

Line managers as implementers of HRM

The effect of line managers' limitations on their HRM implementation effectiveness

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Preface

Hereby I present my master thesis which was written to complete my Masters degree in Business Administration at the University of Twente. It concerns an examination of the limitations that line managers experience in their HR responsibilities and the effect of these limitations on their HRM implementation effectiveness.

In the master of Business Administration I developed a deeper understanding and interest in Human Resource Management (HRM). Whereas in my bachelor education, internships and work experience the focus was on how to execute HRM practices, in the master of Business Administration I learnt about HRM performance, strategic HRM and how to manage Human Resources. I did not have to hesitate long about the topic for my master thesis: line managers' expanding HR role and the problems that go along with this was something I recognized from practice. Therefore, I contacted the expert on this topic: drs. A.C. Nehles. She offered me a concrete thesis on this topic, which I enthusiastically accepted. In the last months I learned how to perform an academic study, gained a lot of knowledge on the HR-role of line managers and can present you with surprising results. However, I could not have achieved this without the help of a number of people.

I would like to thank my supervisors for their guidance and input. First of all, I would like to thank my first supervisor, drs. A.C. Nehles, for the pleasant collaboration in executing this research together and her valuable remarks and constructive feedback. I would also like to thank her for the possibility to attend a HRM conference in Spain, which was an unique experience for me. Furthermore, I would like to thank my second supervisor, dr. M.J. van Riemsdijk, for his interesting views and conviction. I also would like to thank dr. P.A.T.M. Geurts, for his assistance with statistical data analysis.

I enjoyed writing my thesis at the university and appreciated the company of fellow graduates, PhD students and lectures. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends, especially my boyfriend and parents, for their support and incentives.

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Management summary

Rationale

Two aspects which are critical for HRM to be successful are the presence of HRM practices and the effectiveness of HRM implementation. Line managers are responsible for HRM implementation in an organization since they have to execute the HRM practices on the work floor. Nevertheless, research has indicated that line managers find implementing HRM practices difficult because of several limitations they experience in implementing HRM. HRM practices can be developed properly, but if line managers fail to implement them successfully on the work floor they are still not effective.

Research objective and questions

This research aims to measure to what extent line managers perceive the suggested limitations as hindering and whether their employees perceive their HRM implementation as effective. Furthermore, it aims to examine to what extent line managers' limitations influence their effectiveness in HRM (according to their employees). This research objective leads to the following research questions: 1) *To what extent can line managers implement HRM practices effectively?* and 2) *What is the influence of the limitations that line managers experience in implementing HRM on their HRM implementation effectiveness?*

Line managers' limitations in implementing HRM

Many researchers expressed concern about line managers' performance due to a number of limitations. First of all, line managers have a lack of **desire** to implement HRM. However, willingness is essential for someone to perform effectively. Furthermore, line managers do not have **capacity** to implement HRM, since they have other, more pressing, short term operational responsibilities. This short-range focus may result in people management that is generally less effective. Besides, line managers have limited skills and **competences** in HRM due to a lack of training. It is suggested that these low competences are a significant constrain on the effective devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers. Line managers are also hindered by a lack of **support** from the HR department and it is argued that line managers cannot perform their HR tasks effectively without the assistance of HR professionals. Lastly, line managers rely on clear **policies and procedures** on what their HR responsibilities imply and on how to execute HRM practices. Without these policies & procedures, their HRM implementation effectiveness is likely to suffer. Based on this literature, I developed the following (positively formulated) hypotheses:

Hypotheses
1: <i>The more desire line managers have to perform HR tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.</i>
2: <i>The more capacity line managers have to execute HR tasks next to their operational tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.</i>
3: <i>The more competent line managers perceive themselves to perform HR tasks, the more effectively they will</i>

implement them on the work floor.

4: The more HR support line managers perceive to receive from HR professionals in performing their HR tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.

