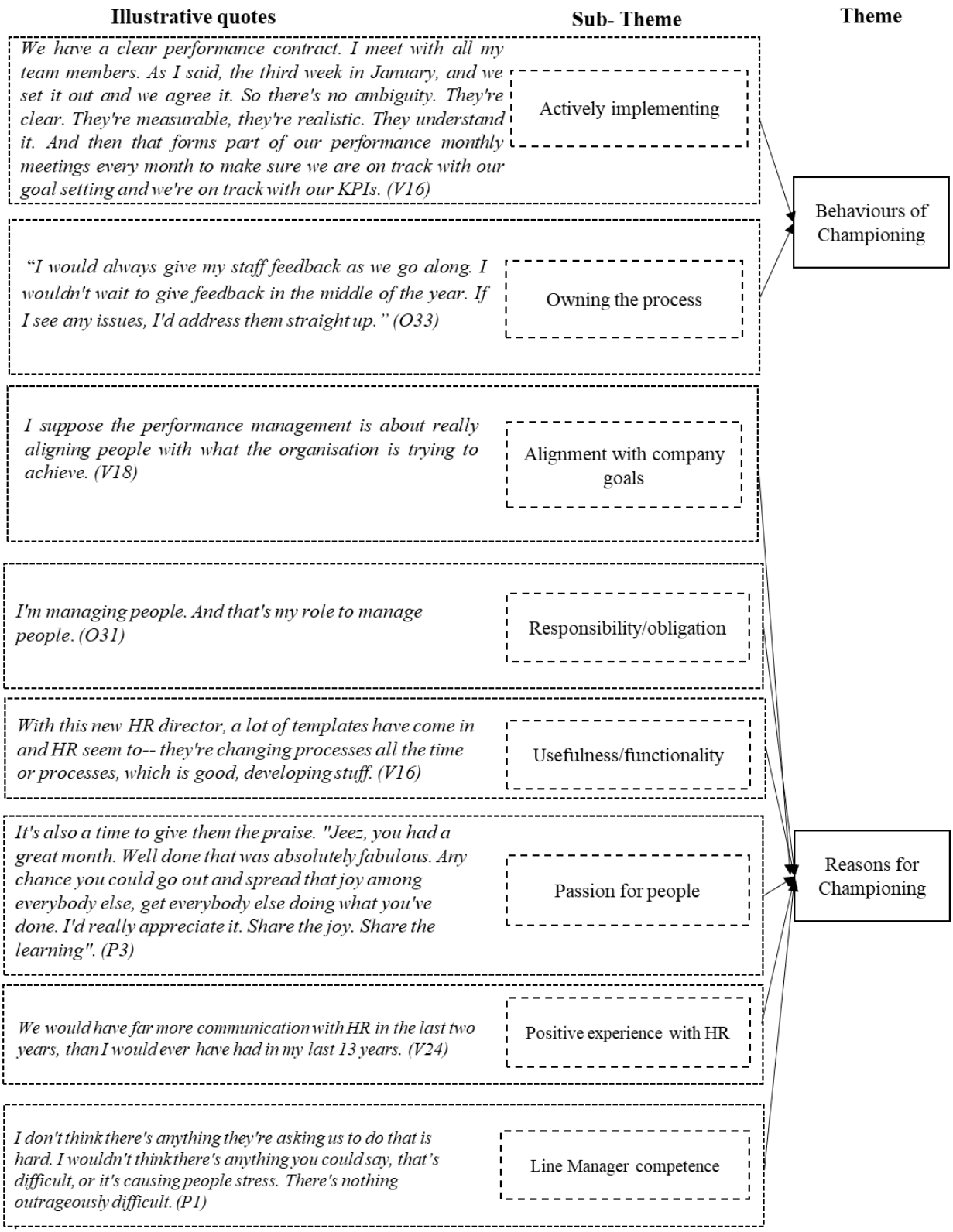

Illustrative quotes
Sub- Theme
Theme
We have a clear performance contract. I meet with all my team members. As I said, the third week in January, and we set it out and we agree it. So there's no ambiguity. They're clear. They're measurable, they're realistic. They understand it. And then that forms part of our performance monthly meetings every month to make sure we are on track with our goal setting and we're on track with our KPIs. (V16)
Actively implementing
"I would always give my staff feedback as we go along. I wouldn't wait to give feedback in the middle of the year. If I see any issues, I'd address them straight up." (O33)
Owning the process
Behaviours of Championing
I suppose the performance management is about really aligning people with what the organisation is trying to achieve. (V18)
Alignment with company goals
I'm managing people. And that's my role to manage people. (O31)
Responsibility/obligation
With this new HR director, a lot of templates have come in and HR seem to-- they're changing processes all the time or processes, which is good, developing stuff. (V16)
Usefulness/functionality
It's also a time to give them the praise. "Jeez, you had a great month. Well done that was absolutely fabulous. Any chance you could go out and spread that joy among everybody else, get everybody else doing what you've done. I'd really appreciate it. Share the joy. Share the learning". (P3)
Passion for people
We would have far more communication with HR in the last two years, than I would ever have had in my last 13 years. (V24)
Positive experience with HR
I don't think there's anything they're asking us to do that is hard. I wouldn't think there's anything you could say, that's difficult, or it's causing people stress. There's nothing outrageously difficult. (P1)
Line Manager competence
Reasons for Championing

Table 4.2 Additional Illustrative Quotes, Sub-Themes, and Themes for Championing

Theme	Sub-theme	Additional illustrative quotes
Behaviours of championing	Actively implementing	*Some of them [team members], their one-to-ones could be very well focused with what is going on, but a lot of them I do try focus on their development…. what they are interested in. (P9)*
		So, then we look at populating a draft of the PMDs, so then we can have a discussion around training and developmental areas as well. And that links back into the competencies, and I spend a lot of time on understanding for each of the grades, what are the competencies? And what are the appropriate ones to tie into the various objectives. And that is another conversation. (O31)
	Owning the process	*I would be very conscious and would document the one. It could be an informal chat, but I normally put it in people's diary's so I can say, "Okay, we're going to have a little chat tomorrow at three o'clock. (P3)*
		I am holding myself accountable [for managing my people's performance] and making sure that people understand how I use the system and my expectations of it. (P6)
Reasons for championing	Alignment with company goals	*We set out what are our 2021 objectives as a company and then as a business unit, and we have to be aligned in performance management. As a business, we should be aligned to the organisational strategy (V16)*
		The purpose of the [performance management] process is to align with the company overall goal and objectives. Essentially, whatever the bank's overall statement is that should just trickle down. (P3)
	Responsibility Obligation	*I suppose the purpose of it [performance management] is to set out goals and objectives for my staff member at the start of the year, and then to evaluate their performance against those goals and objective as the year goes on. (O33)*
		Obviously, [performance management process] is for career progression. I think about what they [my people] have done really well over the year. I discuss what they consider to be their next move. When the next role does come in, they are prepared and ready to roll and to go for it. (P7)
	Usefulness functionality	*I suppose the good thing as well, with the objective setting as well for me, is that it helps me set out a plan over the year as well. (P1)*
		They are a good unit, because of the new structure then they are changing everything. (V12)
	Passion for people	*I enjoy my job. I like managing people. I really like coaching others. (P4)*
		I do not want to meet any member of my team unprepared, that is not me. Even with the goal setting, I have to think about the person, their job, what would be applicable goal-wise, not doing their goal setting for them, but certainly having a think about what their goals

	should be, or at least inputting or having a bit of input with them and setting them together. (V20)
Positive experience with HR	*You can trust them [HR]. (P3)*
	There are steps, as I said, in the right direction with development programs, and that sort of thing. (V17)
Line manager competence	*To be honest with you, 90% of what you are going to do…..you know as a manager what is needed anyway. (P6)*
	Look, there has not been too many ratings I have given that I have been overturned, which is probably something that I look at myself as a marker of knowing my own staff and knowing my own people that I manage. (P4)

4.3.2 Theme 2: Reasons for championing

Reasons for championing provides an understanding of why the line managers championed the implementation of performance management. In this research study, the data analysis revealed six reasons for championing behaviours: (1) alignment with company goals, (2) responsibility or obligation to their team members, (3) the perceived usefulness or functionality of the practice and of HR in supporting the practice, (4) a passion for people, (5) positive experience with HR, and (6) line manager competence. These are discussed in greater detail below.

4.3.2.1 Alignment with company goals

A reason for managers implementing the performance management practice is for the alignment with the company goals or strategy. In their interviews, managers described those connections. Line managers who perceived that there was an alignment between performance management with company goals were clear about the purpose, vision, and objectives of the company. For example, one line manager clearly articulated the sources of information that informed the strategic direction and then how performance management was linked to it. This manger's role involves delivery for government and the reference this stakeholder in their explanation.

"So, we're briefed on our statement of strategy. We have multiple sources for what we're supposed to be doing. We got the programme for the government, and we got our business plan which we feed into [performance management] as well." (O31)

Similarly, another line manager focused on the importance of performance management being connected to the strategy.

"As a business, we should be aligned to the organisational strategy. We shouldn't be going off in silos and doing our own thing when it's not aligned to the overall goal of the organisation." *(V16)*

Lastly, the below line manager reinforced the need for alignment between company goals and individual goals in performance management.

"*You do, obviously, need to align to the organisational goals [in the performance management], the goals would be more around the direction of the company which is always what we're doing anyway." (P6)*

4.3.2.2 Responsibility/obligation

This sub-theme refers to how line managers perceived that they have responsibility and obligation to implement performance management to meet the needs of their employees. In this example manager *(O32)* reflects on the experiences they have had with previous managers and uses this to describe the responsibility they feel for implementing the performance practices with their own people.

"I think what I try and do is to think about [my] past leaders and how they made me feel, and then I try and apply that to what I'm doing in my day-to-day [to my people]." (O32)

In the next example, the line manager described his desire to ensure that the employees knew how they were performing at all stages through the year. He described how he wanted to ensure they were fully informed of their performance levels.

"They [the employees]essentially know what they're getting before they get it [the year-end review]and that is because you have spoken to them at least once a month for the entire year and told them, you haven't necessarily told them what the rate's going to be, but you've told them, "This is what you're

doing well, this is what you [the performance review] need to improve on." (P4)

4.3.2.3 Usefulness/functionality

This sub-theme describes how one of the reasons why managers are able to implement the practice is because HR resources make implementation possible through the provision of tools and support from the HR people who were available to help them in implanting the practice. In these quotes, the line managers describe this support. In the first interview manager (O34) These resources came in the shape of the tool itself.

"It just offers you the support the structure to frame those conversations. So that's why I think it's actually a very useful tool." (O34)

The below line manager provided a different perspective and referred to the HR people who worked with the businesses.

"I think the HR guys make themselves very visible to the branches. We know we have their support." (P3)

4.3.2.4 Passion for people

Some managers showed caring for and also showed deep interest in their employees' success. For example, line manager (V17) when reflecting on their own experiences in the past with previous managers articulated why they wanted their own people to have a better experience of performance management.

"Isn't there a saying about always do better for the people who report to you, than what you receive yourself……. I have had experiences where I mightn't have been very happy with the review, It's usually totally the lack of input from the manager. I obviously wouldn't want my people to have that experience, because it's not going to motivate them and that's what it's all about. motivating people to do the best job." (V17)

Another line manager demonstrated their passion for people by articulating the importance of making people feel valued.

"I want them to feel that they have an active and a very important role in delivering for the organisation. They can see that the tasks we're doing are

important. They are valued and what they are doing is clearly linked to something tangible." (O31)

4.3.2.5 Positive experience with HR

This sub-theme encapsulates managers expressing trust, faith, and belief in the HR department. In their interviews line managers cited positive experiences with their colleagues from the HR department and also their HR business partner and they expressed faith and belief in the ability of HR to support the business. .Line managers expressed optimism and hope in HR and this manager describes his/her experience with the HR department and describes how they are integrated and active in the business.

> *"They [HR] make clear they're not just sitting in and listening to what you're saying, but they are very much part of the ecosystem now, e.g., they are embedded in the business." (V23)*

In the following examples, manager (P5) recounts how HR colleagues are applying an approach of continuous improvement to the performance management process. Where there was a new HR Director recently appointed there was an optimism about "change for good" as a result of the initiatives they saw being implemented. They were also optimistic about the future and proactive in their communications with the HR function. In another example, manager (V29) expresses enthusiasm at the developments following the appointment of the current HR Director to the business and her influence on people growth and development.

> *"I think every year they [HR] look at how they can make improvements to the process." (P5)*

> *"I know Alex [pseudonym], who has taken over as our HR Director just early last year, it's a change for good.. She's very big on performance management, career & progression, personal growth and how you develop within yourself for a different role or where you want to go next. I think that's an area that I'm excited to see what happens." (V29)*

Another line manager has had good experiences throughout the years with HR and particularly the responsiveness from the function.

"In all my years here, I always felt you could call them, email them (HR) you'd always get a response." (P6)

4.3.2.6 Line manager competence

This sub-theme describes managers self-assurance in implementing the practice. In other words, because it is easy for them to do so, they have confidence in their own capability of carrying out the practice. For context, Boyatzis (1982) defined competency as: 'an underlying characteristic of an employee (i.e., a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one's self-image, social role, or a body of knowledge) which results in superior performance' (p. 21). One line manager spoke confidently of how he/she believes he implements the performance management practice.

"*I don't think there is anything they are asking us to do that's hard, it's not outrageously difficult." (P1)*

Similarly, another line manager expressed the importance of performance management as skill when implementing it and how they have acquired this skill over the years.

"I genuinely believe that strong performance management is a skill. It's a skill I developed over time. I think lots of us have probably made mistakes along the way because you know, nobody hands you a real book. It's learned experience." (P6)

4.4 Topic 2: Line Managers Curtailing Performance Management

The data analysis revealed a topic called *curtailing*. In the context of this study, it is used to describe line managers deflecting or not taking responsibility for performance management. Two themes were identified within this topic, behaviours of curtailing and reasons for curtailing.

Line managers curtail in different ways including *actively avoiding and passively avoidin*g which presented through three behaviours (1) de-prioritising (2) disowning, and (3) ticking boxes. The data also revealed that line managers had seven reasons for acting in

these ways: (1) lack of training and instructions from HR, (2) time consuming, (3) dysfunctional systems, occurring because of a lack of consequence in the event of non-implementation, (4) dysfunctional systems associated with the design of the performance management practice or the content, 5) powerlessness up, 6) powerlessness down, and 7) cynicism. The following sections elaborates these in more detail.

Figure 4.4 presents the illustrative quotes, for sub-themes and themes for the topic of curtailing. Table 4.3 presents additional supporting quotes for these sub-themes and themes for the curtailing topic. In the following sections, the themes of behaviours of and reasons of curtailing and their sub-themes are discussed in detail.

4.4.1 Theme 3: Behaviours of curtailing

The analysis revealed that avoiding could be either passive or avoided in a more active way. Line managers behaved in different ways when curtailing the implementation of performance management including (1) passively avoiding which included: de-prioritising, disowning and ticking boxes; and (2) actively avoiding. In other words, some line managers deprioritised it or removed themselves from owning the process and others just went through the motions by ticking boxes, whilst others actively avoided implementing the performance management practice.

4.4.1.1 Passively Avoiding

4.4.1.1.1 De-prioritising

Another way that managers curtailed was by de-prioritising the activity. They did this by deflecting responsibility back to HR or by not taking responsibility for the practice themselves. In this example, a manager reacts when they are asked why they do not inform HR of his/her unhappiness with the system, suggesting that the practice is "*not in my mandate*" and he/she deprioritises the practice by suggesting that "*I have more important things to do*."

"It's not in my mandate to change the process to make it better for my team. I may not like certain aspects of it, but it's not in my mandate. …. I have more important things to do." (V21)

4.4.1.1.2 Disowning

Passive avoiding was also evidenced by managers disowning the practice by responding to his/her team members disinterest in having a conversation. By way of context, in this situation, employees are given the option through the self-service portal of requesting a review conversation. The manager describes what happens if the employee decides not to request the conversation.

"At the bottom of the screen, employees can say, you want to meet to discuss this or not? And I think a lot of people just put "no" into that field. And then…well, I can decide actually, whether I want to have the conversation with them [the employee] or not, but they've just pressed the button to say they're happy. And then that's it. So sometimes, there may not be a conversation." (O32)

4.4.1.1.3 Ticking boxes

This sub-theme is defined as "going through the motions" without real commitment to the practice. In these examples a manager suggests that performance management appraisals are held to fulfil requirements, without any real meaning.

"It's a tick box exercise, so that there is a record, as a result, there are no quality conversations happening, I haven't seen them anyway." (P5)

"You could have somebody who sees it as a tick box exercise and wants to spend 10 minutes on it." (V17)

Another manager describes how in their business unit, workarounds, and recycling, or copying and pasting from previous years, can occur as a way of completing their obligations:

"For some teams it is really only a box ticking exercise and you can find workarounds, maybe copy last year's one onto another document and then cut and paste across if you can…… If you only want to recycle somebody's [performance reviews] from last year you could probably do that. Just check that box." (O30)

4.4.1.2 Actively Avoiding

In in this example, a trenchant and active approach to avoidance is taken by the line managers who actively refuse to implement.

> *"I know of management and staff that have refused to do them [performance management reviews]. They [both managers and staff] have taken union guidance and just refuse to do it. The unions got involved then." (P3)*

Managers described instances of avoiding the implementation of the practice. However, it was notable in the conversations, that no manager directly referred to themselves as avoiding but spoke in general terms of managers or managers that they know. In this example manager (O34) reveals that managers can avoid the practice.

> "*If a line manager who doesn't check on their people and is relaxed about it [performance management], they could avoid doing it properly or do the bare minimum." (O34)*

He/she then describes how the other performance process elements, aside from the year-end review discussions, are also avoided:

> "Y*ou'll often find that it drifts until later in the year, and people are filling in their goals and objectives in April or May, or something like that. Similarly, with the annual review and the mid-year review, you know, they can drift. And I think that's because there's just not a massive amount of consequence behind not doing so. So that would be my views on it?" (O33)*

Figure 4.4 Illustrative Quotes, Sub-Themes, and Themes for Curtailing

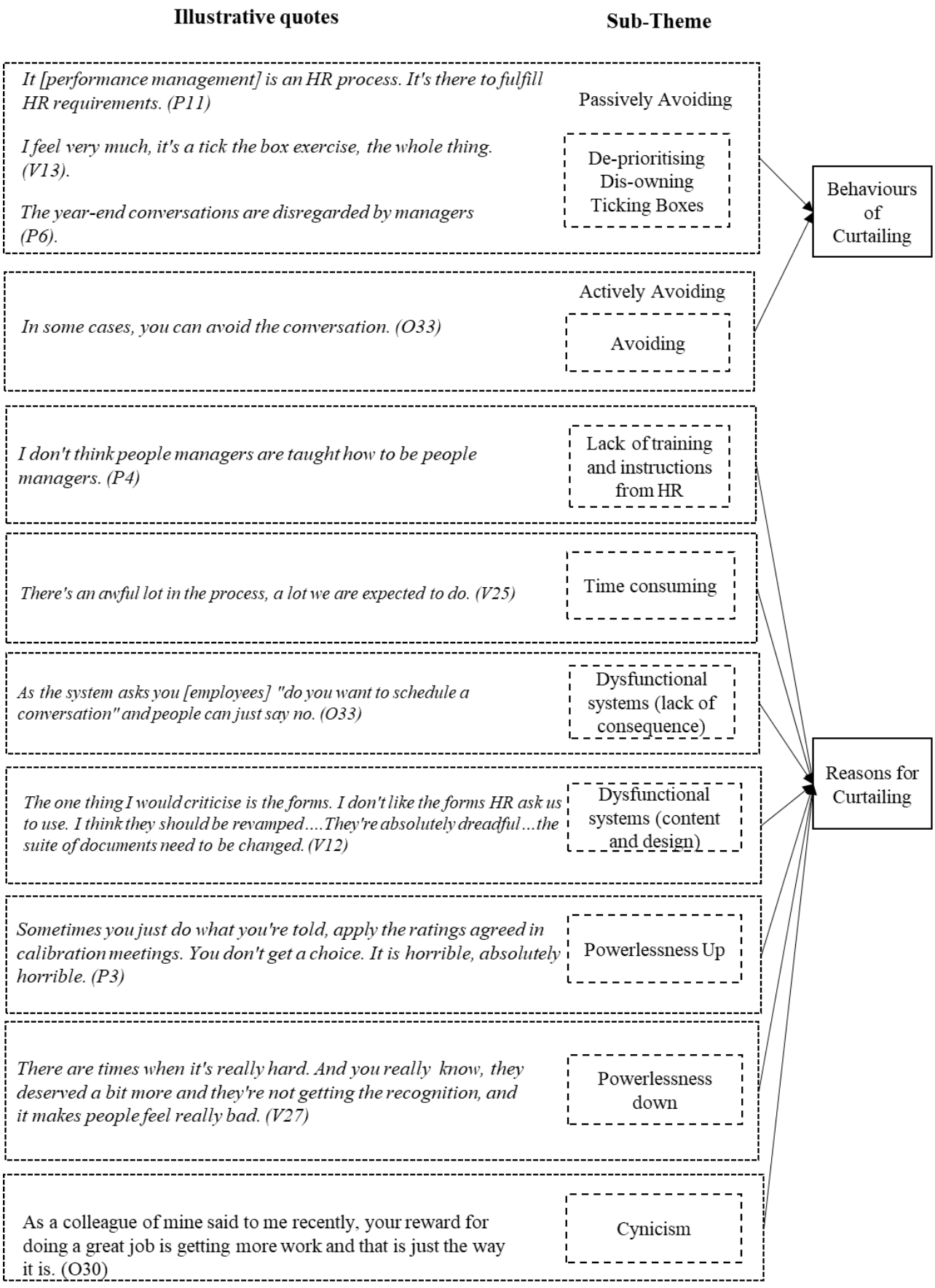

Illustrative quotes
Sub-Theme
It [performance management] is an HR process. It's there to fulfill HR requirements. (P11)
Passively Avoiding
I feel very much, it's a tick the box exercise, the whole thing. (V13).
The year-end conversations are disregarded by managers (P6).
De-prioritising
Dis-owning
Ticking Boxes
Behaviours of Curtailing
In some cases, you can avoid the conversation. (O33)
Actively Avoiding
Avoiding
I don't think people managers are taught how to be people managers. (P4)
Lack of training and instructions from HR
There's an awful lot in the process, a lot we are expected to do. (V25)
Time consuming
As the system asks you [employees] "do you want to schedule a conversation" and people can just say no. (O33)
Dysfunctional systems (lack of consequence)
The one thing I would criticise is the forms. I don't like the forms HR ask us to use. I think they should be revamped....They're absolutely dreadful...the suite of documents need to be changed. (V12)
Dysfunctional systems (content and design)
Reasons for Curtailing
Sometimes you just do what you're told, apply the ratings agreed in calibration meetings. You don't get a choice. It is horrible, absolutely horrible. (P3)
Powerlessness Up
There are times when it's really hard. And you really know, they deserved a bit more and they're not getting the recognition, and it makes people feel really bad. (V27)
Powerlessness down
As a colleague of mine said to me recently, your reward for doing a great job is getting more work and that is just the way it is. (O30)
Cynicism

Table 4.3 Additional Illustrative Quotes, Sub-Themes, and Themes for Curtailing

Theme	Sub-theme	Additional illustrative quotes
Behaviours of curtailing	Passively Avoiding	*There is an interim performance review, but we do not practice it every year. (V20)*
		There are rumours that some managers just do a round-robin, with the maximum bonus. For example, if I have a team of three, each year I just rotate who gets the maximum bonus and that way and there is no need to have conversations with anybody. (V22)
	Actively Avoiding	*It is something that has to be done and it is partly for the HR function. (P11)*
	De-prioritising Dis-owning	*I sometimes think that HR think that we have nothing to do besides people management. There is more to my role than people management and doing so on a day-to-day basis. (V21)*
	Ticking boxes	*We always just put something in the boxes, to keep HR happy. My understanding would be that HR would want us more engaged on it and not be just completing it for the sake of completing it. (P11)*
		I *think people really see it just as a tick box exercise. (O34)*
Reasons for curtailing	Lack of training and instructions from HR	*HR have seriously curtailed the training budget. Would it be too much to ask for €1,000 per person for training to help people managers do their job? (V22)*
		In the last year there has not been any real instruction or refresher courses around how to do performance management. (P1)
	Time consuming	*People tend to find it is very time-consuming to set objectives for potentially 25 people if we look across my two teams. (P6)*
		HR do not have to do the implementing…. a lot of people can see their workload as very heavy, and then when you have these practices coming….it's more work for you. (V18)
	Dysfunctional systems (lack of consequence)	*There are no quality checks .. and nothing would be said. (O34)*
		Realistically we have not used it [performance management] for the intended purpose. (P11)
	Dysfunctional systems (content and design)	*The rating favours the low performance because unless you are on a performance improvement plan, you are going to get your effective bonus. You can really be just doing the bare minimum whereas somebody who could be really pushing the boat out, they will still come out with the same rating. (V14)*
		I think the system could be made a lot easier if it were, if it were less clunky. It is quite a quite a tedious system to use. (O30)
	Powerlessness up	*I think probably regardless of my thoughts, it would be my manager's final decision and not mine. (P11)*
		We did give feedback about the process [performance management] to HR and to the SLT [senior team] and hopefully that will get through to them, I am not so sure. (P1)
	Powerlessness down	*There are some casualties every year because of this process [bell curve]. I rate my people based on 'that thing' [the bell curve] and there are casualties. Some things are within my control and others are not and that is just the way it goes. (V21)*

	I do think to get twos and ones [high ratings] in this company is very, very hard. You need to nearly be swinging out of the chandeliers. That can be quite frustrating as a people manager, because two of my team members, for me, are twos and I cannot award those ratings [due to bell curve restrictions]. (P10)
Cynicism	*Maybe that's just me being cynical, I just don't think anything will come from it. (P1)*
	I suppose there is a fear of stepping outside of what has been defined as 'this is the process that you go through' [the performance management process]….To be honest with you, it is very seldom you would deviate because you're only opening yourself up to interpretation and also to staff questioning you. (P3)
	I am probably being very negative. I am sorry. (P9)

4.4.2 Theme 4: Reasons for curtailing

The data revealed seven reasons why managers slowed down the process or reluctantly implemented the practice of performance management. These included (1) lack of training and instructions from HR (2) too time consuming (3) dysfunctional systems, occurring because of a lack of consequence in the event of non-implementation, (4) dysfunctional systems associated with the design of the performance management practice or the content (5) powerlessness up (6) powerlessness down (7) cynicism.

4.4.2.1 Lack of training and instructions from HR

Managers expressed the view that they or others lacked adequate skills or experience to enable effective implementation of performance management. One manager describes that:

> *"I haven't had enough experience….if there were some sessions prior to the start of objective setting …. I certainly would get a lot of those sessions." (P10)*

He/she then goes on to express dissatisfaction and how training would be preferable before the objective setting process,

"..Instead of just receiving an email to signal the start of the process." (P10)

Other managers also reflect on how helpful training could be and in the last example from manager (P1), the focus is specifically on guidance for dealing with underperformance.

"There's probably something that the HR could do [to help managers], maybe a webinar to tell people how you set goals and share some ways of how to do that." (V25)

"There needs to be more practical training and I'd love to see more line management support training in place. You can get promoted to any rank across the civil service with no real people skills, and you're suddenly put in front of a team." (O34)

"There needs to be maybe a bit more guidance on how to deal with underperformers and at what level you interact with HR on that. If you have someone that's performing badly, HR will say, 'we'll put them on a PIP (performance improvement plan) Well, maybe, that's a bit extreme. Is there not a less extreme approach you can do?" (P1)

4.4.2.2 Time consuming

This sub-theme describes how managers referred to the practice as involving too much time and work and the practice is perceived as a distraction or being too unwieldy to implement. One manager described the perceived burden of the activity as follows:

"People are really busy, and when you pull them away to this [objective setting or review] meeting and ask them to fill in forms, it takes a lot of time, you know. And even for people who want a high rating, they need to spend time justifying why in the forms, that takes a lot of time." (P8)

In another case a manager describes the pressures in the branch network where there are limited resources.

"*There is an awful lot of work involved in it [performance management]. Maybe half a day per person. When you're in a small branch like this one, six people, you could lose a week doing it [performance management]." (P3)*

Manager (O34) is less diplomatic in terms of his description of the process.

"*There's still a lot of fluff, as I call it, airy fairy floss that people just don't see the relevance off and they don't have time for." (O34)*

4.4.2.3 Dysfunctional systems (Lack of consequence)

Within this sub-theme, lack of consequence is evident from two perspectives. In the first construct it relates to absence of sanctions for non-implementation of the practice and in the second construct it is portrayed as an absence of a link to compensation, and therefore is perceived as providing insufficient reward to encourage high performance. The impact of non-linkage to bonus and reward is exemplified in these two examples from managers.

"Because there isn't a direct link to compensation" there is a lack of importance on the practice. .... there aren't any real consequences ...so to a certain extent they [end of year review discussions] are disregarded by managers." (O33)

"People here don't think performance management is that important, because we don't get any bonuses." (O34)

In another example, this manager refers to the quantum of the bonus and the impact on engagement.

"What I would say about it is that it's not a huge amount of money either. If someone gets a three rating, it's not going to be a significant pay increase they usually give out. It's still an increase and it's worth something, but I don't think it's big enough. I don't think it's enough to motivate people really to go above and beyond. There is a pay increase that's linked to that but it's not much really." (P1)

The second perspective of this theme i.e., no perceived sanction for lack of implementation, is illustrated in the following quotes. In the first example, manager (P2) relates how HR itself is too busy to follow up on whether the practice has been completed, and therefore there is no consequence if it is not carried out:

"*HR are often too busy to follow the processes they send." (P2)*

In this example, it appears that for this managers there isn't clarity on what would happen if they did not follow the process.

"*I don't know what would happen if you didn't follow the process." (P11)*

Another manager expresses self- awareness of his response,

> *"I know it sounds unprofessional, but if you think you don't have to do it, then why bother?" (V20)*

4.4.2.4 Dysfunctional Systems (Content and design)

Dysfunctionality was also evidenced in relation to how HR designed and operated the system, including the forms, materials, guidance notes and technology platform. One manager divulges:

> *"The user interface on the platform is very glitchy, it's not easy to use.*" *(P6)*

A particular issue within the design of the system was the operation of a bell curve and the forced ranking restriction placed by the HR department on people managers. In this quote the manager explains the operation of the forced distribution within the bell curve and sums up his/her feelings in terms of potential unfairness and the demotivating impact on people.

> *"You have ineffective, effective, superior, and outstanding, and you have one in 10 [employees] can go into outstanding, 3 in 10 can go into superior and then 6 in 10 between ineffective or effective. In the main, you're compared with people at your grade. There's a management group and a staff group. It's very demotivating for everyone, because performance payments are based on the group that you compared to and that can be a mix of levels and ability." (V12)*

Further examples are provided from other managers who express the limiting aspect of the assignment of employee ratings at the end of every year. In this interview the manager says:

> "*We had to invoke a bell curve, and lots of people didn't get their due reward. And some do better than they should."* She then discloses how she feels about the method *"With the bell curve continuing, it's not a meritocracy on how you are recognised. It's shocking." (V23)*

> "*It's like somebody can perform very, very well all year and still only get effective, which is the basic average rating, whereas somebody could be really underperforming and still get the same rating*." *(V14)*

But the depth of feeling with how some managers experienced the restriction on their assignment of year end ratings is illustrated in these quotes from two managers:

> "*To be honest, I hate the bell curve, I absolutely hate the bell curve. Because I think it's very unfair in certain ways and it's very challenging." (V27)*

> *"The bell curve can be a little bit frustrating, really. The problem is it can undermine the process." (P1)*

4.4.2.5 Powerlessness-up

The story of line manager implementation of HRM practices developed further as managers described the sense of powerlessness they felt during the application of performance management. This sub-theme describes how managers feel impotent due to authority being removed and is exemplified in this quote from a manager, whose powerlessness stems from the application of forced ranking as outlined in the previous section:

> "*As a manager you have to justify why you give people higher ratings. Then it's up to managers above me accept my justification and decide to agree or not. The SLT [senior leadership team] might just turn around and say, "No that person is only getting a three [lower rating]," but in my head they are definitely a two [higher rating]*." *(P1)*

This sense of powerlessness, and furthermore a desire for ownership, is expressed by another manager who describes his feelings at the year-end review process:

> *"I feel that not being able to represent your own team is very frustrating because other people don't see what they [team member] do day-to-day. I think if you are a people manager, you should have the right to go into those meetings, [calibration meetings] represent your team, and bring your scoring and business case to that forum. It shouldn't just be the senior managers making those decisions. They are not close enough to what my team do." (P5)*

Powerlessness manifested itself in other ways too. This manager describes how he was "put back in his box" when he challenged the performance management system in a training session:

> *"We had someone come in and train us on people management last year. We had a management meeting the next day. I suggested that we stop having those training sessions because what we're doing is completely the opposite, and it didn't go down well whatsoever with anyone. I got put back in my box." (P4)*

4.4.2.6 Powerlessness-down

This theme describes how managers experienced a feeling of being unable to deliver for their employees. One manager relates how he dreads the performance review each year because employees will inevitably be disappointed if they receive a low score. The manager is then responsible for picking the employee back up and motivating them after providing negative feedback:

> "*Oh, God, I dread it every year. I dread that part, the bonus part. You have people who are doing a great job, and I have to tell them, they are just performing at a satisfactory level." (P6)*

She then turns her attention to how the employee feels:

> *Inevitably, they're disappointed. It's very hard to turn around and say, "Yes, now listen, you have to pick yourselves up and go again." (V22)*

In another example a manager describes his helplessness in relation to his employee, when he says that "*there's nothing I can do about that*." He/she then demonstrates lack of awareness of the process and indicates that he does not understand the system behind the bell curve and questions whether there is a bell curve in existence but has a hunch that there is one in place.

> "*There's nothing I can do about that then. All I can do is tell that person, "I think you're a two, but this is what's happened. He then describes doubt and lack of trust in the information he receives, "Even though we are asked*

for our input, and we are told there is no percentage of rating levels. I'm pretty sure there is. That's what it feels like anyway*." (P1)*

A third example is 'provided from a manager who describes his frustration with having to award a lower score when he believes a person should be awarded a higher one:

"The performance rating thing is only going to work if people buy into it. If someone is performing really well and I feel that they should be getting a two [higher rating] and I have been giving them that feedback – I can't just turn around and say, "You're a three [lower rating]." That can be very frustrating when that happens." (P1)

4.4.2.7 Cynicism

This sub-theme is defined as displaying, scorn, pessimism or being disparaging. It manifested itself in two ways, firstly in relation to how managers felt in relation to the experience with HR:

"*An HR manager once said to us at a meeting, "Nobody's handcuffed to the desk. If you're not happy, you know what you can do". Sometimes you wonder where in the name of God they come out with these things." (P3)*

It was also manifested in how the managers felt about the performance management practice itself:

"How do I feel about PMDS [performance management process]? I think it depends how long you've been in the organisation, whether you're all cynical like me or not. [laughs]. But overall, I think cautiously, is how people approach it." (V13)

Whilst this manager focuses on the impact on employees and how their experiences can breed caution and cynicism:

"I certainly would see evidence in other areas where if somebody has been poor at performance management with their own staff for a long time, which can lay lots of deep-seated angst with the process and creates inconsistency and then people do get quite cynical about them as well." (P6)

4.5 Topic 3: Line Manager Translating Performance Management

The data analysis revealed a topic that was labelled *translating*. This is a term based on the concept of translation and translation theory (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996). The origins for translation theory can be found in the work of Callon, (1986) and Latour, (1987) implies that translation describes how an idea is not simply accepted but actors can enact by 'modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it' (Latour, 1986, p. 267). In the context of this study, it is used to describe how managers made changes to the performance management practice to make it more suitable to the local environment or to meet employee needs.

Two themes transpired in the analysis, they were, *behaviours of translating*: and *reasons for translating*. The data revealed three types of translating behaviours displayed by line managers, (1) altering forms and templates, (2) altering the process they were required to adhere to, (3) responding to HR when they found reason to alter the process. Reasons for translating included (1) localisation (2) inconsistency across managers and (3) improving effectiveness

Figure 4.5 presents the illustrative quotes, sub-themes, and themes for the topic of translating. Table 4.4 presents additional illustrative quotes for these sub-themes and themes for the translating topic. In the following sections, the themes of behaviours of and reasons for translating and their sub-themes are discussed in detail.

Figure 4.5 Illustrative Quotes, Sub-themes and Themes for Translating

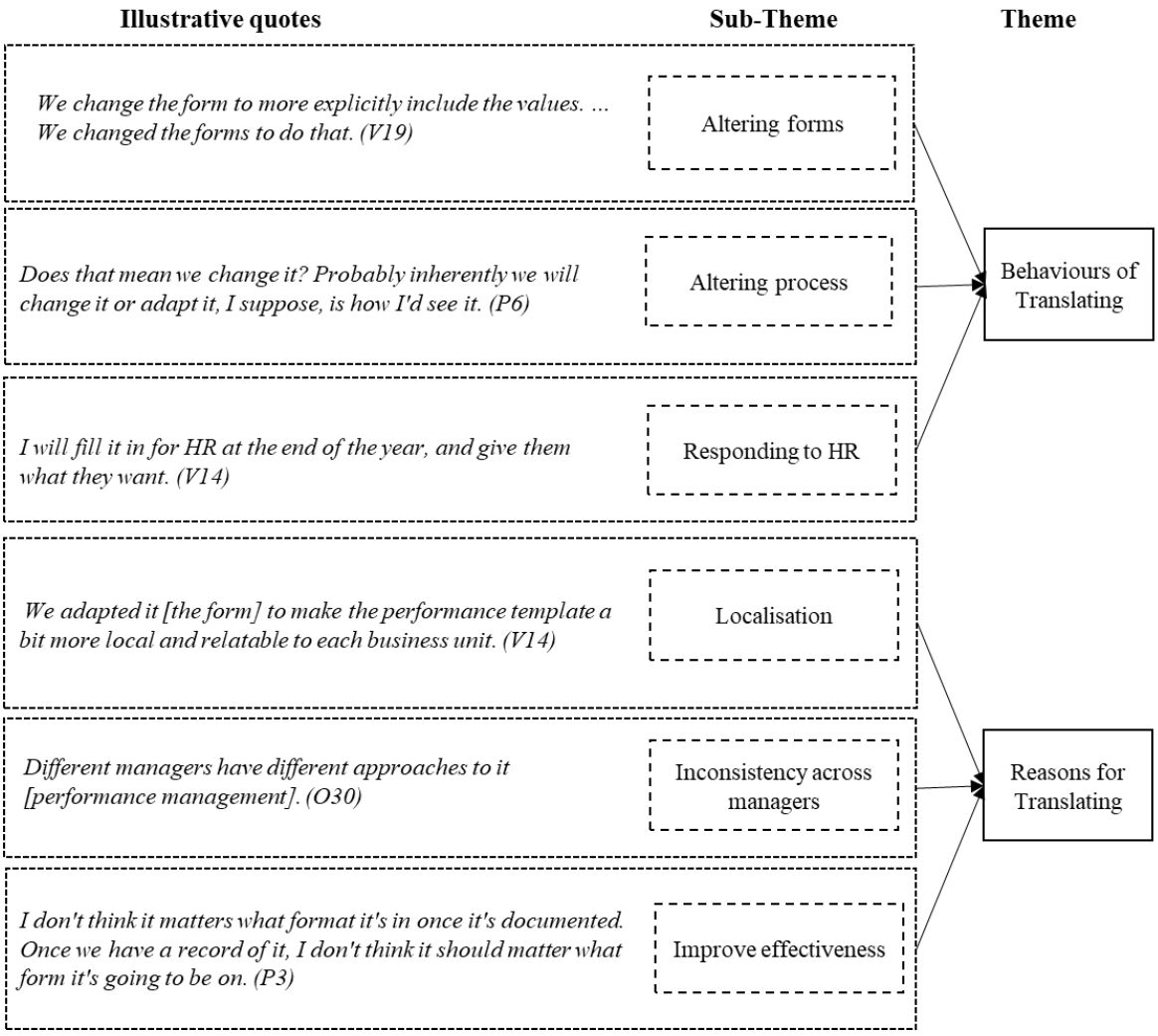


Table 4.4 Illustrative Quotes, Sub-Themes, Themes for Translating

Theme	Sub-theme	Illustrative quotes
Behaviours of translating	Altering forms	*We sat back and did our own form 2 years ago, and it worked. It worked a treat. It is a much more open-ended form. (V12)*
		When I first came in, we had used our own form. It was based on the HR form, but maybe with a little bit of a few additions in there. It was to build on top of what was there. It was not that it was a complete deviation. It's just trying to; I suppose be make the department more focused. (P4)
	Altering Process	*We have built succession planning into the Individual Development Plan. It is not part of the process. We introduced that. (V16)*
		My team write down everything they have done. I write down too. We meet, we look at it, and we are basically building up the

		picture of everything they've worked on during the year. The guys are happy with that. (V13)
	Responding to HR	*We've explained this [change in process] to HR We would go back to the HR to say, "Look, this is what we've done. This is what we have identified. This is how we're going to do it better." (V16)*
		"I haven't shared the changes with HR" (P10)
Reasons for translating	Localisation	*HR ask us in the process to apply smart objectives, but they are old fashioned and when you have a team of 32 people in an area, some are working on tax, some are working on reporting costs, payroll, accounts payable, all different areas, you need a more dynamic process. (V12)*
		The revised rating system that was implemented, from a manager's point of view, leaves you with less flexibility. (O33)
	Inconsistency across managers	*I do think at a leadership level, there are very inconsistent experiences for staff. (P6)*
		It is really inconsistent because you could have somebody who sees it as a tick box exercise and wants to spend 10 minutes on it. (V17)
	Improve effectiveness	*I think we have the power to do that [change the process], we are empowered to do that by HR, There's lots of guidance. (P6)*
		I have certainly seen myself as a performance manager evolve over the last few years. (V19)

4.5.1 Theme 5: Behaviours of translating

The data analysis revealed that line managers behaved in three different ways when translating the implementation of performance management, including (1) changing forms and (2) changing the process (3) how they behaved when they encountered areas of dissatisfaction with the existing process.

4.5.1.1 Altering forms

Managers who demonstrated this behaviour adjusted or used alternative forms to the templates that were provided by HR. In the examples below, managers describe how they alter the forms. Manager *(P3)* from the sales network describes how the regional sales office developed a new form for the objective setting process, this form was imported from another institution and became the recommended form replacing the HR template. Similarly, managers *(V14)* and *(V19)* describe their alteration of the one to one template for the benefit of employees.

> *"There are two forms, in circulation at the moment. There is the regional form that our regional office has come up with. It's somewhat a reflection of what used to be done in another financial institution, and they feel it's a form that works well and they strongly recommend that we use it. We use that instead of the HR form." (P3)*

> *"I'm not using the form HR have given us. ... I've been using a one-pager with the guys when I meet them quarterly. It's just easier for them because they can just write down their achievements as they go along." (V14)*

> "*We altered our one-to-one template. When we sit down, and we document how the month went with the employee that's now a standalone item." (V19)*

In another example additions were made to the forms by a line manager seeking best practice outside the company and then applying the changes within their own area. They identified succession planning as an area that could be strengthened.

> "*We went off and did a bit of researching and I happened to come upon one form that included a succession plan at that company. So, we spoke to their company and used that form in our department." (V16)*

The manager provided further colour by enthusiastically describing how it now was integrated with their development planning:

> "*We built succession planning into the IDP* [individual development plan] *it's not part of the process. We introduced it*." *(V16)*

4.5.1.2 Altering process

Translating also took place when managers changed the process, this manager describes how they enhanced it by implementing more regular rating of employees.

> *"We decided to do our ratings per quarter, which makes it easier than for the overall year, so that if things change, then you have a better understanding of where people are. We do our ratings quarterly. I don't think the rest of the organisation does them like that." (V24)*

In another example, a manager explains how they altered the process by adding to the existing forms and instructions outlined by the HR department. As the interviewee described how they implemented the process in their team, they showed the researcher a skills matrix that was used to review the skills of team members and was incorporated into the process. When asked if the matrix was provided by HR the interviewee responded *"No, I've created this skills matrix myself",* they then provided further background as follows:.

> *We took it on board ourselves, so we've actually been running with this skills matrix for the last, I'd say, three and a half years, four years. It's just a very simple Excel spreadsheet." (P10)*

4.5.1.3 Responding to HR

Managers who translated the practice by altering forms or processes then made choices about how they responded to HR once this translation had occurred. These responses differed amongst managers. This manager describes how he/she behaved, they demonstrate proactivity and demonstrate pride in what they have done.

" ..then I go back to HR to say, "Look, this is what we've done. This is what we've identified. This is how we're going to do it better." (V16)

Another manager's behaviour is similar, as they relate how they behave following their changes to the HR process.. They describe how they inform HR, and an arrangement is made to take their process change and incorporate into the HR forms to fill HR requirements by

We've explained it to them [*HR*] *and they are happy to go with that approach* [change in process] *and we'll just lift all that into the HR form at the end of the year." (V13)*

In contrast to these examples, manager (P10) takes a different approach when asked if he had advised HR of the changes made and suggests that they're changes are covertly implemented.

"I have shared it [change in the form] with other departments but not HR, they don't know we use it." (P10)

4.5.2 Theme 6: Reasons for translating

Reasons for translating provides an understanding of why line managers translated rather than applied the exact requirements of HR. Three reasons were identified, (1) localisation, (2) inconsistency across managers, and (3) improving effectiveness. These are discussed in greater detail below.

4.5.2.1 Localisation

Localisation is defined as translating to improve the relevance to the local context. In these examples line managers described how they made the process more suitable for the local environment. In the following quotes these managers indicate that changes made were for the purposes of making the process more suitable to the environment.

"*I suppose we changed it to make the department more focused, it suited us better and the way we work in this department ." (P4)*

"We have altered the process to help us apply it better." (V19)

In their interview, manager *(V12)* described how they sought to improve the process and in this quote they refer to the SMART objectives that had been included in the HR form, which they considered an old fashioned view of the world. They then proceed to outline how they made changes that he/she felt made employees feel more empowered.

> *Sometimes SMART objectives, well, it is an old-fashioned view of the world. We've changed it to suit us better and we now say what are , "what are the four things you need to achieve in the year, and the onus is on the person to come back and say, what they will do instead of us telling them. People then feel much more empowered. We include culture too because in Finance we want to make sure they live the culture.(V12)*

They further described how roles differ and how they have enhanced the process with integrated role profiles to address this complexity .

> "*They are [different team members] not measured in the same way. They all do different things in the Finance department, and we need to reflect that. So, everybody was given a job profile, which is fantastic. For the first time, everybody knew what was expected of them." (V12)*

In this example, the manager describes how, in their area, they "adapted" the forms for the purposes of making it "*a bit more local and relatable to the business."* In this quote they explain why they made these changes..

> *"We keep the core of the template there, but I would add in additional things, which would be specific to our area which is mainly business change. Like, learning and development….We do adjust the template. We don't remove what's there, but we would adjust it then to ensure that it matches back to someone's KPIs and the performance We're doing it to make it more local, I suppose as I said, we adapted to make the performance template a bit more local and relatable to each business unit." (V6)*

In another example in response to what the manager would like to change about the rating system, he tells how the application locally has revealed difficulties for his area.

"I'd look to have consistency around the ratings and also a split the way different levels are rated. There's a disconnect between those two things. There needs to be, from a consistency point of view, a recognition that even though there might be different levels or different jobs." (P1)

4.5.2.2 Inconsistency in implementing PM among line managers

In exploring the reasons why managers make changes to the practice, it became clear that inconsistency was a prevalent theme across the data set. Inconsistency of application created a normalisation of the way the practice was implemented for the managers in the study. Managers either described how they applied the performance management system differently to others or perceived that other managers did not apply it with the same diligence as they did. When combined with a lack of consequence, it provided managers with a reason for varying the practice. In the following examples these managers refer to this inconsistency.

"I think having a framework to have performance management conversations helps, but I don't think, the people managers around the company use it to the best of its ability and apply it consistently." (P4)

"*My opinion, based on my own observations over time, I think it's inconsistent. I think that's down to how good people are as leaders and what value they put in performance management." (P6)*

"There is an element, I suppose. Some people might take it more seriously than others." (V15)

"So, to me, the time and the value placed on it, and it isn't the same, you know, across organisations .....the time that's given, it's not the same." (O31)

"It would seem that other areas in the organisation didn't have that same process in place." (V16)

4.5.2.3 Improving effectiveness

Managers confidently spoke about the importance of the outcome rather than the actual process. They translated the performance management system to improve overall effectiveness of "the conversation" that is meant to occur concurrently with the performance appraisal ratings.

> *"But the important part is that here's what we're saying, the conversation, and taking action, as opposed to making sure everything is written down on a piece of paper." (P4)*

Managers described how they felt empowered to make changes and this manager reveals how he felt empowered to shape to "do it well for our particular teams" to increase overall effectiveness:

> *"I know it is based on good practices, but it is not prescriptive, it is not so prescriptive that we can't use our own experience and knowledge to actually shape the process that works well for our particular teams. I think that there is plenty of room in there for people to do it and do it well and does that mean we change it? probably inherently we will change it or adapt it I suppose, is how I would see it. (P6)*

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter commenced with an overview of the findings of this research with a description of the themes and sub-themes. It then proceeded to illustrate the themes revealed in the analysis. The findings from the interviews were then described using verbatim quotes and the chapter also provided a table of supporting quotes for each theme.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Summary of the Study

In this chapter, the threads of the thesis are brought together to answer the focal research questions: (1) what are the choices managers make in response to the implementation of HRM practices?; (2) why do managers act in the way that they do?; (3) how does this impact their implementation of devolved HRM practices? At the individual level, line managers' HRM actions "form and fulfil" employees' psychological contracts (McDermott et al., 2013) This study contributes to the key areas of HRM research identified by Ostroff & Bowen, (2016) as (1) the policies, practices, and systems (i.e., HRM content); (2) the implementation of these practices, policies, and systems (i.e., HRM process); and (3) the subsequent results influenced by HRM content, HRM process, or both (i.e., HRM outcomes). The study specifically contributes to line management and strategic HRM implementation research, and builds on prior work regarding line manager implementation (Khilji & Wang, 2006; López-Cotarelo, 2018; Trullen et al., 2020) by showing that line managers take one of three routes when implementing HRM practices; *championing*, *curtailing* or *translating.*

To investigate this phenomenon and answer these questions, a qualitative exploratory study was conducted to develop insights into line manager implementation of HRM practices. One practice was chosen – performance management appraisal – to ensure a deep focus on the reasons and subsequent behaviours of the manager. The researcher was given

access to three organisations to conduct the study that took place from September 2020 to August 2021. The researcher adopted a purposeful and criteria-based sampling approach, and this method created a diverse pool of 34 managers who formed the sample across three organisations. The instrument used for investigation was the qualitative non-structured interview and an inductive approach was used, as is usual with qualitative research.

The data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2020) and a reflexive and iterative approach was used to develop the themes. The findings from the thematic analysis, as outlined in the previous chapter, revealed three main topics for how line managers implement HRM practices. These topics were labelled: 1) *championing,* which describes that line managers enthusiastically embraced the performance management practice; (2) *curtailing,* which describes that line managers reluctantly accepted responsibility for implementation or sought ways not to implement the performance practice and (3) *translating,* which describes that line managers made changes during implementing performance management. Across each of the three topics, there were common patterns within the data, and these were labelled *behaviours* and *reasons,* and these form the main themes within each topic. Within these main themes were sub-themes providing further detail. The data structure therefore, was formed from the analysis, and consisted of the three aforementioned topics, six main themes and within each main theme several sub-themes. Reviewed together, these provide a thorough understanding of how the line managers within this study implemented HRM practices and their reasons for these choices. A summary of the themes and sub themes for each topic are as follows.

Topic 1 Championing: Within this topic are two themes, *behaviours of championing* and *reasons for championing*. For those managers who actively implemented, two sub-themes were identified in the analysis, these were labelled "actively implementing" and "owning the process." For the second main theme i.e., *reasons for championing,* six sub-

themes were identified, and they are (1) alignment with company goals, (2) responsibility or obligation to their team members, (3) the perceived usefulness or functionality of the practice and of HR in supporting the practice, (4) a passion for people, (5) positive experience with HR, and (6) line manager competence.

Topic 2 Curtailing: The thematic analysis produced two main themes that illustrated how line managers reluctantly accepted responsibility for implementation or sought ways not to implement the performance practice. These themes are labelled *behaviours of curtailing* and include the sub themes of passively avoiding which included: de-prioritising, disowning and ticking boxes and a second sub theme of actively avoiding, (2). The second main theme, the *reasons for curtailing* includes seven sub-themes namely (1) lack of training and instructions from HR (2) too time consuming (3) dysfunctional systems, occurring because of a lack of consequence in the event of non-implementation, (4) dysfunctional systems associated with the design of the performance management practice or the content (5) powerlessness up (6) powerlessness down (7) cynicism.

Topic 3 Translating: This third topic is comprised of the main theme called *behaviours of translating*, which includes the sub-themes of (1) altering forms and templates, (2) altering the process they were required to adhere to, (3) responding to HR when they altered the process. The second main theme within this topic was identified as *reasons for translating* and included (1) localisation (2) inconsistency across managers and (3) improving effectiveness.

Overall, the findings indicate that line managers demonstrate different behaviours when implementing HRM practices and have distinct reasons for doing so. This study provides unique insights into the choices line managers make and thus adds to the body of literature on line manager implementation and answers the research questions outlined at the start of this chapter and summarised in Table 5.1

Table 5.1 Research questions

What are the choices managers make in response to the implementation of HRM practices?	Why do managers act in the way that they do?	How does this impact their implementation of devolved HRM practices?
Championing	-Alignment with company goals -Responsibility/obligation -Usefulness/functionality -Passion for people -Positive experience with HR -Line manager competence	-Actively implementing -Owning the process
Curtailing	-Lack of training & instructions from HR -Time consuming -Dysfunctional systems (lack of consequence) -Dysfunctional systems (content & design) -Powerlessness Up -Powerlessness down -Cynicism	Passively Avoiding -De-prioritising -Dis-owning -Ticking boxes Actively Avoiding
Translating	-Localisation -Inconsistency across managers -Improve effectiveness	-Altering forms -Altering process -Responding to HR

5.2 Empirical Contributions of this Study

The main findings of this study provide insights into the choices made by managers when implementing HRM practice and the reasons behind those choices. In the following sections, the relevance of these three topics are discussed in the context of existing research. The salient points are extracted to help the reader understand the relevance of the insights generated.

5.2.1 Line managers championing HRM practices

This study revealed that managers can act positively towards the requirement to implement HRM practices. The researcher has described this as "championing" HRM practices. The managers who displayed championing behaviours demonstrated these behaviours in two different ways: actively implementing the practice of performance

management or taking ownership for doing so. There were several reasons why managers approached the implementation in this championing way. For instance, a positive experience with the HR function was one of the reasons for championing. Managers who had a positive experience with HR expressed trust, faith, and belief in the HR function and their positive experiences were reinforced over time. These managers expressed a view that HR colleagues listened to their concerns and were responsive, their HR business partner was perceived as a member of the business team, and managers expressed optimism about future HR contributions to their business.

This finding, which highlights the positive perception of HR by managers, builds on previous research. It is consistent with findings from Dewettinck & Vroonen, (2017) who asserted that line managers' perceived support from the HR department, was positively related to their beliefs regarding the usefulness of performance management activities, which then enhanced their implementation of those performance management activities. This is important in a broader sense, as research has also shown that line managers who show a genuine interest in and a sense of ownership of their HRM responsibilities are likely to find themselves to be more successful in HRM implementation (Op de Beeck et al., 2018). This study contributes to the literature by identifying five further reasons for managers championing HRM practices and these are now discussed.

A second reason for championing, which has so far not been identified in prior research, relates to managers' belief in their own competence to deliver the practice skilfully and to do so in a way that is beneficial to their team members. This finding of line managers expressing confidence contrasts with findings from previous research (Gilbert et al., 2011) that reveals line managers experience role stress (i.e., HR role ambiguity and HR role overload) in response to devolution of HRM practices.

The managers who were part of this current study showed competence and this was associated with a confidence they held in their own ability to deliver these practices with their teams. Managers who had this sense of their own ability, acquired their perceived expertise from sources that they themselves had driven, namely actively sourcing training from the HR function or initiating their own self learning and accessing open source content available from learning providers. This finding builds on the study of line manager motivation to implement HRM practices, conducted by Kellner et al., (2016). Their findings based on qualitative data, suggest ability and motivation are interdependent in such a way that line managers who are highly motivated to implement HRM practices effectively usually also make sure that they possess the skills to do so.

A third reason for managers championing the HRM practice is the importance of alignment with company goals. In other words, these managers believed that they were playing *their* role in contributing to company performance and they deemed this connection to the company goals as an essential ingredient in the creation of goals for their own team members. Managers who articulated the importance of alignment of company goals also took a methodical approach to individual and team goal setting. They did this by firstly understanding their own goals and then used these goals as the foundation for setting the goals for each individual team member. Although previous HRM research has highlighted the importance of strategically aligning employees (Schuler & Jackson, 1987; Wright & McMahan, 1992) and of linking of individual goals to organisational level goals through the concept of a 'line of sight' (Boswell, 2006), this finding is a new insight into managers responses to the devolution of HRM practices. This research study provides evidence that one of the reasons line managers champion HRM practices is to contribute to this goal congruence between the company and the individual.

A fourth reason why managers championed was because of the usefulness and functionality of the HRM processes supporting the practice. These champions were positive about their experience with the forms and the process and although they did suggest improvements, for example in technology, they took the view that they could work within its imperfections and were hopeful that these would be fixed in due course. One exception to this was their experience with the forced distribution approach to performance measurement, and this is discussed later. Managers who championed were also industrious in their attempts to fill gaps in their information and were familiar with the information documents and they referred to the on-line portal provided by their HR functions. Overall, they were happy to use these as sources for information to support their implementation of the practice.

A fifth reason for managers championing the HRM practice was their passion for people. This was a new insight into why managers chose to enact the practice. This was apparent as in their interviews they cared deeply for their teams and showed concern for their performance by taking time out to understand their career aspirations and desires. The final reason identified for managers championing was the sense of obligation and responsibility they felt for their employees especially in terms of the provision of developmental opportunities but also in terms of their sense of obligation that their role imparted on them as managers.

5.2.2 Line managers curtailing HRM practices

This study revealed that managers curtailed the practice by passively avoided through, de-prioritising the practice, disowning the practice and ticking boxes. Or managers curtailed through actively avoiding the practice. When managers passively avoided the practice, they delayed conversations, in some cases not having conversations with employees, or they engaged in retrospective goal setting. When managers de-prioritised the practices, goals were set halfway through the year. A third curtailing behaviour involved

managers ticking boxes and "going through the motions" of implementing the practice. Managers also related how they de-prioritised the tasks associated with performance management and viewed the task not as their responsibility but something that was being "carried out for HR." Lack of engagement by line managers can have negative implications for the effects of HRM systems. Sikora et al. (2015) found positive workplace outcomes, such as lower intention to quit, higher job performance, and higher participation in decision making, among employees whose line managers made more frequent use of HRM practices. Moreover, as line managers with varying abilities and goals implement HRM policies, they introduce variation in the actual practices received by employees (Wright & Nishii, 2013). Such variation is problematic because any effects of HRM practices must be brought about by employees' reactions to the actual practices they experience:

In contrast to managers who championed the practice, managers who curtailed were not complimentary about their interaction with HR. There were numerous reasons that managers gave to explain why they curtailed the practice. For instance, managers described lack of training and instructions from HR as a reason for curtailing. This is consistent with previous findings in research that indicate that line managers are frequently dissatisfied with the services that HRM professionals deliver. Research has revealed that some HRM professionals do not provide line managers with the services they need (Bond & Wise, 2003; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003), often HRM professionals are not available when needed by the line managers (Nehles et al., 2006) or they are reluctant to let go of their operational HRM responsibilities and only adopt a consultative role in supporting line managers (Hall & Torrington, 1998).

Managers curtailed the practice because of a lack of training and instructions from the HR function. One of the fundamental enablers to the effective implementation of HRM practices is sufficient training and instructions from the HR function. Previous studies assert

that line managers do not receive adequate training to perform various aspects of their job, including their role in delivering HRM practices (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Townsend et al., 2012; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). The research conducted in this study supports this assertion, however, a caveat is required, as this study takes the manager perspective and human resources informants were not formally interviewed to assess the level of training provided. Another surprise is the lack of proactivity by managers in seeking out the information required to do their job. This laissez faire approach was prevalent in discussions with managers who described lack of training as an issue. When asked if they could find ways of seeking the information these managers acknowledged that it could indeed be available or would be made available to them if they asked. This contrasts with those managers who championed the practice, they had no hesitation in seeking assistance and being proactive with their own development. Line managers who are highly motivated to implement HRM practices effectively, usually also make sure that they possess the skills to do so (Kellner et al., 2016).

Another reason for managers curtailing included the time consuming nature of the practice, and the perception that it was a burden to implement. This criticism of the 'burden' of time is a not a surprise and received attention over the past number of years. For example, Deloitte, a global firm offering consultation, auditing and financial advisory services found themselves devoting a great deal of time and money to performance management; Deloitte's review suggested that they were spending two million hours per year completing forms, holding meetings, and conducting performance reviews (Buckingham & Goodall, 2015). But the negative publicity has not detracted the preponderance of the practice, as evidenced by the work of Gorman et al. (2017) who surveyed Fortune 500 firms in the United States and reported that a substantial majority of these firms use formal performance appraisals as a key part of their human resource management strategy. In their recent study of

performance appraisal in multinational companies, Morley et al. (2021) identified 472 multi-nationals using formal appraisal within their organisations to make decisions about pay, development, and career moves. So, despite the calls for performance appraisal to be disbanded in organisations (Murphy, 2020), it is still very much a feature of HR people practices.

Dysfunctionality in the system also contributed to the reasons for curtailing the practice. This manifested itself in two ways, firstly because of lack of consequence for non-implementation, as the HR function did not carry out any quality control mechanism and secondly because of the dysfunctionality in content and design. A particular reason was the forced distribution that is discussed later in this chapter. Finally, a reason or curtailing was cynicism, and this was a consequence of many of the above factors.

However, new insights have emerged in this study that have not been highlighted in the line manager implementation literature to date. A most surprising finding was the sense of powerlessness experienced by managers in conducting their role. Powerlessness is a cognitive experience wherein one perceives a lack of control or influence over a situation. For the managers in this study, those who experienced powerlessness used phrases such as '*being undermined*' or '*it's not in my control.'* The data analysis revealed that this sense of powerlessness was multi-faceted and was experienced from two perspectives. *Powerlessness up* reflects the loss of authority by managers. This loss of authority and impotence due to their inability to have complete control over a key management responsibility, i.e., managing performance and rewarding appropriately. *Powerlessness down* reflects the feeling of being unable to deliver for employees and their inability to impact the year-end bonus allocation or reward for employees. Despite managers believing that rewards may be due to their employees, they were unable to apply this reward because the system required the final allocation of awards to be made at a level above. This sense

of powerlessness resulted in managers curtailing the implementation of the practice and not implementing the practice of performance management as intended.

Further probing with the respondents in this study revealed that this powerlessness was directly attributed to the model of forced distribution that was designed to create consistency across the organisations with regard to bonus allocation. By way of context, HR in these organisations implemented a forced distribution ranking as a feature of the practice of performance management appraisal. It is not within the scope of this study to discuss the pros and cons of forced ranking in organisations, but some explanation is warranted at this point. Forced ranking is a performance appraisal system that forces supervisors to distribute a pre-determined percentage of employees in categories based on their employees' performance relative to other employees' performance (Moon et al., 2016). There is very limited empirical research in relation to the application of forced distribution in appraisals and there are calls for more research in this area (DeNisi et al., 2014). Prior to the synthesis provided by (Moon et al., 2016) one research study specifically examines raters' reactions and suggests that managers found it more difficult to rate using forced distribution and considered the ratings less fair (Schleicher et al., 2009). The findings from this study support the findings of Schleicher. Managers in this study also spoke of the lack of fairness in the application of the practice.

Managers described how one of the reasons that they avoid implementing the system was their unhappiness with the system itself, particularly the completion of unwieldy forms that was required as part of the process. Managers also criticised the technology platform that supported the system was and it was perceived as outdated and cumbersome and in need of review. In comparison with those who undertook championing behaviours and were tolerant of the unwieldy forms, managers who curtailed showed less patience with the processes. This focus on the process could indeed be attributed to the cumbersome system

in terms of forms and technology or the perception that the process is worthless due to the powerlessness they experience.

5.2.3 Line managers translating HRM practices

The label translating is used to describe the activities managers embarked upon to embed the practice in their area by altering (or changing) it to make it more suitable for their own environments. The behaviours of translating in this study include changing forms and changing processes. Some managers made changes to the forms provided by the HR function, and they did this to enable them to include elements they deemed as necessary to their local situation. Other managers changed the process itself, for example they implemented a new process of quarterly bonus payments rather than annual which were the norm for their company. Other managers expressed unhappiness with the process in its current form and altered it in order for it to be more effective and to help them deliver business goals. Purposefully altering the practice was perceived by these managers as a positive activity and aimed at extracting more value from the intended HRM practice.

Previous research describes managers making local adaptations for example López-Cotarelo, (2018) describes how managers avoid and circumvent policies and procedures and he also describes how managers when they make changes interact with the HR function by asking and negotiating an outcome outside of formal policies and procedures, This thesis provides further insights as one of the behaviours that managers exhibited was how they responded to HR once they had implemented the change, and this differed amongst managers. Some managers eagerly shared their changes with the HR function and with other managers. However, others did not report the changes that they made, when probed further by the researcher they informed her that they had not considered doing so and for no reason other than they had irregular communication with the HR colleagues. Harney & Jordan, (2008) found that line managers often adapt inadequate HR policies to meet their local

needs, focusing their efforts on meeting clients' expectations and improving workplace morale.

5.3 Scholarly Implications

This study answers calls for more empirical studies of *how* line managers implement HRM practices (De Nisi & Murphy, 2017; Fu et al., 2020; Gilbert et al., 2015; Op de Beeck et al., 2016). Studying the actual processes are important because implemented HRM may be substantially different to intended HRM (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Nishii & Wright, 2008; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007) and therefore this study pays explicit attention to the day to day activities and processes whereby line managers implement HRM practices, highlighted as an a area for future research. (Steffensen et al., 2019).

It has been suggested that current conceptualisations of line managers' roles in HRM are overly narrow and simplistic (Kehoe & Han, 2020), a problematic situation in light of scholars' calls for greater attention to HRM practice delivery (e.g., Becker & Huselid, 2006; Nishii & Wright, 2008). This study focuses on the line manager as the key actor of implementation. Using qualitative research, the study develops insights into the reasons and behaviours of line managers in terms of the decisions that they make when a practice is devolved from HR for their implementation.

This study contributes to strategic HRM research and makes contributions in four specific areas of research: (1) by adding to the causal chain of HRM performance through categorisation of line manager implementation (2) by shining a light on managers championing HRM practice (3) by informing the under-explored area of line manager attributions (4) by contributing to the discussion on HRM process through the use of the theoretical lens of translation theory. This section reviews how this study contributes to theory from these five perspectives, firstly the 'How' of line manager implementation,

secondly, the “Why” and line manager attributions, thirdly the process and fourthly the content

5.3.1 Theoretical contribution

The role of line managers in HRM implementation has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years. Earlier in this study, the researcher identified a range of theoretical frameworks that has been adopted by these scholars to explore line manager implementation of HRM. Those theories include role theory and role dynamics (Conway & Monks, 2010; Evans, 2017, 2022; Op de Beeck et al., 2016, 2017, 2018); attribution theory (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020; Katou et al., 2021); signalling theory (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Farndale & Kelliher, 2013; Katou et al., 2021); agency theory (Makhecha et al., 2018); social exchange theory (Keegan & Den Hartog, 2018; Kilroy et al., 2022; Kurdi-Nakra & Pak, 2022; Makhecha et al., 2018; Townsend, Bos-Nehles, et al., 2022; Townsend, Dundon, et al., 2022; Tyskbo, 2020); AMO (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gilbert et al., 2015; Trullen et al., 2016; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018; Vermeeren, 2014) and paradox theory (Fu et al., 2020).

Even though conceptual approaches such as AMO theory, social exchange or perceived organisational support provide us with valuable insights into line manager implementation (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2012; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Trullen et al., 2016), it has been suggested (Bondarouk et al., 2018) that as research expands beyond the role played by supervisors and considers implementation from a sociological (in addition to a socio-psychological) perspective, other theoretical lenses may also be brought forward such as discourse, power, micro-politics or institutional theory. Furthermore, it has been asserted that recommended best practice is to use multiple theoretical lenses to maximise explanatory power (Jackson & Schuler, 1999; Watson, 2007). In this study, two theories underpin the research and enhance theoretical perspectives of line manager implementation. The first is translation theory (from the institutional school) and the second

theory is attribution theory (Heider, 1958) By taking this multiple theoretical-lens approach within the relatively new setting of HR it will create a theoretical feedback loop thus advancing our knowledge of translation theory (Whetten, 1989). Creating a feedback loop means that theorists can learn something new about the theory itself as a result of working with it under different conditions.

5.3.1.1 Translation theory and line manager HRM implementation

Through this research, the aim is to contribute to theoretical discourse on the implementation by line managers of HRM practices. To do so, insights are drawn from translation theory, the origins of which can be found in sociology (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1986) and are further developed by (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996) who introduced the 'sociology of translation' to organisation theory, focusing on the circulation, or 'travel,' of various organisational ideas between actors and places. The notion of translation is generally viewed as the movement of an entity whether it is a technology, a conceptual frame or a management tool in space and time, or the transport of ideas related to this entity and its ongoing transformation (Callon, 1980; Latour, 1986). It should be noted that the term 'translation theory' and 'translation studies,' which are frequently used refer to two different schools of thought. In contrast to Translation theory, translation studies is established as an interdisciplinary field that connects linguistics, psychology, anthropology, communication theory, literary theory and cultural studies (Røvik, 2016).

Translation is "the spread in time and space of anything – claims, artefacts, goods, - in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it" (Latour 1986, p. 267). Translation occurs in the space and time between when an idea is conceived to when it is institutionalised (Mueller & Whittle, 2011). The "travel of ideas"

metaphor is used to help understand how HRM practices or "ideas" become legitimised as they travel within an organisation.

Three studies have been identified that are connected to HRM practices that use translation as the key theoretical underpinning of the study in question. Firstly, (Boxenbaum, 2006) studied the implementation of diversity initiatives originating in two US firms within a Danish context. She found that core to successful implementation was the process of framing and also strategic reframing as part of the sensemaking process for managers. Strategic framing is an interpretive lens through which individuals perceive and interpret the world (Benford & Snow, 2000). Strategic "frames" are cognitive schemes that guide the attribution of meaning to specific social situations and guide future action (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Secondly, Cassell & Lee, (2017) studied the translation of a union idea in a multi organisational setting over a period of seven years. They identified the importance of power in successful implementation within the deeply political unionised environment. Finally, Vossen & van Gestel, (2019) explored translation of macro practices in absence management within three hospital settings in the Benelux region. Their findings indicating that translation is an interactive and dynamic series of social exchanges in which interpersonal relationships perform a crucial role in the outcomes of translating macro to micro level practices. Although these studies increase understanding of the process of translation, none of them examine the editing process that take place in translation or specifically the sensemaking and sense-giving activities of the actors involved. Although this theory has yet to be leveraged extensively in the HR literature using it, as a lens within HRM can create an understanding of how practices are implemented, rather than whether they are implemented or not. Existing micro-HR research has only scratched the surface of

why and where intended HRM practices change when implemented by managers (Makhecha et al., 2018) and using translation theory can inform research in this area.

5.3.1.2 Attribution theory and line manager HRM implementation

Attribution theory has its roots in social psychology, and its central tenet is that attributions are causal explanations that individuals make about events, actions, or behaviours to make sense of their experiences, and these attributions inform their response (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1985). Behaviour depends on two sets of conditions, namely, factors within the person and factors within the environment (Heider, 1958), or, otherwise stated as internal and external attributions (Kelley, 1973) "At the heart of attribution theory is the assertion that people are on a continuous quest to explain events that they encounter" (Hewett et al., 2018: 87).

An example of the application of attribution theory in HRM research is provided by Nishii et al. (2008) who argue that the attributions that employees make about the reasons why management adopts the HRM practices has consequences for employees' attitudes and behaviours, and ultimately, firm performance. Attributions of line managers has been rarely discussed in the literature with the exception of (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020). To better understand what line managers need, in order to implement HRM practices effectively, the authors have developed and validated a psychometric measurement instrument dealing with line managers' attributions for effective HRM implementation. Based on the theory of causal attributions, the authors distinguish between internal and external attributions that determine how line managers implement HRM practices on the work floor.

5.3.2 Contribution to strategic HRM research

This study contributes to strategic HRM in a number of ways , primarily by providing more insights into how managers mediate the HRM-performance relationship through an in depth study of how managers implement HRM practices and the choices that they make that drive that implementation. The research study answers the call from scholars for further

exploration of line managers' downward influences (i.e., through different HRM delivery behaviours) on both HRM process and content (Kehoe & Han, 2020).

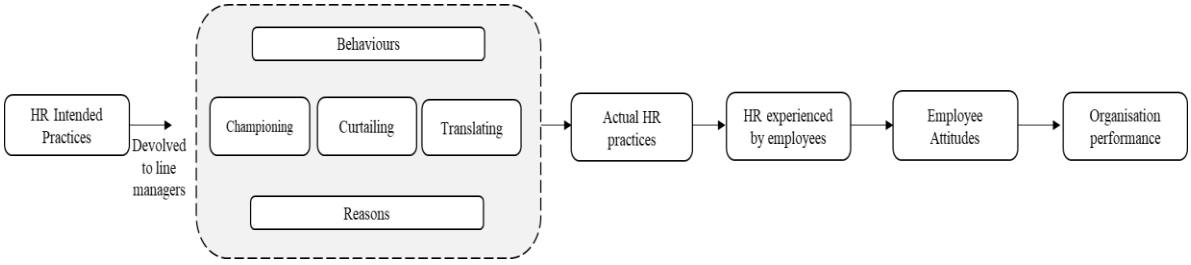
Scholars define strategic HRM as "the pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable an organisation to achieve its goals" (Wright & McMahan, 1992: 298). Early strategic studies focus on the bundles of practices and their link to firm performance. In recent developments in strategic HRM, research focuses on the mechanisms through which strategic HRM influences firm performance. Other research focuses on exploring the manager-employee relationship at the micro level and its effect on employee attitudes and behaviours and use social exchange (J. Kilroy et al., 2022; Kuvaas et al., 2014; McDermott et al., 2013).

On the other hand, studies draw on HRM/Strategic HRM to frame discussions on devolution trends and influences (Brewster et al., 2015) or to theorise on the role of line managers in the HRM-performance link, for example through the concept of the strong HR system (Björkman et al., 2011; Ryu & Kim, 2013), through the HR causal chain (Nishii & Paluch, 2018; Vermeeren, 2014) or through the AMO framework (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). Scholars have pointed toward the critical role of line managers mediating the HRM–performance relationship (e.g., (Alfes, et al., 2013; Harney & Jordan, 2008; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). The process model of strategic HRM (Wright & Nishii, 2013) has drawn attention to the distinction between intended HRM (policies developed by decision makers), actual HRM (implemented human resource practices), and perceived HRM (employee perceptions of HRM practices).

This research study contributes to this conversation through the creation of a typology of line manager implementation and the identification of three categories that build on current theorisation. These categories explicate the choices made by managers who are linking pins in the journey from intended to actual HRM to experienced HRM. In doing so,

this study answers calls (Steffensen et al., 2019) to overlay the principles expounded by Wooldridge et al., (2008) of the sub-processes of integration/execution. This is illustrated in Figure 5.1 where the contribution from this study is overlayed on the intended-implemented-actual performance chain (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

Figure 5.1 Contribution to Strategic HRM



5.3.3 Theory building on 'How' line managers respond to HR

The study finds that managers implement HRM practices along a continuum that includes three categories of implementation, and these are called *championing*, *curtailing*, and *translating*. This study contributes in two ways to the "how" of implementation. Whereas prior research has focused on those who avoid HRM practices e.g., (Evans, 2017; Harris, 2001; McGovern et al., 2007) or who sabotage implementation (Analoui, 1995) this study shines a spotlight on those who are positive about HRM practice implementation. Examples of line managers as champions of HRM practices are rarely examined in the HR literature (Renwick, 2003; Wright, McMahan, et al., 2001).

The second contribution in this field is the creation of the aforementioned new typology for line management implementation. The literature review conducted as part of this study identifies three other studies that created typologies, these are presented in Table

5.2. In the first study López-Cotarelo, (2018) presents three categorisations following research conducted in the retail industry. In the second study, Kehoe & Han, (2020) conduct a systematic literature and identify three categories that they assert represents the research and theorising to date on implementation. The final study reflects the emergence of digital HRM technology within the workplace and in this study Khoreva et al., (2022) juxtaposes the evolution of technology with the reaction of line managers. These typologies add to our understanding and reflection about line manager implementation; however, they do not encapsulate the emotions and behaviours that underpin the research findings from this study. Within each of the categories of championing, curtailing, and translating the sub themes present deeper meaning of the rationale and the feelings experienced by managers .

Table 5.2 Categorisations of line manager implementation in research

	Kehoe & Han, (2020)	López-Cotarelo, (2018)	Khoreva et al., (2022)
Type of study	Conceptual	Qualitative	Qualitative
Context and purpose of study	Integrate insights from research on HRM practice implementation, workforce differentiation, and autonomous strategic behaviour to develop a more complete understanding of line managers' downward involvement in HRM.	Describes three distinct ways in which line managers engage with HRM policies and procedures.	Explores the role of line managers in the implementation of digitalisation and proposes line managers act in a number of ways
Categorisation	**Implementation** i.e., enactment of the organisation's espoused HRM practices	***Decide and propose*** *a decision within the remit of their formal role*	***Outside observer*** *– resistant towards digitalisation and takes a wait and see approach*
	Translation i.e., "filling in the blanks" of sparser or more generic espoused HRM practices to fit local needs,	***Ask and negotiate*** *an outcome outside of formal policies and procedures.*	***Playmate*** *- Line managers actively experiment with digital technologies and the prevalent attitude among line managers is 'what if'*
	Adaptation/intro-duction i.e., explicit	***Avoid and circumvent*** *policies and procedures.*	***Ambassador*** *- line managers take a helicopter perspective*

	modification or replacement of an organisation's espoused HRM practices at the local level.		*on the interplay between digital technologies and the current workforce.*
			Inspirator *- acting as a digital role model, motivating colleagues to engage in digitalization, and encouraging digital collaboration*
			Conductor *- In this phase, self-steering self-critical teams are assembled, technology and people work as a team and managers are conductors*

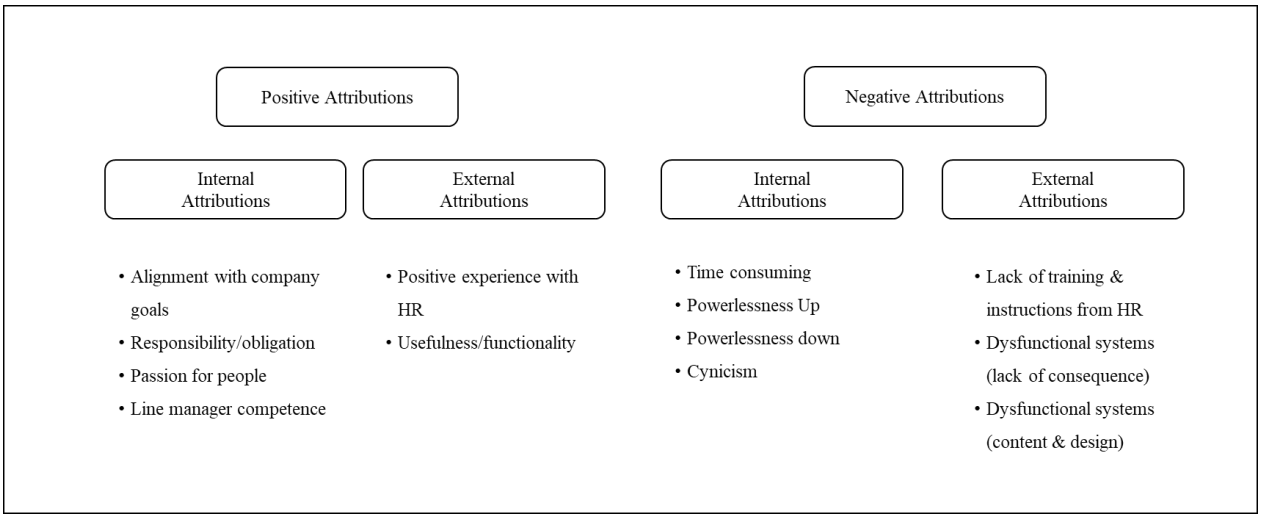
5.3.4 Theory building on the 'Why' of HRM implementation

HRM attribution research has tended to focus on attributions that employees have of HRM practices (Hewett et al., 2018; Katou et al., 2021; Nishii et al., 2008; Shantz et al., 2016) and line manager attributions have been rarely studied (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020). This thesis builds on the research and the application of attribution theory by articulating the reasons of "the why" or "why not" of managers implementation of HRM practices. It is important to know and understand the reasons why people do what they do, as this can help inform further research or help practitioners in their understanding of line manager behaviours. A key component therefore in this research are the reasons why managers take the actions that they do. Two key theories with attribution tenets at their heart are HRM system strength (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) and HRM attributions theory, (Nishii et al., 2008).

This study contributes to our understanding of line manager attributions by identifying both internal and external attributions for the application of HRM practices by line managers. In Figure 5.2 the findings of the study are linked with internal and external attributions. For example, managers who have the best interests of their employees at heart when they implement, are more likely to have these better outcomes. This is important for future research and can spur a wealth of research, for instance quantitative researchers can

take these categorisations and operationalise them into appropriate scales and test them in future studies.

Figure 5.2 Line manager attributions



5.3.5 Theory building of the process perspective

This thesis contributes to the process perspective of HRM. The findings provide insights into the roles played by managers as they implement, and a new insight of powerlessness is introduced. In addition, insights are drawn from how and why managers change (translate) the process to deliver better business outcomes.

The process-based approach to HRM focuses on the mechanisms through which HRM practices inform organisational performance and focus on the enactment of HRM practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Strategic HRM literature has been dominated by research examining the effects of HRM system content, or almost exclusively on HRM system process (Kehoe & Han, 2019). The study adds to the processual understanding of HRM by investigating the line manager in detail and how he or she responds to devolution of the practices. The study answers calls for specific investigations into the roles that managers play in deciding which HRM practices/ strategies get adopted (idea generation), developing the means for how the HRM content will be executed (initiative development), and contributing to the implementation of the HRM plan (integration/execution) (Steffensen et al., 2019).

5.3.5.1 Powerlessness of line managers

Two findings from this study are relevant to the roles that managers play in implementing HRM practices, powerlessness-up and powerlessness-down. Powerlessness is a cognitive experience wherein one perceives a lack of control or influence over a situation. *Powerlessness up* reflects the loss of authority by managers due to their inability to have complete control over a key management responsibility, i.e., managing performance and rewarding appropriately. *Powerlessness down* reflects the feeling of being unable to deliver for employees and their inability to impact the year-end bonus allocation or reward for employees. Despite managers believing that rewards may be due to their employees, they were unable to apply this reward because the system required the final allocation of awards to be made at a level above. This sense of powerlessness resulted in managers curtailing the implementation of the practice and not implementing the practice of performance management as intended. These two findings have broad implications, as powerlessness may result in a diminution of the manager role in the eyes of the team members and in their own ability to operate effectively. Leadership is key to successful implementation and line managers are expected to give their focus to their people (Burke et al. 2006) and empathise with the developmental needs of their employees and provide them with opportunities to learn and grow (Jung, Yammarino and Lee 2009).

5.3.5.2 Inconsistency of line manager HRM implementation

One of the findings from this study highlighted that managers did not implement HRM practices consistently. They either changed the practice for better business outcomes, as in "translating," or in other cases inconsistency was a feature because of a lack of engagement with the practice as illustrated in "curtailing," both of which are reviewed earlier in this thesis. Research on HRM practice implementation has focused on the within-organisation variance resulting from differences in line managers' implementation of HRM practices at the unit level (Pak & Kim, 2018). This work has

generally taken the view that inconsistency in implementation undermines organisations' HRM practice investments and has sought to identify both contributing factors and consequences associated with unplanned variation in line managers' HRM practice implementation behaviours (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Woodrow & Guest, 2014).

Consistent implementation has been posited as favourable for the organisation by Fu et al., (2020) but scholarly debate is divided on this topic of consistency. At the group and organisational levels, consistency in the implementation of HRM systems underpins their "strength" in creating organisational climates for performance behaviours (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) and when managers implement HRM in a consistent way, members perceive a clear, coherent, and fair message regarding the organisation's values, processes/procedures, and expectations (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Consistently implementing HRM is a challenge organisationally and individually (Wright & Nishii, 2013). Scholars assert that inconsistent messages regarding the firm's HRM practices can lead employees to become dissatisfied and less engaged (Li et al., 2011) thereby reducing their commitment to the organisation (Sanders et al., 2008) and increasing intentions to quit (Liao et al., 2009).

For some it poses a concern that HRM practices are not implemented consistently by every line manager in organisations (e.g., McGovern et al., 1997). Whilst for others (Kuvaas et al., 2014) it is asserted that the reason practices are varied, may be due to line managers not perceiving HRM practices as enabling, or that the HRM practices are not sufficiently adapted to local needs, individual needs, or the line manager themselves. Adopted HRM practices have also been perceived as incompatible with the workplace settings (e.g., Bos-Nehles et al., 2017;Evans, 2017; Makhecha et al., 2018; Pak et al., 2016).

Kehoe & Han (2019) suggest that local modifications of HRM practices may be particularly well suited to shape the employees' individual satisfaction, fulfilment, and

well-being, because line managers are more proximal to employees and may thus have a better understanding of their unique goals and needs. Other scholars also view inconsistency as a positive and productive element (Brandl et al., 2022) and contend that gaps in implementing HRM policies can actually be productive, as they secure organisational legitimacy, They (Brandl et., al 2022) are proponents of HR managers allowing purposeful flexibility in the interpretation of HR policies.

In this research study a prevalent theme is inconsistency of application and the findings of this study reveal examples of managers referring to differences in practice application. Their knowledge of this inconsistent approach was acquired through their own experience in other departments or through conversations with others. The lack of consequence for managers of inconsistent practice and therefore the perception by managers that inconsistent application would be accepted had created a climate where managers used inconsistency as a reason and justification to make their own adaptations to the practice. This raises questions, as consistency refers to features that allow the event–effect relationship to present itself the same over time, people, and contexts.

Furthermore, in the research undertaken in this study, consistency was revealed in a positive light by managers who changed the practice, to improve relevance, and to achieve better business outcomes. This resonates with organisation behaviour theories of i-deals. where managers may play important roles in shaping differentiated HRM practice experiences at the individual level, through the negotiation of idiosyncratic deals with specific employees (Marescaux et al., 2021; Rousseau et al., 2006).

5.3.5.3 Overlap with AMO

The findings of the thesis overlap with the AMO model of line manager implementation.The use of AMO in line manager implementation is analysed in detail in sub-section 2.4 reviewing theoretical perspectives in line manager HRM implementation. Several studies have used the AMO framework to examine the mediation process between

HR systems and firm performance. The AMO model suggests that HRM practices influence firm performance because they enhance employees' ability, motivation, and opportunity to perform (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Delery & Doty, 1996; Guest, 1987; Lepak & Snell, 1999). In later research (Jiang et al., 2012) classify HRM practices according to the AMO model and found that human capital (i.e., ability) and employee motivation partially mediate the impact of three HR dimensions (skill enhancing practices, motivation enhancing practices and opportunity enhancing practices), on organisational outcomes. This AMO framework has also been used in other HRM related research including line manager HRM implementation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018; Vermeeren, 2014).

Many examples of line managers having insufficient HRM abilities and the detrimental effects of this are advanced in the HRM literature (Hailey et al., 2005; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). It is generally accepted that competence in performing HRM practices can be developed through training. Some authors have shown the need for continuous and systematic training in HRM practices (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; McGovern et al., 2007). In this thesis, one of the findings shows that managers curtail the practice because of lack of training. Motivational theory posits that performance is affected by both motivation and ability as they interact with each other (Vroom, 1964). It has also been posited that a line manager who not only knows what to do with HRM practices but also likes to put this ability to good use, and is stimulated to do so, will probably be more effective than someone who knows what to do but has little interest in doing it (MacDuffie, 1995). In this thesis, managers who championed and managers who translated demonstrated the motivation to implement practices and were confident in their ability to do so. Whilst managers who curtailed complained about factors such as lack of time and lack of training to support them in implementation. With regards to opportunity, if line managers have the necessary HRM skills and are motivated to implement HRM

practices effectively, they may not succeed if they find few opportunities to do so within the organisation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). In this thesis the research revealed that managers felt powerless because of the lack of opportunity to implement the practice.

5.4 Implications for Practice

Based on this study, there are a number of practical implications that HR managers and professionals should consider when designing, implementing, and evaluating the impact of HRM practices. This study found that managers can act in one of three ways when they implement HRM practices. They can *champion* the practice, which means they implement it as designed by HR, they can *curtail* the practice which means that they can slow down or reluctantly implement the practice or they choose to *translate* the practice which means they make changes to the practice to suit their own situation. This is important for the HRM department, in that when they (HR) are designing practices they need to not just think of the content, but the process. As this study shows they need to recognise that implementation decisions take different forms, some supportive and on the contrary some negatively impacting the effective implementation of HRM practices.

Managers' curtailing implementation is concerning for two reasons: firstly, because HRM practices are designed to help organisational performance; and secondly because performance management is a key function of managers and important for employees and the organisation. This is because performance management systems are built to align the performance goals and activities of work groups and functions with the broad strategic goals of the organisation. These systems also support employees in executing the plans and strategies that are used to achieve unit goals (Pulakos et al., 2015). Research also supports the importance of appraisal to employee outcomes. Kuvaas, (2011) found a relationship between satisfaction with performance appraisal, and outcomes such as affective commitment and employee turnover intentions. On the other hand, dissatisfaction with performance appraisal is associated with negative outcomes including

increased job dissatisfaction, lower organisational commitment, and higher intentions to quit (Brown et al., 2010). Therefore, this emphasises the importance of the practice to the organisation and their employees and the potential impacts if managers choose to curtail implementation. The following sections examine the opportunities for HR leaders implementing HR and the learnings that can be taken from this study.

5.4.1 Creating line manager champions

One of the first findings of this study has revealed that some managers will choose to actively implement and own the HRM practice and one reason for this revolves around understanding of the alignment of the practice with the goals of the company and the strategy. In 1996 Ulrich introduced the concept of HR Champions in reference to how HR and line managers can work together to increase organisational capability and achieve company goals (Ulrich, 1996). This thesis re-introduces the concept of champion with a focus on the line manager, who can often be perceived as blockers to HR implementation and contrary to this perspective, in this study they show the potential to be a proactive proponent of the value of HRM practices. What this study proves, is that this strategic alignment is as important for first line managers as it is for senior managers This is an important message for HR functions within organisations. Drawing clear connections between the business outcomes and how HR supports those business outcomes has been proven to be a motivator for managers to implement intended practices. The outcome of which, is strategy execution and HRM practices help accomplish business objectives (Boselie & Paauwe, 2005). HR functions would do well to remember that the strategic link and alignment of goals is as important down the line and as such need to focus messaging and reinforce messaging to all management levels.

The study shows the need for HR to 'road test' practices to ensure that they can be explicitly perceived as enablers '*for*' the business as opposed to HRM practices applied *to* the business. This study revealed that managers will take ownership for the practice and

some managers in this study took responsibility for implementation as they viewed it as a core function within their roles, to implement HRM practices. In their conversations with the researcher, they enthusiastically related the importance of the practice and how they used it for their own benefit and for the benefit of their employees. There are opportunities for HR in this regard, they could use business champions to demonstrate the effectiveness of people practices. Perhaps there is an opportunity for organisers of HR focused conferences to focus more on business users talking about HRM practices rather than HR people. An area for future research would be to test the extent to which managers champion HRM practices in this way and visibly do so with their colleagues.

5.4.2 Co-creation of HRM practices between HR and line managers

A second finding of this study was that some managers changed practices to make them more applicable in their own areas. Managers took this action in order to increase effectiveness and make the practice it more suitable when applying locally. In the companies used in the study line managers were not invited by HR to participate in the creation of practices and feedback from the managers to HR was sporadic to no-existent. that the HR functions do not have involved the managers in the creation of practices. This is a lost opportunity for the HR function who could involve managers in practice design. Doing so, can bring benefits for both actors: line managers because their voice can be heard and HR representatives because it is an opportunity to engage with the manager population.

Thus, creating understanding of the purpose of practices and providing an opportunity for HR to co-create people initiatives though engagement with a key stakeholder. (Hewett & Shantz, 2021) identify HR co-creation as a continuous process in which HR and stakeholders create value through collaborative efforts to problem-solve and innovate in the design and use of HRM practices to help them to better satisfy stakeholders' needs. Hewett and Shantz further assert that co-creation of HRM practices

has the potential to improve the value of the practice and produce better outcomes for the organisation.. This study supports this notion of co creation and the potential to increase value for all stakeholders. There needs to be more understanding of the role played by managers as co-creators in HRM practices. This is an area for further research, looking at organisations who co-create practices in conjunction with the business and developing understanding of the impacts on both HR, line managers and employees.

5.4.3 Dialogue with line managers

There was evidence in this study that managers felt disconnected from the HR function and this aligns with previous theorising on consequences of devolution which may result in the HRM department being perceived as 'faceless' and operating through electronic websites and portals (Townsend et al., 2022) The impact of this in the performance link is not yet understood but Bos-Nehles, (2010) investigated and found that the greater the support received from the HR professional, the greater the effectiveness of the line manager enactment of HRM. But what is clear is that HRM stakeholders need to cooperate and interact to implement HRM practices effectively (Kuvaas et al., 2014; Makhecha et al., 2016). A practical suggestion may be, for HR to spend time in the businesses understanding their challenges, customers, and business drivers. These 'walk in my shoes' experiences could potentially build important relationships with business leaders. Even more importantly, this illustrates to the business that HR colleagues are prepared to invest the time in understanding the challenges and demonstrating real partnership.

The findings of Chen et al., (2011) and Kim & Ryu, (2011) indicate that cooperative relations forged by the HR department positively influence line managers' assessments of the HR function's effectiveness, whereas Guthrie et al., (2011) view the operation of high-performance HRM practices, encouraged by the HR department, as contributing to social (and human) capital which in turn results in a more positive assessment of the HR function

by general managers. At a most fundamental level, HR need to keep the channel of communication open with managers by implementing regular information or discussion sessions for line managers. This can provide an opportunity for explaining the background and to educate and build understanding for managers on how HRM practices work or the rationale for those practices. These communication mechanisms must be regular as doing so can keep the practice top of mind for managers.

5.4.4 Providing support to line managers

In this study managers expressed a need for training, and this is consistent with the findings from literature which informs us that from previous research it has been shown that line managers do not receive adequate training to perform various aspects of their job, including their role in delivering HRM practices (Townsend et al., 2012; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). This study finds that there are gaps in managers' knowledge and these gaps include the competence to deal with difficult conversations and also the knowledge of HR policy to apply HRM practice effectively. In this study, managers who championed the practice were confident in doing so and one of the reasons for this was the application of learnings they had acquired. Dewettinck & Vroonen, (2017) found that line managers' perceived support from the HR department was positively related to their beliefs regarding the usefulness of performance management activities, which then enhanced their implementation of performance management activities.

The HR department is well advised to regularly provide relevant information and training as well as monitor the implementation of HRM practices (Gilbert et al., 2011; Piening et al., 2014). Organisations, however, do not typically provide line managers with adequate training and support to perform their role (Townsend et al. 2012), despite the line managers being recognised as a critical linchpin that enacts intended human resource management policies(Wright & Kehoe, 2012).

Future research may address the above issues and extend this analysis particularly a longitudinal study where interviews take place in real time could provide more information. Furthermore, a study involving dyads of managers and their employees would provide more complete insights into the perspective of the manager and his/her employees.

5.4.5 Selection of line managers

This research prompts discussion on how line managers are selected and their level of interest and knowledge in HRM practices. In their study Trullen et al., (2016) spoke with selection informants who referred to 'the strategic selection of line managers' as helping the HR department in providing line managers with the necessary skills and motivation to implement HRM practices. The selection team chose managers who had been exposed to HR or had a background in HR. In contrast to other initiatives, this was not an action taken by HR departments in connection with the introduction of a specific HRM practices, but an approach to smooth out the HR department's work with the line, with additional benefits for HRM practice implementation.

The findings from the study in this thesis suggest that there was a low level of HR competence amongst managers and also a low level of interest. The researcher was surprised by the lack of knowledge by managers who were unaware of the language of HR and struggled to articulate some of the practices in a coherent or confident manner. The findings support the informants' views in the study by Trullen et al., (2016). Suggestions for making a difference could be for HR practitioners to consider the inclusion of HRM in onboarding and developmental programmes to help managers develop the core skills and competencies for effective HRM implementation..

5.4.6 Managing tensions in implementing HRM practice

This study examines one practice, performance management implementation. The findings revealed contradictions and tensions that impacted managers, resulting in managers who feel powerless, frustrated, and undermined. HRM practices are identified

as emotionally challenging at the best of times (Gilbert et al., 2015; Shantz et al., 2016) Emotions expressed by managers in this study were high when they described the forced distribution approach used in their company. Managers were frustrated, as they perceived that employees would be disappointed at the end of the year. They expressed concerns that despite performing to a high level, they could not reward employees appropriately due to the system of forced distribution and would be required to deal with the "fall-out". Managers also recounted how they knew of cases were managers had "given in" to the system and applied a "round robin" of bonus allocation, this meant that they rotated the allocation of bonus annually to the extent that employees would know "whose turn was next" to receive the annual bonus. They also perceived that employees were aware of this activity.

These emotions ultimately impacted implementation through curtailing behaviours. The same system also resulted in managers not being able to allocate the reward they believed was appropriate for individuals. Paradoxically, in these cases, the performance management process that is designed to reward and recognise performance is creating a situation where its application does the opposite. This is caused by the system of forced distribution that has the effect of some managers avoiding the practice or "going through the motions". The practice is also undermined in the eyes of the employee, who themselves do not see awards being given for high performance.

This has implications for the organisation, aside from disempowered managers, ambitious employees may also see the role of manager as unattractive, resulting in talented individuals seeking career progression in other organisations. HR functions should increase dialogue, educate, and take time to understand how managers feel about HRM practices. In this study, the forced distribution approach created much difficulty and HR functions need to first focus on outcomes and what is to be achieved and then build

interventions that can deliver for the business without creating other unintended consequences.

5.4.7 Applicability to Managing Change

There are similarities between the findings unearthed in this study and the description of the responses of people to change as described in the change management literature. Within the change literature, behavioural change can be characterised along a continuum that reflects emotional responses to change. This continuum includes active resistance, passive resistance, compliance and finally enthusiastically supporting (Huy, 1999). Parallels can be drawn with the research undertaken in this study. Managers who curtailed, acted by either actively avoiding implementing or passively avoiding. Managers who championed were enthusiastic supporters who overcame implementation challenges and implemented the process in line with the expectations of the HR function.

The findings in this study can therefore inform the implementation of change in organisations through the recognition that potential new categories of change response exist, as explicated in this study of line manager. Similar to the four stages of change outlined above, the line managers in this study chose either to curtail, translate or champion. However, there are differences from the assertions of Huy, in that the findings do not suggest that this was a progression of activity along a continuum but a more fixed state for which practitioners will need to acknowledge and apply suitable strategies for each cohort.

5.5 Limitations and Future Research

As with all research there are some limitations to this study that need to be considered in evaluating the contributions and affect the formulation of the implications drawn from its findings. This section explores the methodological limitations and the limitations for research. These limitations also provide opportunities for further research, and these are outlined in this section.

5.5.1 Methodological limitations

Generalisability: A qualitative research design was consistent with the philosophical position of the researcher and deemed most appropriate for the purpose of this study. Although generalisability is not an aim of this, or typically other explorative qualitative research (Guest, et al., 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994), it is important to note that caution must be exercised when considering how the findings from this study are replicable in other organisations or reflect more general trends in terms of HRM practice implementation. Nevertheless, the findings from this qualitative study could be further enhanced by the use of quantitative analysis to test hypotheses and also by applying a mixed method approach to develop more insights into the choices line managers make in implementing HRM practices.

Generalisability may be impacted by leadership behaviours. For example, in previous studies on the impact of High Involvement Work Systems, Kilroy et al., (2022) demonstrate how HRM practices directly and indirectly influence employee well-being. A critical component to these outcomes being the implementation of an engaging leadership style by managers which emphasises strengthening, connecting, inspiring, and facilitating (empowering) behaviours. In other studies, research has shown that line managers who show a genuine interest in and a sense of ownership of their HRM responsibilities are likely to find themselves to be more successful in HRM implementation (Op de Beeck et al., 2018). It has also been suggested that transformational leaders aim to motivate people to perform while improving the quality of life of organisational members (Tucker & Russell, 2004), and they strive to create opportunities for employees in organisation.

Another aspect of generalisability relates to the extent to which these findings may relate to other practices. The finding of this thesis provides an opportunity for future research to examine whether there are any contextual factors that may make this

generalisability possible or not possible. For example, practices such as employee rewards and specifically how bonuses are awarded, selection practice and induction could be possible contexts for further investigation.

Methodology: Another limitation is that the research is based on retrospective accounts from line managers who recounted their experiences in the middle of the performance management cycle. This may have impacted their recall in relation to certain events and it is difficult to completely mitigate retrospective influences in reflective accounts. Therefore, there could be questions left unanswered which may be answered by a longitudinal case study. This would allow real time interaction between researchers and managers to create understanding of the impact of decisions by line managers. Other avenues of data collection could include journalling activities by managers to record their thoughts and emotions. Future research could use these reasons developed in this study to develop hypotheses around…And then create questionnaires and test them deductively through quantitative methods.

Sample: There are limitations in relation to the sampling of participants. The organisation's representatives invited the line managers to voluntarily participate and although the sponsor was asked by the researcher to provide a diversity of candidates, the researcher was not privy to the sponsors choice of who to approach. Therefore, there may be potential bias in the selection e.g., those that would be more well-disposed to HR.

Another limitation is that the researcher did not interview other stakeholders. Employees would have provided an alternative perspective on how line managers implement HRM practices. Nor did the researcher include HR informants in this study. Interaction that did take place with HR representatives, was for the purposes of sponsoring the activities within their organisations and understanding the context of the performance appraisal within their businesses. Although previous research has included the HR stakeholder perspective (Bondarouk et al., 2009; Conway & Monks, 2010) a qualitative

focus to establish the response by HR to manager championing, curtailing and translating would bring additional insights.

5.5.2 Limitations in research

Performance management: For the purposes of this study, the practice selected was performance management. Further exploration of more emergent HRM practices e.g., central to discourse on wellbeing such as menopause would shed light on the role and perceptions of line managers and the competing challenges they face in delivering business results and supporting initiatives which are of a more pastoral nature. This type of practice will also draw on different skills of the line manager, providing more interesting insights into their coping mechanisms when these skills have not been developed sufficiently.

An area that has not been addressed in this study, nor is it within the scope, is the debate about the future of performance appraisal within organisations. There has been much commentary about this within the past 10 years, but as outlined earlier it is still prevalent within organisations and no suitable alternative has yet been devised. What is important though is the role that HR play in these debates, and how they ensure that they are driving these debates as business enabling activities. Research that explores the lessons from this hiatus would be useful to determine the role played in this high profile discussion.

Context: The managers in this study came from three Irish organisations and they operated in traditional economic environments.. Choosing from different countries with informants who operate within different economic and legislative may also yield valuable insights. We already know from prior research that devolving to the line is increasingly assigned to line managers across countries, (Holt Larsen & Brewster, 2003) and that the extent of such assignment varies from country to country (Brewster et al., 1992).

Finally, this study was conducted in a hierarchical, 'traditional' organisation, other studies have started to examine practices in non-traditional settings for example project based organisations (Keegan et al., 2012; Keegan & Den Hartog, 2018). The research for

this thesis was during the pandemic and since then hybrid working has become more normalised. Although they were operating within a hybrid environment due to the pandemic, most of the managers would have not been accustomed to hybrid working prior to this study. Choosing samples from different forms of organisations may yield more knowledge and insights from non-traditional work environments. For example, Keegan & Den Hartog, (2018) examined project based organisations for their studies, where traditional dyadic relationships were replaced with polyadic arrangements and hybrid organisations where explored by Conway et al., (2016).

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

The chapter recaps on the research study and the findings in general. The opening chapter of this thesis focussed on introducing this study, through a review of providing the researcher motivations, and context. Following that, an outline of the research questions were provided, and they are, (1) what are the choices managers make in response to the implementation of HRM practices?; (2) why do managers act in the way that they do?; (3) how does this impact their implementation of devolved HRM practices?

The core focus of this study was positioned in the realm of the Strategic HRM process perspective and focused on contributing to discourse in this area. In chapter 2 the review of the literature explored the origins of HRM and Strategic HRM and the evolution of the scholarly discourse on the content and process perspective of HR. In positioning this study within SHRM, the literature review encapsulated the critical stages of the development of theory and research, acknowledging the early scholarly work linking strategy to human resource management (Fombrun et al. 1984; Miles & Snow 1984, Schuler & Jackson 1987), and the distinctive phase focused on the content perspective in

the 1990's which provided an evidence base for the claim of the HR company performance link (Huselid 1995; Mac Duffie 1995; Delery & Doty 1996) Literature that focused on line manager literature was reviewed and an outline of various focus of some of the journals was highlighted.

In chapter 3 of the study the researcher outlined the methodology including a review of the research design, methods of data collection and data analysis. In chapter 4 of this study the researcher presented the findings following the thematic analysis that was conducted. Using this interpretive, qualitative study, the findings from the thematic analysis, revealed three main topics for how line managers implement HRM practices. These topics were labelled: 1) *championing,* which describes that line managers enthusiastically embraced the performance management practice; (2) *curtailing,* which describes that line managers reluctantly accepted responsibility for implementation or sought ways not to implement the performance practice and (3) *translating,* which describes that line managers made changes during implementing performance management to better suit their environment. Across each of the three topics, there were common patterns within the data, and these were labelled *behaviours* and *reasons,* and these form the main themes within each topic. Within these main themes were sub-themes providing further detail. The data structure therefore, was formed from the analysis, and consisted of the three aforementioned topics, six main themes and within each main theme several sub-themes. Reviewed together, these provide a thorough understanding of how the line managers within this study implemented HRM practices and their reasons for these choices.

In chapter 5 the findings were discussed in terms of the scholarly and practical contributions. The researcher identified the contributions of the study to research and these included contributions in four specific areas of research: (1) by adding to the causal chain of HRM performance through categorisation of line manager implementation (2) by

shining a light on managers championing HRM practice (3) by informing the under-explored area of line manager attributions (4) by contributing to the discussion on HRM process through the use of the theoretical lens of translation theory.

Practical implications were discussed in chapter 5 and a number of areas of interest for HR practitioners were highlighted. For example, curtailing should be of concern to HR functions, as this study revealed that one of the reasons managers curtailed was due to the lack of HR knowledge and training opportunities to develop their HR skills. This could be detrimental to outcomes, as managers may make errors which could affect, legislative requirements or company reputation if a disenchanted employee takes a legal case.

Powerlessness was revealed as a reason for managers avoiding implementing or de-prioritising the practice of performance management. This example is important for the Human Resource function, as this study highlights areas of concern that must be addressed by HR professionals in organisations, or as outlined above will lead to unintended consequences. Managers are key to implementing HRM practices and consequently the impact on organisational outcomes. For this to be successful managers need to feel part of the process and involved. Bondarouk et al. (2018),in their special issue, called for a process perspective on HRM implementation considering the engaged usage of HRM practices. More specifically, if organisations want their designed HRM practices to be implemented effectively, they need their line managers to engage in using them on a regular basis, since they are the ones who are responsible for implementing them in the organisation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gilbert et al., 2015). Furthermore, managers' sense of powerlessness may impact employees view of what leadership is in within their organisation. Employees view of the leadership role as being powerless may impact their own desire to progress into leadership roles. Therefore, this now has a potential to impact talent management, as progression could now be perceived as a less than attractive proposition.

Tensions emerged in the stories of the participants of this study, the forced distribution approach applied by HR caused created lack of trust, managers felt undermined and were concerned for the fairness on employees. Therefore, the HRM practice of performance management was designed in such a way that instead of motivating and increasing performance, the design was in fact impacting negatively on how the key actors felt about the practice. In essence, this practice as designed by the HR function created tensions through paradox and this resulted in managers curtailing the practice. An additional finding from the study was the existence of managers who did not possess knowledge in relation to how the forced distribution system worked. In other cases, there was suspicion that there may indeed be some forced distribution, but some managers said that they had never been informed formally that this process took place.

This chapter concludes this thesis and in doing so as re-introduced the objectives, outlined the methodology, reviewed the findings and the practical implications of those findings.

REFLECTION

I commenced this PhD study in 2017 on a part time basis at Trinity Business School My reasoning for embarking is highlighted at the start of this thesis, but the main motivators were curiosity about my practitioner world, a desire to round off my career with academic rigor that I could apply in that same practitioner world. It also was a challenge that I wanted to embark upon because I believe we are always learning.

As I look back over these past six to seven years, it has indeed opened my mind to the many things I did not know about “my subject ”. It could be easy to jump to assumptions without really investigating thoroughly the phenomenon under investigations. It was also impossible to ever imagine that in the intervening years since that commencement date there would have been some major shifts in the world of work.

These shifts did cause me some concern about access to companies, how managers would engage with me during this period of disruption and that it would be via Zoom or Teams technology. As it turns out, all of these factors became manageable, especially as the 'new normal' developed. Doing so through zoom proved to be less challenging than I had thought, and interviewers were relaxed, and technology proved not to be an impediment to fluid conversation.

During the research phase of this study, the conversations with managers were energising and the art of listening became crucial to understand the choices they made in relation to practice implementation. It was a new direction for me, as I left my professional practice hat aside and adopted the role of researcher. When I reflect back on that period, the piloting of the interviews with peers and colleagues proved to be essential preparation. This helped me to listen but to probe too in order to draw more insights. I think though, next time around I will be better equipped to conduct qualitative analysis and on reflection interviewing dyads could have provided a deeper level of insight to develop.

The subsequent analysis was more complicated than I thought it would be and my supervisors played a key role, challenging me and sending me back to the data to draw insights rather than make assumptions. Although I had the opportunity during this time to work on a paper with a supervisor to apply thematic analysis, it was even more interesting to apply the learnings from that exercise to my own study. On reflection data analysis was harder than I had initially thought it would be and extremely challenging at times, as I sought to leave my practitioner hat aside, not an easy thing to do!

When I reflect on the HR landscape during the lifetime of this PhD, there has been significant change. The pandemic has had an enormous impact on organisations and created a shift to hybrid working and the well-being agenda was elevated during this time, as a result of the concerns for employees. The phrases 'great resignation', 'quiet quitting,' and 'the future of work' have become part of the HR and leadership lexicon. In addition,

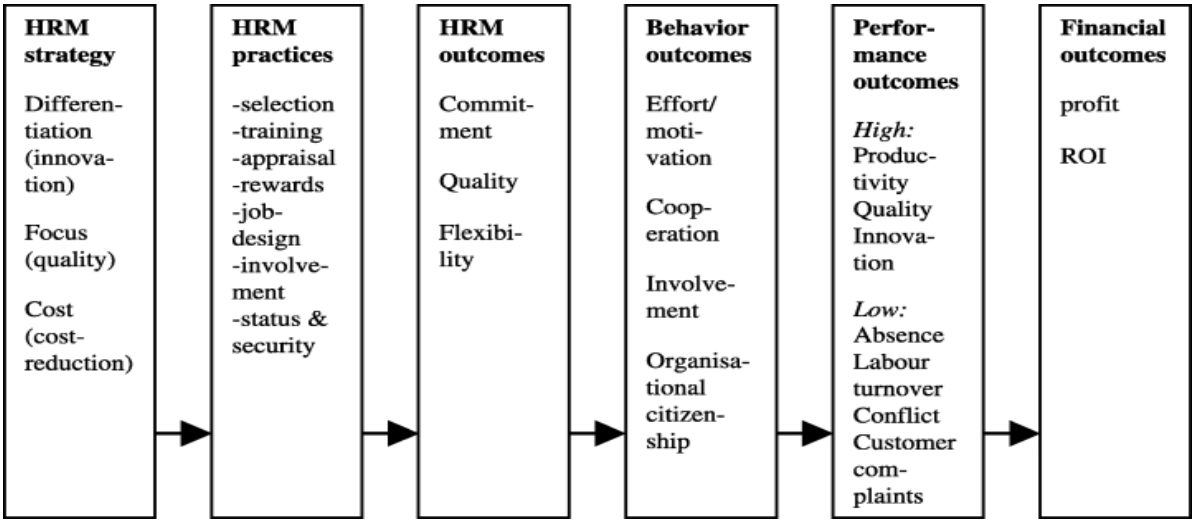
the impact of technology on supporting HR within organisations has come to the fore and more recently the impact of artificial intelligence is now front of mind for all people leaders, bringing both opportunities and areas of concern. Through all these changes the role of the line manager has become even more important as they navigate through the challenges that they and their own are grappling with during this period of disruption.

When I reflect on my own journey, it has not been without its challenges: for example, the practicalities about committing myself to the PhD whilst working full time, the apprehension about whether organisations would fully engage in the midst of a pandemic and of course the self-doubts that are natural during a challenge that PhD study presents. However, despite these concerns it has been a voyage of discovery. I have thoroughly enjoyed the learning process that has taken place. The conversations with line managers has opened my eyes to what managers think and how it can help me be a better person when working with line managers in the future. The study has furthered my curiosity and provided me with new skill that I look forward to applying in both a practical way and also in the world of academia.

APPENDICES

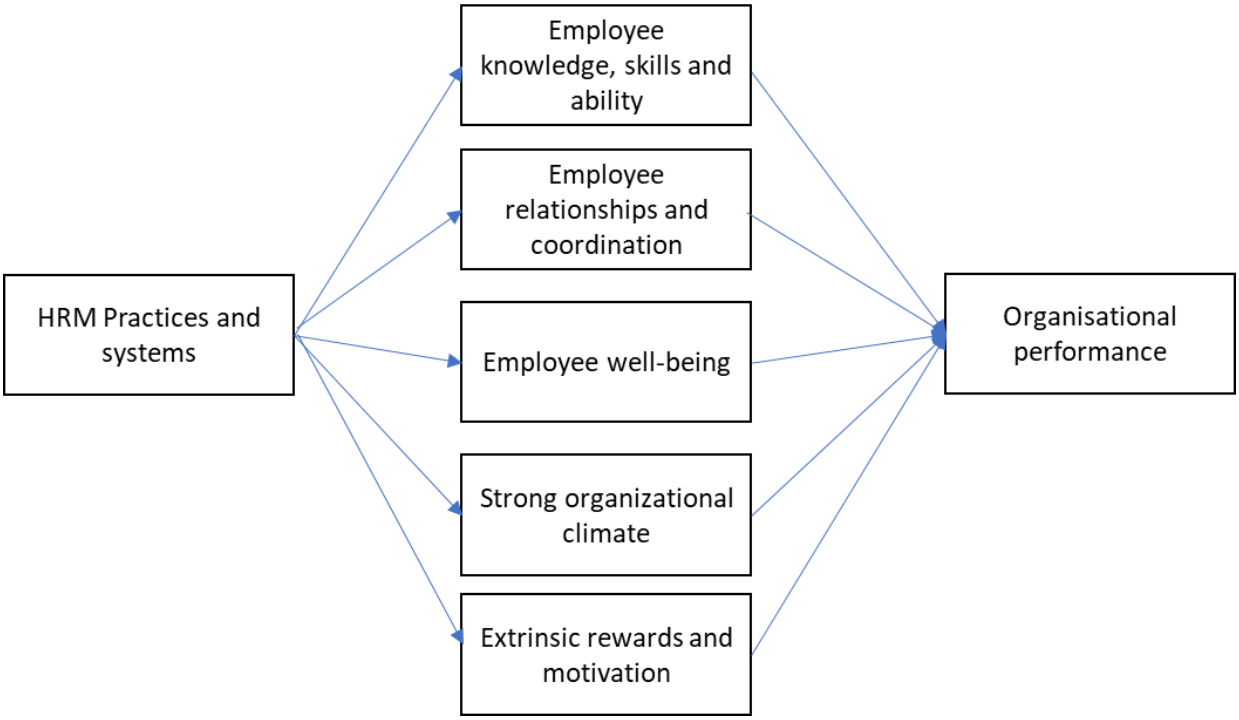
Appendix A HRM Models

Figure A.1 Process Model 1



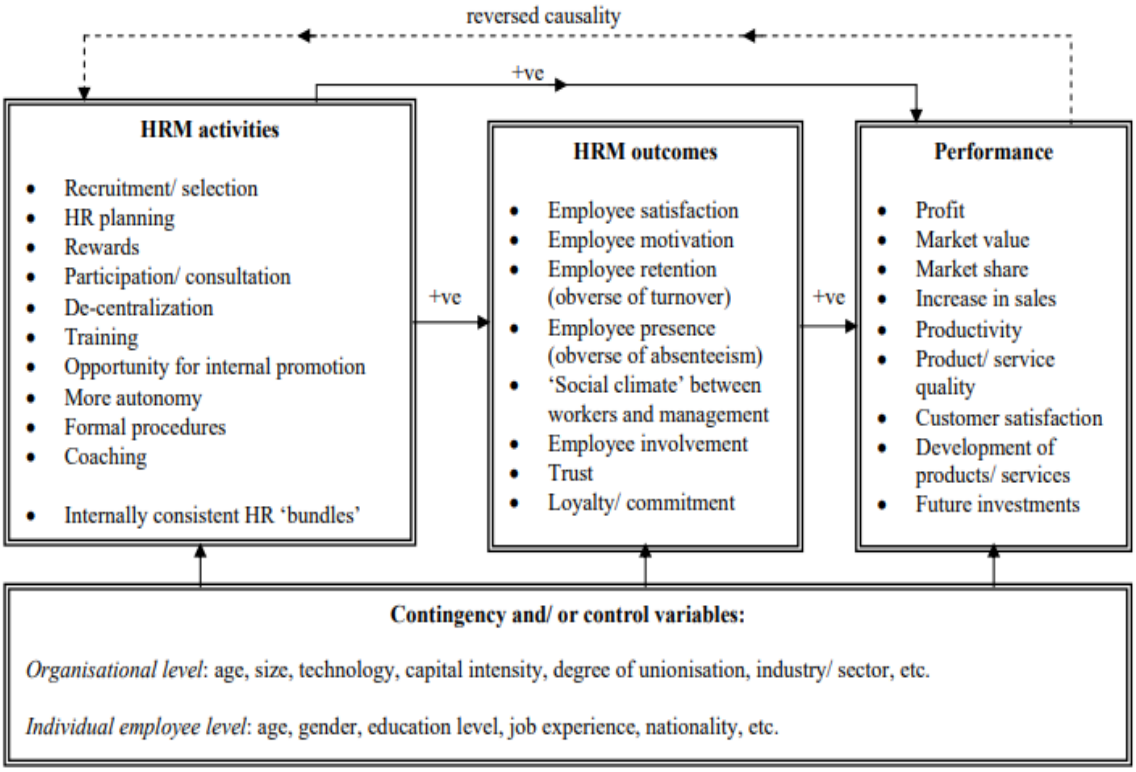
Source: adopted from Purcell (2003: 7)

Figure A.2 Process Model 2



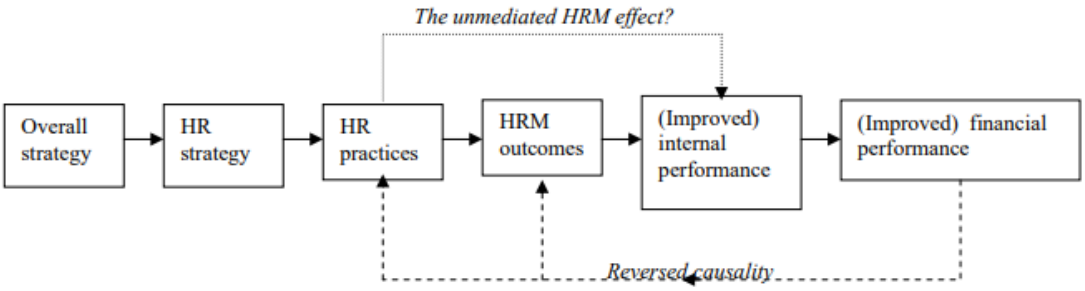
Source: adopted from Peccei et al. (2013: 19)

Figure A.3. HRM Performance Model 3



Source: adapted from Paauwe and Richardson (1997: 258)

Figure A.4 HRM performance model 4



source: Boselie et al. (2005: 10)

Appendix B Summary of HRM Implementation Special Issues

Special Edition IJHRM 2011 - Comparative Perspectives on HR and Line Manager Relationships and their Effects on Employees			
Study	**Theoretical lens**	**Method**	**Focus**
(Sanders & Frenkel, 2011)	n/a	n/a	Although knowledge concerning the impact of HRM practices on performance is accumulating, the processes involved, particularly the role played by social relations – managers and employees – and particularly HR and line management at different levels, merit further investigation.
(Gilbert, et al., 2011)	AMO	Quantitative research	Investigates the impact of employees' perceptions of HR Management (HRM) investments made by line managers and the HR department on employees' affective organisational commitment. The authors found that line management enactment of HRM practices, relationship-oriented leadership behaviour and the HR department's service quality have positive effects on employees' affective organisational commitment.
(S. Kim & Ryu, 2011)	HR strength	Quantitative research	Investigate whether the effectiveness of the HR department is influenced by the HR unit's social capital, i.e., structural, relational, and cognitive aspects relating to HR, line management and employees. They found that the more the HR department undertakes the role of a change agent, the stronger the relationship between social capital of the HR department and HR effectiveness as perceived by a strategic staff member.
(Björkman et al., 2011)	n/a	Quantitative research	Investigates several factors that are expected to influence HRM internalization, i.e., the extent to which general managers of subsidiaries value and are committed to their subsidiary's HRM practices. They found a positive relationship between both the operational work experience of HR managers and the level of perceived HRM capability of the subsidiary's HRM department and HRM internalization.
(Guthrie et al., 2011)	n/a	Quantitative research	Examine the relationship between the use of high-performance HRM practices and general managers' perceptions of the strategic value of these departments. General managers perceive the HR department to be adding more strategic value when these units are seen to pursue a larger number of high-performance HRM practices.
(D. Guest & Conway, 2011)	HR system strength	Quantitative research	Perceived effectiveness of HRM practices by senior line and HR managers has a stronger impact on employee attitudes than the mere presence of these practices.
(Chen et al., 2011)	Stakeholder theory	Quantitative research	They found that closer perceived collaboration by HR and line managers is positively associated with line managers' perceptions of future firm performance.

Study	Theoretical lens		Focus
(Bondarouk et al., 2018)	n/a	n/a	Highlight the need for more research into line manger implementation and greater understanding of different interpretations of implementation
(Mirfakhar et al., 2018)	n/a	Review	Review the literature on HRM implementation to answer the question of what factors contribute to the effective implementation of HRM policies and practices. Conceptualizing the introduction of new HRM practices as an instance of change, they adopt Pettigrew's *strategic change framework*, which acknowledges the relevance of content, context, and process elements in shaping a change process.
(Van Mierlo et al., 2018)	Structuration theory	Conceptual	Argue that HRM implementation is less linear and one directional than commonly depicted, as HRM practices need to become inscribed into the interpretive schemes of organisational actors, resources must be distributed, and the HRM practice has to gain legitimacy before it is effectively implemented. Rather than talking about implementation gaps in a static form, they advocate for a more dynamic and processual view of implementation from a multi-actor perspective.
(Vargas et al., 2018)	Theory of Planned Behaviour	Conceptual	Conceptualize HRM implementation as individual's decision to adopt a new HRM practice, which in their study is the use of HR analytics by HR professionals. The authors decompose the decision making process that leads to the adoption of an HRM innovation, distinguishing between the knowledge, persuasion, and decision stages.
(A. C. Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018)	Social Exchange theory/Line managers perceived organisational support/LMX	Quantitative research	The paper uses two conceptualisations of social exchange: one focusing on line managers perceived organisational support, which reflects the relationship between the line and the organisation (where the HR department plays a crucial role), and another focusing on leader–member exchange, which tackles the exchange relationship between line managers and employees in their units. The paper concludes that social exchanges between these different actors in the organisation are needed for employees to perceive the existence of the practices, which affects the effectiveness of their implementation and employees' affective commitment.
(Straub et al., 2018)	Signaling theory	Quantitative research	Supervisors send out signals to their employees that shape how they make sense of their working environments. By actively supporting employees during the implementation of a new HRM practice (in their case, a work–life intervention), the authors show that supervisors play a crucial role in influencing employees' overall work-home culture perceptions, which in turn affects the firm turnover.
(Budjanovcanin, 2018)	Social power	Qualitative research	Taking the perspective of employees, in a qualitative study of female lawyers, this paper examines employees' roles in shaping HR implementation, addressing a lack of understanding about the role of 'others' in the process.

(Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018)	AMO	Quantitative research	Examines HRM implementation as experienced satisfaction with HRM by line managers and employees. Focusing on one particular HR policy, performance management, they show how line managers' AMO is positively associated with employees' satisfaction with the policy, which in turn is mediated by perceptions that the performance management system is strong, hence building in turn on the concept of HRM system strength (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) to conceptualise effective implementation.

Special Edition IJHRM 2018 - Conceptual and Empirical Discoveries in Successful HRM Implementation

Study	**Theoretical lens**		**Focus**
(Bondarouk et al., 2018)	n/a	n/a	Highlight the need for more research into line manger implementation and greater understanding of different interpretations of implementation
(Mirfakhar et al., 2018)	n/a	Review	Review the literature on HRM implementation to answer the question of what factors contribute to the effective implementation of HRM policies and practices. Conceptualizing the introduction of new HRM practices as an instance of change, they adopt Pettigrew's *strategic change framework*, which acknowledges the relevance of content, context, and process elements in shaping a change process.
(Van Mierlo et al., 2018)	Structuration theory	Conceptual	Argue that HRM implementation is less linear and one directional than commonly depicted, as HRM practices need to become inscribed into the interpretive schemes of organisational actors, resources have to be distributed, and the HRM practice has to gain legitimacy before it is effectively implemented. Rather than talking about implementation gaps in a static form, they advocate for a more dynamic and processual view of implementation from a multi-actor perspective.
(Vargas et al., 2018)	Theory of Planned Behaviour	Conceptual	Conceptualize HRM implementation as individual's decision to adopt a new HRM practice, which in their study is the use of HR analytics by HR professionals. The authors decompose the decision making process that leads to the adoption of an HRM innovation, distinguishing between the knowledge, persuasion, and decision stages.
(Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018)	Social Exchange theory/Line managers perceived	Quantitative research	The paper uses two conceptualisations of social exchange: one focusing on line managers perceived organisational support, which reflects the relationship between the line and the organisation (where the HR department plays a crucial role), and another focusing on leader–member exchange, which tackles the exchange relationship between line managers and employees in their units. The paper concludes that social exchanges between these different actors in the organisation are needed for employees to perceive the

	organisational support/LMX		existence of the practices, which affects the effectiveness of their implementation and employees' affective commitment.
(Straub et al., 2018)	Signalling theory	Quantitative research	Supervisors send out signals to their employees that shape how they make sense of their working environments. By actively supporting employees during the implementation of a new HRM practice (in their case, a work–life intervention), the authors show that supervisors play a crucial role in influencing employees' overall work-home culture perceptions, which in turn affects the firm turnover.
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(Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018)	AMO	Quantitative research	Examines HRM implementation as experienced satisfaction with HRM by line managers and employees. Focusing on one particular HR policy, performance management, they show how line managers' AMO is positively associated with employees' satisfaction with the policy, which in turn is mediated by perceptions that the performance management system is strong, hence building in turn on the concept of HRM system strength (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) to conceptualise effective implementation.

Special Edition European Journal of International Management 2017

(Bos-Nehles et al., 2017)	n/a	Mixed Methods Research	LMs engage in a range of behaviours: they ignore, deviate, imitate, internalise, initiate and/or integrate the delegated practices because they fail to see the value of the content of the practice and the process of execution.
(Bondarouk et al., 2018)	n/a	Quantitative research	The results show that HR professionals are more likely to see the HRPs they develop effectively implemented when they (1) involve line managers in the development of HRPs (consultation)
(Ruël & Gbur, 2017)	HR Frames	Qualitative research	The results suggest a model with four sequential domains: HRM-as-intended, HRM-as-composed, HRM-in-use and HRM-in-integration. This study contributes to the existing literature by exploring the importance of HRM frames during HR change, proposing a model that regards and explains HRM as a process.

Research Handbook on Line Manager 2022

Study	Theoretical lens	Method	
(Townsend, Bos-Nehles, et al., 2022)	n/a	n/a	Calls for clarity of definition of line managers and although scholars agree on the crucial HRM role that line managers play HRM scholars do not agree about the details.
(Harney & Lee, 2022)	Systems theory	n/a	Consider the important role of agency of frontline managers through a systems theory lens to demonstrate the complex, yet interrelated aspects of frontline managers within organisations
Robertson and Veres	Person–environment fit	n/a	Explore the differences between the managed and the managers within the organisational context.
(Evans, 2022)	Role theory	n/a	Consider the complexity of the various different line managers through using role theory, and the various tensions between role overload, role ambiguity and role conflict in the HRM system
(Boxall & Purcell, 2003)	Social exchange theory	n/a	Considers the history of how Blau has influenced line manager implementation research
(Brandl et al., 2022)	Paradox theory	n/a	Draw in a recognition that the requirement for line managers to be increasingly involved in HRM presents a situation of competing demands. Their chapter brings a relational approach to this paradox, to understand how individuals' responses to competing demands can either enable or hinder the dynamics before them.
(Hewett & Shantz, 2022)	Attribution theory	n/a	Use attribution theory to discuss the role of line managers in the implementation of HRM practices
(J. Y. Kim & Kehoe, 2022)	n/a		Reconsider the traditional view of line managers as HRM implementors and place a focus on their individual agency. Equally, the authors continue, the HRM implementation role is usually only a relatively small part of the line manager's day-to-day workload.
Sikora	n/a		Consider the capabilities of line managers within the organisational system

Brookes and Brewster	n/a	Draw out the key role of national context in line manager experiences. They find that the organisations with the most strategic HRM assign the least HRM responsibilities to line managers. Further demonstrating that context is very important,
Knies, Decramer and Audenaert	n/a	Explore the experience of line managers within the public sector. The authors find that while there is an increasing likelihood that public sector organisations are looking more like those in the private sector, there remain differences, particularly for line managers.
Atkinson, Lupton and Dahwa	n/a	Recognise that much of the line manager research relates to large firms. Their focus on small firms illuminates the complexity of HRM implementation by line managers when there is no internal HRM department in small firms. This
Townsend, Troth, and Loudoun	n/a	Draw on a qualitative study of frontline managers (FLMs) to better understand how they see the leadership required in their role. This chapter demonstrates the context-specific nature of FLMs, while drawing patterns of expectations within the work of FLMs and presents the 'pillars of frontline leadership.'
Marescaux, Van den Broeck and De Winne	n/a	Argue that when line managers empower their employees this leads to a range of positive outcomes, including higher levels of autonomy, competence, satisfaction and negotiating i-deals
King	n/a	Argue that talent management is not a senior management responsibility: that in fact, all levels of managers within organisations play an important role in the policies and practices that shape and implement talent management.
Saundry, Fisher and Kinsey consider	n/a	Using data from a multimethod study of workplace conflict in the United Kingdom. The authors argue that the ability of managers to prevent, contain, manage, and resolve conflict has important implications for organisations and the individuals within them.
Mirfakhar, Trullen and Valverde (Chapter	n/a	Argue that the specific area of human resource management is mostly silent on the topic of senior managers, the uppermost authority in organisations and the people who determine much of what HRM systems, and their implementation will look like
Prolifi, Sammarra, Innocenti and Bos-Nehles	n/a	Examine the way in which line managers implement a very specific part of a HR system: that of work adjustment practices for chronically ill employees. This study demonstrates the complexity of line managers and their work to support not only healthy workers, but also those who have diseases that can be long in duration, and diverse in nature.
Hastuti and Timming	n/a	Consider line managers and the disclosure of mental illness in the workplace
Mildenhall and McCann	n/a	Consider the emergency services, specifically in relation to paramedics, and how important the support of line managers is for employees in a hierarchical, uniformed work culture

Monks and Conway	n/a	Focus on the influence of new technologies and COVID-19 on how future work is organised and experienced. They discuss frontline managers' role in managing the interaction between the technical, the social and the environmental consequences of these new changes. They also discuss how frontline management itself is changing as a result of technological advances
Khoreva, Bos-Nehles and Salojärvi's	n/a	Focus on the implementation of digitalisation. By identifying digitalisation as one of the major trends influencing future business, the authors conducted an explorative inductive qualitative study to reveal the implementation process of digitalisation in organisations and to explore the role of line managers in digitalisation implementation. They conclude their chapter by calling for more future research from different theoretical lenses to understand the implementation of digitalisation and the role of line managers in this.
Drent, Renkema and Bos-Nehles	n/a	Focus their attention on the role of line managers in the age of artificial intelligence. By conducting semi-structured interviews with HRM software vendors, they explore the new responsibilities of line managers due to the introduction of artificial intelligence in work processes and discuss how organisations may pass over HRM responsibilities to artificial intelligence in the next phase of HRM devolution.
Meijerink, Rogiers and Keegan	n/a	Discuss the implications of platform-enabled gig work for line managers. They first define the characteristics of platform-enabled gig work and introduce different types of online labor platforms. They then discuss the HRM-related paradoxes faced by line managers under different types of online labor platform models.

Appendix C HRM Implementation Definitions

Definition	Influences of HRM literature
Dynamic	Dynamic HRM implementation (A. Bos-Nehles, Bondarouk, et al., 2017; Budjanovcanin, 2018; Van Mierlo et al., 2018) Non-linear process (Bondarouk et al., 2018)
A process	HRM implementation process (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017; Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018; van Mierlo et al., 2018; Budjanivcanin, 2018)
A new policy or practice	New HRM policy (Bondarouk et al., 2018;)Guest & Bos Nehles, 2013; Stirpe et al., 2013)
A focus on multiple actors	Multiple HRM actors (Bondarouk et al. 2018), HRM and line managers (Bos-Nehles et al. 2017), Line managers and employees (Bos-Nehles and Meijerink 2018; Bos-Nehles et al. 2013; Khilji & Wang 2006; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer 2018) HR managers, line managers, and employees (Makhecha et al. 2018), HR departments and line managers (Trullen et al. 2016) HR practitioners, employees, and senior professionals (McDermott et., al. 2013), Various line manager hierarchies (Op de Beeck et al. 2016), Multi-hierarchy and multi-level line managers, employees, and HRM professionals (Van Mierlo et al. 2018)
Interactions among actors	Social exchange relationships between HRM actors (Bos-Nehles &Meijerink 2018) Co-Creation (Hewett & Shantz, 2021) Interactions between HRM actors (Boada-Cuerva et al. 2019) Bondarouk et al. 2018; Brewster et al. 2013; Kuvaas et al. 2014;Makhecha et al. 2018; McDermott et al. 2013; Op de Beeck et al.2016; Trullen & Valverde 2017; Van Mierlo et al 2018)

Source: Adapted from (Trullen et al., 2020: 15)

Appendix D Steps in Thematic Analysis

Phase	*The process*
Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes.	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading to understand data, writing initial ideas capturing reflections in memos.
Systematic data coding	Coding interesting features of each set of data using Nvivo. Reviewing and refining coding and capturing ideas in memos
Generating initial themes from coded and collated data.	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. Writing memos through this process and reviewing existing memos.
Developing and reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis. Testing the themes to ensure face validity.
Refining, defining, and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the "stories" being revealed by the data.
Writing the report	Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

Appendix E Interview Protocol

E.1 Interview Consent Form

Consent Form

Researcher name: **Shirley Kavanagh (PhD candidate)**
Supervisor name: **Amanda Shantz (Associate Professor Trinity College Dublin)**

I am invited to participate in this research project which is being carried out by Shirley Kavanagh. My participation is voluntary. Even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The study is designed to investigate how managers implement HRM practices and in this study the practices of goal setting and feedback are being researched.

PROCEDURES
If I agree to participate, this will involve taking part in an interview about my experience of goal setting and feedback. The interview will be carried out over Zoom and will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded.

POTENTIAL DISCOMFORTS
There are no potential discomforts to me in participating in this research project.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS
The study will contribute to scholarly research on Human Resource practices in organisations. My organisation may benefit because the findings will be summarised and recommendations made, based partly on the interviews received.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION
Any information or data which is obtained from me during this research which can be identified with me will be treated confidentially. This will be done by anonymising and coding the information provided in the interview and stored in NVIVO. Data will be kept in a secure office and on encrypted computers and only Amanda Shantz (supervisor) and Shirley Kavanagh will have access to it. The data storage and the grounds for continued storage will be reviewed within 2 months of completion of data. Any data that is no longer required will be destroyed or erased in a safe and secure way. Any data that is still required will be further reviewed every 12 months and may be kept for up to 10 years.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
I can choose whether or not to be in this study. If I volunteer to be in this study, I may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. I may also refuse to answer any questions I do not want to answer. There is no penalty if I withdraw from the study.

QUESTIONS ABOUT RESEARCH
If I have any questions about this research I can ask Shirley Kavanagh (Kavans21@tcd.ie)I am also free, however, to contact Amanda Shantz (Shantza@tcd.ie)

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS
The Trinity College Dublin School of Business Research Ethics Committee has reviewed the researcher's request to conduct this project. If I have any concerns about my rights in this study, I can contact Brian Lucey Director of Research in Trinity Business School

Signature of research participant
I understand what is involved in this research and I agree to participate in the study. [*I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.]***

---------- ----------
Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher
I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

---------- ----------
Signature of researcher Date

**** Please note – if it is not possible for you to digitally sign this consent form, you may give your consent by sending an email to Kavans21@Tcd.ie including the section in bold in your mail.**

E.2 Information Leaflet

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN – SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
PARTICIPATION INFORMATION LEAFLET
An investigation into the implementation of HRM practices by line managers.
PhD Student: Shirley Kavanagh. Supervisor: Amanda Shantz Associate Professor

You are invited to participate in this research project which is being carried out by Shirley Kavanagh under the supervision of Amanda Shantz. Your participation is voluntary, even if you agree to participate now, you can withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.

About this study
The study is designed to investigate how managers implement HRM practices and in this study the practices of goal setting and feedback are being researched. If you agree to participate, this will involve participation in a semi-structured interview conducted remotely and audio recorded. This interview will take no longer than 60 minutes. There should be no risks nor discomfort to you when conducting this research.

Confidentiality
All information or data obtained from your organisation will be treated confidentially. All transcripts of recorded interviews with participants will be anonymised and access to recorded materials will be restricted to the researcher and supervisor. A code will be applied to you before the interview, and you will be known by this code throughout the study. Your interview data will be stored in a computer programme Nvivo.

Data protection
Data will be kept in a secure office and on encrypted computers, the researcher and supervisor will have sole access to the data from interviews. The collection and use of data will be in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) EU 201/16/679 GDPR legislation. The data storage and the grounds for continued storage will be reviewed within 2 months of completion of data collection. Any data that is no longer required will be destroyed or erased in a safe and secure way. Any data that is still required will be further reviewed every 12 months and may be kept for up to 10 years.

Benefits of participating to you or others.
You will contribute to scholarly research on the effectiveness of HRM practices in organisations. Anonymised data from this research project may be published in future or presented at academic conferences. The original data will be available only to the present investigators. Your organisation may benefit because the findings will be summarised and recommendations made, based partly on the interviews received. No information that makes a person recognisable will be included in the report. Instead, general trends will be summarised.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about this research please contact me.

Shirley Kavanagh
Kavans21@tcd.ie 087 2557950

E.3 Interview Guide

Interview Questions

Introduction

1. Background Questions

Can you share with me a bit about your role?

Probe:
- What is your key area of responsibility?
- How long have you been in the role and in the organisation?
- How many people are on your team?

How do typically interact with HR?

Probe:
- Do you have a main point of contact with HR?
- How frequently? About what topics? Who initiates the contact?
- How do you hear about new HR ideas/practices?

2. Intended Purpose of Performance Appraisal (including goal setting and feedback)

How would you describe the purpose of the annual appraisal? Why are you supposed to do it?
- Same purpose for goal setting and feedback? Do you see these as interconnected?

Does the process achieve the intended purpose?
- If so, can you provide an example of how it is achieved its intended purpose?

3. line manager understanding of what is expected in the Performance Review process

2a. Can you give me an overview of how the current Annual Performance Review process is meant to be like, and how objective setting and feedback are incorporated into that process?

Probes:
- Link to compensation and if so, how?
- Are the goals split into categories e.g., personal, business, development?
- Is forced ranking in place? If so, follow on…. tell me more about how this plays out?
- How often are you expected to provide feedback against objectives?
- Can you tell me when and how you complete the Professional Development Plan?

4. Implementation

Can you help me to understand how you implement the process?
Are there any circumstances where you might vary the process. If so, why?
Probe
Do you let anyone know about any changes that you make? Can you give me an example of when that happened? What was the outcome?

Probe:

- Does it always happen that way?
- Does each stage (goal setting, feedback, performance review, rankings) happen the same for everyone?
- How does the feedback meeting happen? Can you give me an example?
- Why do you vary the process?

4b. Would there be any reason why you would vary the process?

- If yes, in what circumstances?
- Is that what HR ask you to do?
- What happens if someone achieves something not in the goals?

4c. Is there anything that prevents you from implementing any part of the annual process?
Probe:

- What part do you not implement? Can you give me an example?
- What happens if you do not implement it?
- Would anyone know if you are not implementing it?

4d. Are there any challenges for you in implementing the process?
Probe:

- Can you give me an example of when you experienced a challenge?
- Do forms fit for everyone?
- Are they suitable for both lo and hi performers?
- Does PDP work for everyone?
- Do you share those challenges with anyone in the business? What happened? What was the outcome?

5. Change

In an ideal world, how would the annual performance appraisal take place at your company?

Probe:

- Can you give me an example of how you would change it? – (at goal setting stage, feedback, development plan?)
- Do you have an opportunity to voice those suggestions to anyone in the business?
- If so, have those suggestions been implemented? If they have not been implemented, why do you think that is?

6. Feelings about HR

Generally, how do you think people in the business respond to HR initiatives? Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about the performance appraisal, goal setting or feedback that we have not discussed?

Probes to keep in mind

Can you be more specific?
You say/use the term 'X' – what does that mean for you?
Can you tell me more about that? / Could you say a little bit more about that?
Can you give me an example?
What are the implications of that for you?
What led you to that conclusion?
Why do you think that is important?
Completeness
Anything else? Tell me more.

Appendix F Coding Book

Thematic Analysis Step 2 – Generate initial codes
Nvivo Extract – first round open coding (including memo for researcher on meaning)

Code	Notes
Alignment with Organisation goals	*Managers aligning with organisation goals*
Timing of organisation goals	*Delivery of goals to managers*
Awareness of HRM practice	*Managers understanding and aware of goals*
Benefits to managers –	*Practice benefits manager*
Communications	
Lack of communication	*HR not communicating to manager*
Proactive communication	*HR communicating to manager*
Context	
Culture of Organisation	*Culture of organisation encourages open discussion*
HR Activity –	*HR activity in rolling our PM to line managers*
Level of Interaction with HR	*Line manager interacting with HR*
HR Activity –	*HR activity in rolling our PM to line managers*
Level of Interaction with HR -	*Line manager interacting with HR*
Change	*HR undergoing change – organisation undergoing change*
Dissatisfaction with practice	
Burden on managers –	*Practice is time consuming*
Cynicism	*Manager expresses cynicism towards company*
Demotivating-	*Practice is demotivating to managers and employees*
Disempowerment	*Managers feeling lack of empowerment*
Leadership not valued	*Managers feeling undermined, not appreciated*
Senior managers take the glory –	*When good news to be distributed*
Poor HR Process –	*HR process perceived as below standard*
Poor Rating process	*Rating process is not rewarding people – bell curve*
Benefits under-performers	*Some get rewards when they are not warranted*
Unfairness of rating –	*Bell curve creates unfairness*
Tick Box	*Going through the motions*
Unfairness	*General unfairness of process*
Perception of HR	
Dismissive of HR	*Manager does not value HR*
Positive support –	*HR is beneficial to HR*
Unaware of HR –	*Manager unfamiliar with HR function and HR colleagues*
Poor Performers rewarded –	*HR happy that poor performers get rewarded*
Unsuitable process –	*HR have created an unsuitable process*
EE poor perception –	*Employee perception of process as poor value*
HR Automation	*Technology used by HR*
HR Pro-Activity	*Hr proactive in interactions*
Inconsistency	*Hr are inconsistent in advice and application*
Line Manager ownership	*Give line managers ownership of activities*

Code	Notes
Line Manager Perceptions of HR	How managers feel about HR
Disconnected	*Feeling remote*
HR Standardisation of practice	*Standardisation by HR of practices*
Limited Interaction	*HR not interactive with the business*
Non value add	*HR do not add value to their operation*
Them and Us	*HR are siloed – not working with the business*
Transactional activity	*They are focused on transactional matters*
Undergoing change	*A lot of change underway in HR*
Purpose of process	*Managers view of the purpose*
Alignment with org goals	*Connect with strategy*
Career Development	*Build careers*
Managing performance	*To manage performance of employee*
Recognition Reward	*To reward performance*
Implementation	
Application of Goal Setting	*How goals are set*
Cascade of Goals	*Goals trickle down*
Application of Monthly one to ones	*How formal one to one meetings happen*
Managers unhappy with standard	*Sense that managers do not apply it properly*
Idiosyncratic Activity	*Managers doing individual activity*
Fear - Covering up	*Covering up under-performance*
Feeling Disempowered	*Sense of power being removed*
Inconsistent application	*Managers differ in application*
Involvement in HRM practice	*How managers are involved in the practice*
Manager demonstrating ownership	*Manager feels that they own the practice*
Managers view of their role in implementing	*How managers perceive their role*
Manager not owning practice	*Practice is owned by Hr not manager*
No variation to practice	*Practice applied consistently*
Top-Down Business Owner	*Practice is owned by the top down*
Empowerment of others	*Manager feel they empower others*
Accountability for practice	*Manager feels they are accountable to HR*
Managers varying practice	*Managers changing the practice*
Varies the practice	*Manager changes the practice*
Variation for positive outcome	*Varies to help individual employee*
Consequence of varying practice	*What happens when manager varies*
Dialogue with HR re variation	*Manager approaches Hr when changes occur*
Managers adding to the process	*Manager add new dimension to the process*
Varied to create fairness	*Manager varies to create fairness*
Varied to suit the business context	*Manager varies to suit business context*
Shares varying with others	*Manager tells others of changes they make*
Shares varying with HR	*Tells HR of changes they make*
Does not share varying	*Keeps the changes to self*
Colludes	*In conjunction with employee makes changes*
Perceived Barriers	*What gets in the way of implementation*
Need for Training Support	*Inadequate training*

Training to help selling self	*Help for employees to sell their success at year end*
Technology process	*Tech viewed as unhelpful*
Time constraints	*Not enough time to complete – competing demands*
View of HRM practice	
Applying Ratings	*It is all about applying ratings*
Box ticking	*A box ticking exercise*
Cynicism Lack of belief	*Sceptical of motivations*
Demotivating	*Does not encourage high performance*
Inconsistency in application	*Managers apply inconsistently*
Lack of fairness	*The system is unfair to people*
Need for Change to practice	*There is a need to address the problems*
Non-Value HRM practice	*Practice does not help the manager*
Reward	*It is purely about reward*
Suitability for all performers	*It is applicable for everyone – all levels and performance*
Purpose of practice	*Aims of the practice in the business*
Achievement of Co objectives	*Link to company objectives*
Align to company goals	*Connected to goals*
Benefit for own performance	*Helps improve own performance*
Career Development	*Focused on career development*
Clarity of expectations	*Creates clarity of what is expected*
Creates targets	*Creates targets for all managers and staff*
Fulfil HR's needs	*Designed for HR purposes*
Growth of self	*Can improve development of self*
Increment or reward	*Is in place for the purpose of rewards*
Managing performance	*Is an overall management tool*
Motivation	*Can motivate people and managers*
Monitor performance	*There to keep an eye on performance*
Practice is for employees	*Is really for the employee*
Practice supporting development	*Is aimed at development of people*
Providing clarity	*Creates clarity for everyone*

Thematic Analysis Step 2 – Generate initial codes
Nvivo Extract – second round coding

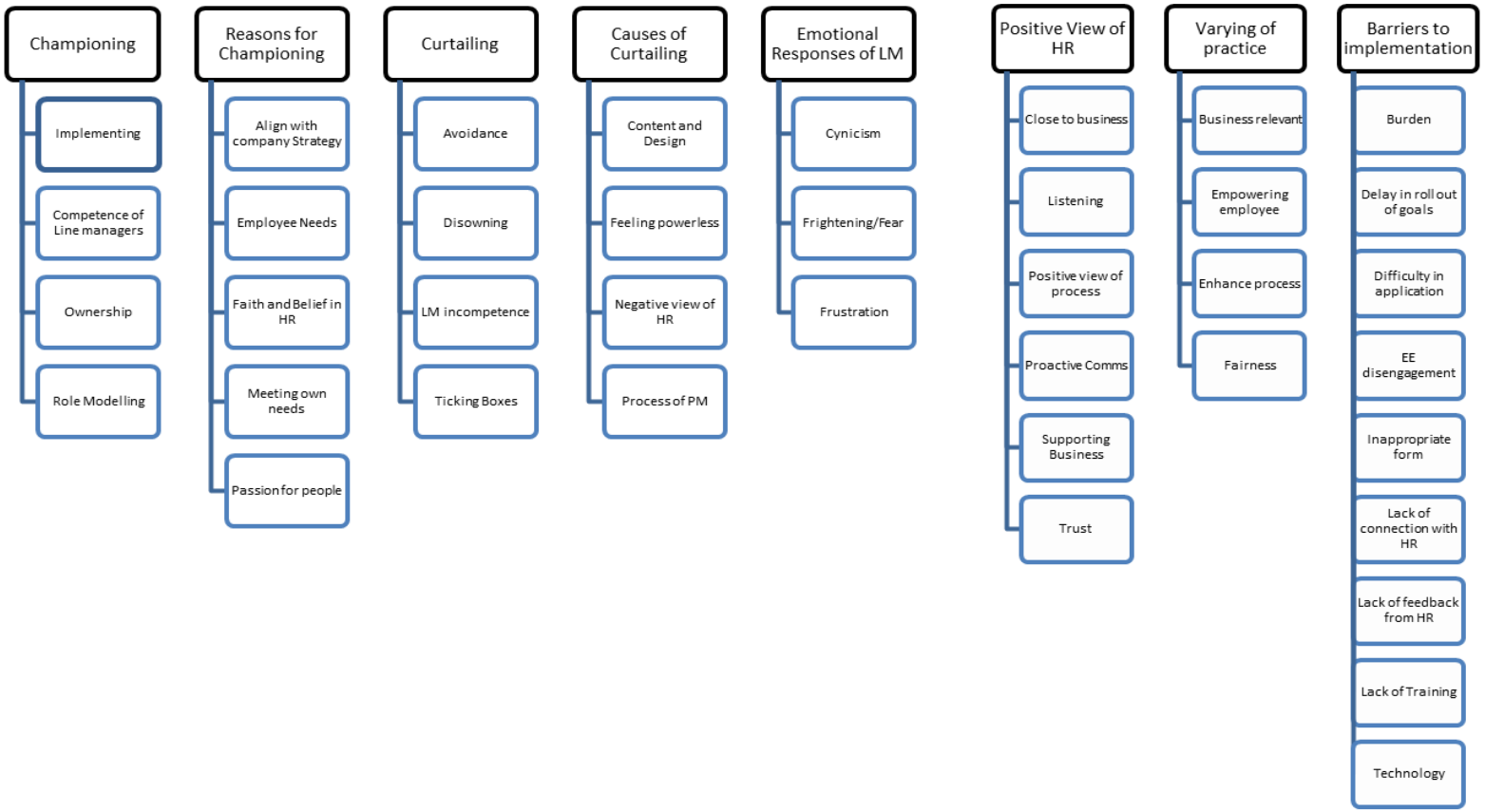
Name	Notes
Barriers to implementation	*Factors impacting negatively on implementation*
Delay in roll out of Bus goals	*Goal setting process delayed in organisation*
Difficulty in application	*Process is difficult to implement*
EE disengagement	*Feelings that employees are dis-engaged*
Inappropriate form	*Form provided by HR not useful*
Lack of connection between HR and line Manager	*Distance between Line manager and HR*
Lack of dialogue	*Lack of communication*
Lack of feedback from HR	*HR not informing Line managers of how reviews are working – good/bad/lacking information*
Lack of Knowledge	*Managers lacking the knowledge to apply practice*
Lack of Training	*Inadequate training for managers in PM*
Technology process	*Technology is out of date or not helpful*
Curtailing	*Reluctantly implementing*
Avoidance	*Finding ways not to implement or delay*
Changing forms-restructuring	*Manager changing form to make it easier to use*
Disowning	*Manager seeing process as belonging to HR not them*
LM incompetence	*Managers lacking the skills*
Ticking Boxes	*Managers going through the motions*
Drivers	*Factors positively impacting implementation*
EE Engagement	*Belief that employees are engaged*
Job clarity	*Provides job clarity*
New Director	*New director bringing hope*
HR Changing	*Changes underway in HR*
LM Championing	*LM's embracing the practice, taking ownership, and implementing the activity*
Competence of LM's	*LM's expressing confidence/mastery in implementing*
Implementing	*Examples of LM actively implementing*
Ownership	*LM's taking ownership for the practice - or seeing it as a business practice*
Role Modelling	*LM's presenting themselves as role models for implementation*
Negative Experiences of Line Managers	*Managers not embracing the practice due to negative association*
Emotional Responses of LM's	*Managers feeling about practice*
Cynicism	*Suspicious – disparaging - skeptical*
Frightening and Fear	*Afraid of doing it wrong or not delivering*

Frustration	*Practice irritates – cannot apply due to bell curve*
Positive view of HR	*Manager feeling positive about HR*
Close to business	*Feels HR are close to business*
Listening	*HR listens to the manager*
Positive view of process	*Views PM as a positive*
Proactive Comms	*Feels that HR is proactively communicating*
Supporting Business	*HR support the business – positive*
Trust	*Line manager trusts HR to help*
Negative feelings	*Why do managers delay*
Burden - Time consuming	*Too much work in practice*
Time constraints	*Too many other demands*
Content and Design	*Referring to the content of the practice and how designed*
Lack of Trust in system	*Managers do not trust as power taken from them*
Paradox	*Is designed to reward good performance but the system demotivates*
Poor forms and templates	*Unsuitable forms*
Unfairness in PM	*Due to the paradox*
Demotivated	*Demotivated as*
Demotivating to Employees	*Believes employees*
Perception of HR	*How do line managers view HR*
Distance-Disconnect	*Distant from the business – lack of connection*
Division -Them and Us	*Silo in their thinking*
Fixers - When things go wrong	*There to help the business when things go wrong*
Lack of Comms	*Not communicating with line managers*
Lack of expertise	*Do not have the up-to-date HR knowledge*
Not supportive	*Not proactively helping the business*
Not up to date	*In terms of website but maybe also in terms of their knowledge*
Policing-checking	*Auditing role*
Provides a service	*May need to rename this code*
Seeking Limelight	*Looking for external awards*
Transactional Role	*HR are perceived as carrying out transactional activity*
Under-resourced	*Lacking capability and the budgets cut*
Lack of influence	*Not a power-player in the organisation*
Process of PM	
Inconsistency	*Between Departments and LM's and teams*
Lack of Awareness of other LM's PM's	*Managers not sure of how their implementation compares to others – are they the same believes there is inconsistency*
Lack of HR listening	*HR not listening to the feedback*
Technology support	*HR slow to correct problems in HR system*
Top-Down Communication	*One way*
Unsuitable	*Does not help manager in his/her business*
Reasons for implementing	*Why managers showcase and implement.*
Alignment with Organisation goals	*Wants to achieve company goals*

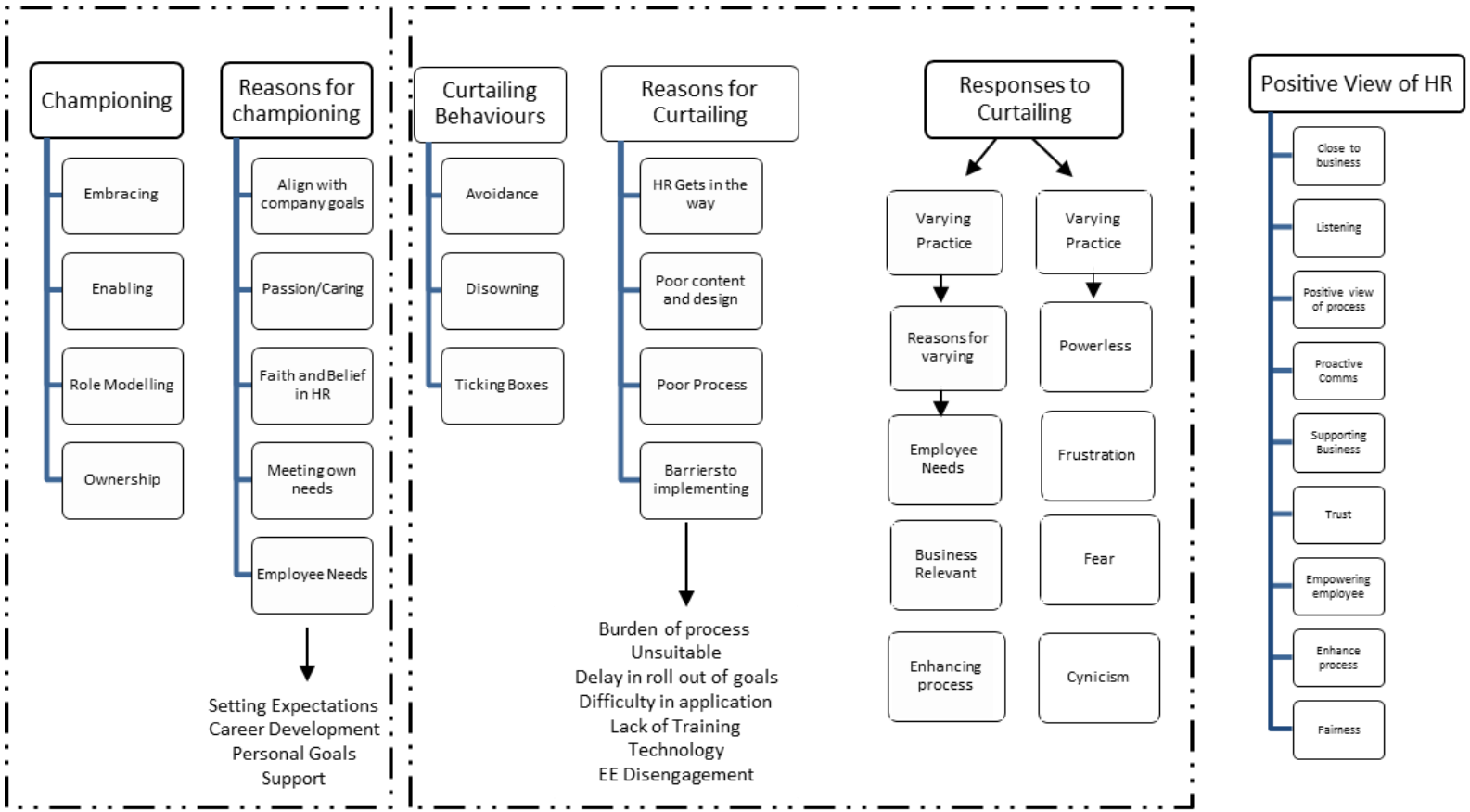
Employee Needs	*Helps employees achieve their ambitions*
Career Development EE	*Working to help employees build career*
Information for EE	*Provides information on progress*
Personal Goals	*Helps them achieve their own personal goals*
Support	*Uses it to support the employee*
Faith and Belief in HR	*Line manager feeling positive/having confidence in HR as a function*
Meeting own needs	*Helps line manager plan*
Passion -Care about people	*Fundamental care for employee*
Varying of practice by LM	*Manager changes practice*
Reasons for Varying	*Why managers change the process*
Business Relevant	*To make it easier to apply to their business*
Empowering employee	*To give more ownership to employee*
Enhance Process	*To improve the process*
Fairness	*To make it fairer*
Meeting employee needs	*To meet employee needs*

Appendix G Generating Themes

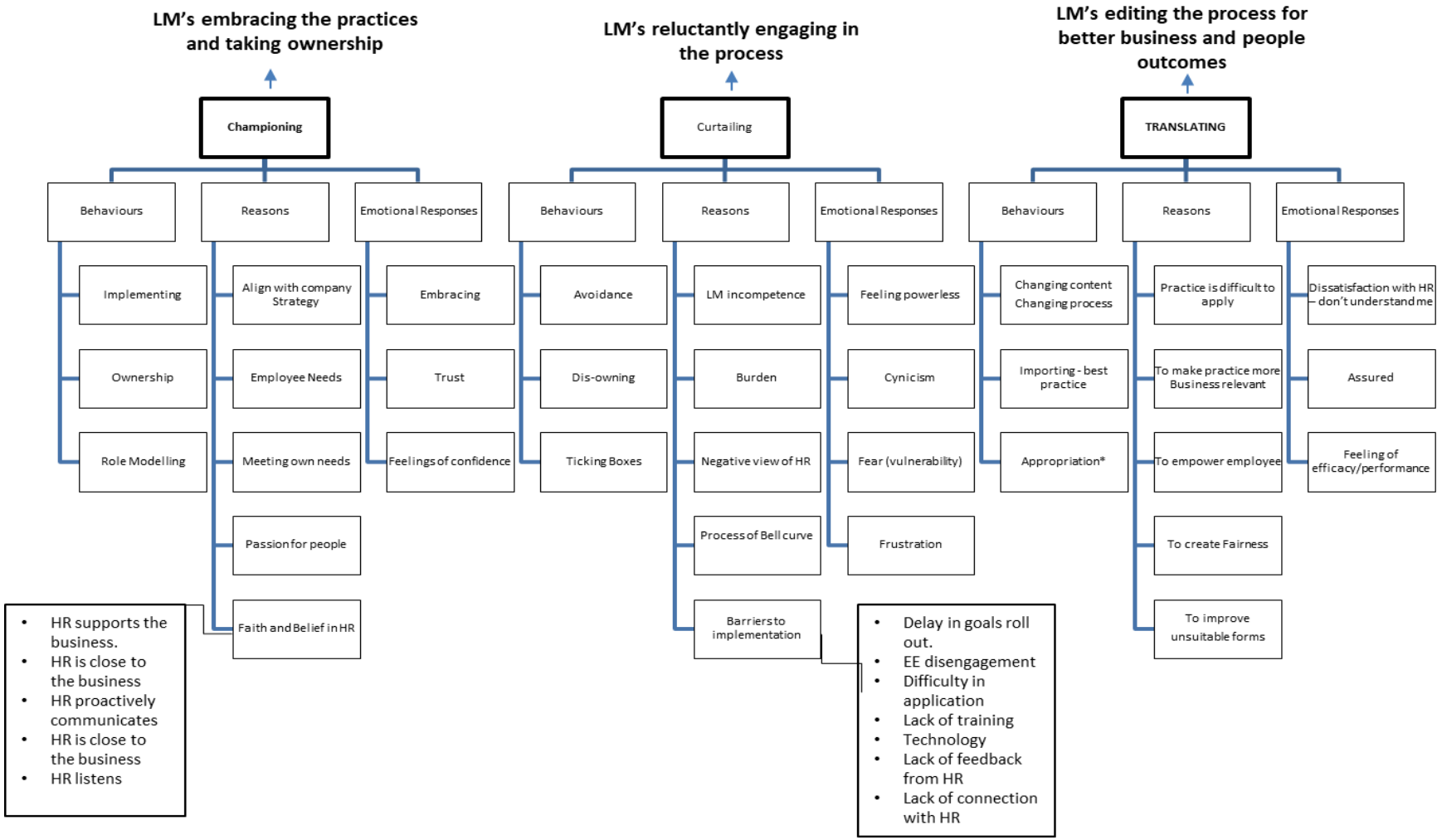
Generating Themes - Iteration 1



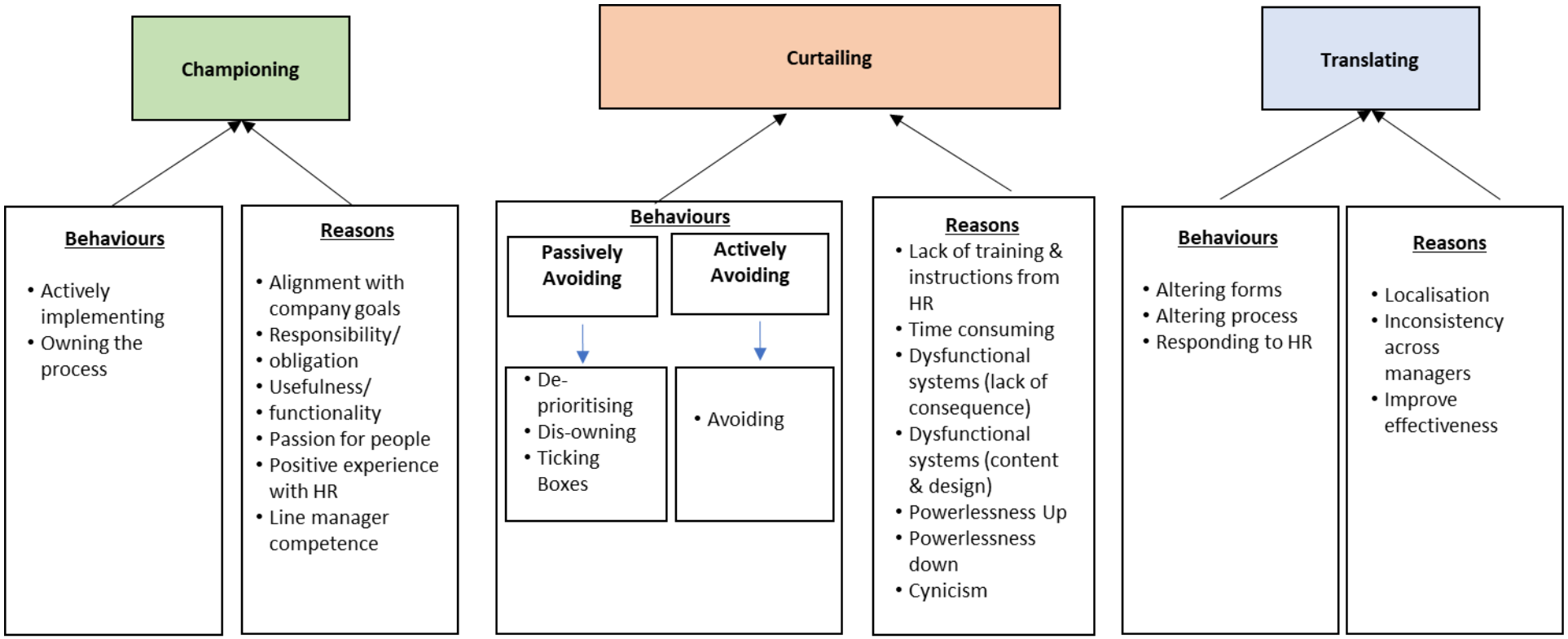
Generating Themes – Iteration 2



Generating Themes – Iteration 3



Generating Themes – Iteration 4



Appendix H Researcher Identity Memo

Researcher Identity Memo – Pre –Line Manager implementation of HRM practices

My own HR career ironically started off not in HR but as a line manager and it was my own frustration with HR within the company that I worked that resulted in me being given the responsibility for taking HR within my own portfolio. A sign of the times maybe that HR was seen as an addendum rather than a function in its own right! My interest in this topic then is from two perspectives - a giver and receiver of HRM practices within organisations.

My interest in this topic has been driven by a puzzle! A puzzle as to why line managers that I have interacted with over 25 years in the field of HR in some cases have been reluctant to implement the practices that were designed by HR people. Although I know myself why I was frustrated, the profession and status of HR has changed dramatically since those early days.

I experienced some great line managers who have been champions of HRM practice, but I have encountered many who have paid lip service and who have felt that HR 'gets in the way' of them doing their business. These managers have paid lip service to, and often completely avoided implementing practices. I have been frustrated at the time and effort that HR functions employ in designing practices, (some well thought out, others less so) and also the lack of dialogue, understanding and desire to work together to ensure that the right things are done.

Embarking on some detailed research may solve this puzzle and help me to help practitioners in the field. During this period of study, I must be aware that I can have strong opinions and I need to ensure that I use my experience and ask some pertinent questions that will help to draw out more useful information from participants in my study. I will need to check myself and it has been good that I have been challenged in the confirmation process by the panel to challenge myself to ensure that I do not "lead the witness" and create bias in my research.

June 2021

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