5: The more policies and procedures line managers have on their HR responsibilities and on how to execute HRM practices, the more effectively they will implement HR tasks on the work floor

Methodology

I performed statistical data analysis to answer the research questions. Nehles (2006) developed a research instrument based on non-HRM literature to measure the limitations that line managers experience in HRM. Line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness is measured by asking their subordinates' opinion of their HR performance on five HRM practices. Nehles (2007-2008) collected data by means of questionnaires in two case organizations; an international naval defence company and a construction company. For measuring line managers' limitations in implementing HRM, the research population was line managers at various levels of an organization responsible for the supervision of a team of employees. For measuring line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness, the research population was line managers' subordinates.

Results & conclusions

Contrary to earlier research, I found that line managers perceive themselves as effective as they do not perceive limitations in implementing HRM and they are also perceived as effective by their subordinates. Thus, line managers have found a way to perform their HR role to their own satisfaction as well as to the satisfaction of their subordinates.

In order to investigate whether the limitations have an effect on line managers' effectiveness in implementing HRM practices, I performed a multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses. I performed three regression models (1) without control variables, (2) with demographic control variables, and (3) with demographic and organizational control variables. Without controlling for the organization in which the research was performed, I can conclude that the more capacity line managers have to apply HRM practices, the more HR competences they have and the better they get supported by HR professionals, the more effectively they implement HRM practices on the work floor. Therefore, I support hypotheses 2, 3 and 4. However, when controlling for the organization, only line managers HR competences are significantly positively related to their effectiveness in implementing HRM. Policies and procedures available for line managers have no relation with their HRM implementation effectiveness and therefore hypothesis 5 is rejected. Line managers' desire to implement HRM has a negative effect on their HRM implementation effectiveness and therefore hypothesis 1 is rejected. This remarkable finding can be explained by the fact that for employees it does not matter whether their line manager believes in HRM practices, since employees themselves might not see the added value of certain HRM practices. Employees might not value standardized procedures and depersonalized instruments but prefer a personal approach with individual decisions.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Line managers and effective HRM implementation

Many researchers assume that the HRM strategy of an organization corresponds with the implementation of this strategy. However, HRM strategies are often implemented without a clear direction, or are not implemented at all. This can lead to significant differences between the developed HRM strategy and the actual implementation (Nehles & Boon, 2006). Two aspects which are critical for HRM to be successful are the presence of HRM practices and the success of HRM implementation (Gratton & Truss, 2003). Researchers have attempted to prove a linkage between HRM and firm performance by investigating the HRM practices while the success of HRM implementation has received little attention so far. The presence of well developed HRM practices is important for an organization's performance but it is not enough to be competitive; equally important is the way how these HRM practices are implemented. The responsibility for the HRM implementation lies with the line managers of an organization since they have to execute the HRM practices on the work floor. Nevertheless, research has indicated that line managers find implementing HRM practices difficult because of several limitations they experience in implementing HRM. These limitations inhibit the HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers (Renwick, 2002; McGovern et al., 1997; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; Hall & Torrington, 1998, Gennard & Kelly, 1997). HRM practices can be developed properly, but if line managers fail to implement them successfully on the work floor they are still not effective (Nehles et al, 2006). (First) line managers can be defined as (the lowest) line managers at the operational level, who manage a team of operational employees on a day-to-day basis and are responsible for performing HRM activities (Nehles et al, 2006, p. 256).

1.1.1 Research objective and question

Many studies have been carried out with the intention of identifying various limitations that hinder line managers in performing their HR role. This research does not aim to identify more limitations, but to measure to what extent line managers perceive the suggested limitations as hindering and to understand which of these limitations are salient for HRM effectiveness.

Therefore, the objective of this research is twofold:

First, I aim to examine whether line managers can implement HRM effectively: to what extent are line managers hindered by HR limitations in executing HRM practices and how are they evaluated by subordinates in their HR performance.

Second, I aim to examine to what extent the limitations that line managers experience in executing HRM practices influence their effectiveness in implementing HRM.

This research objective leads to the following research questions:

- 1. To what extent can line managers implement HRM practices effectively?**
- 2. What is the influence of the limitations that line managers experience in implementing HRM on their HRM implementation effectiveness?**

1.1.2 The changing role of the line manager

The role of the line managers has changed over the last twenty years. There is a widespread drive to give line managers more responsibility for the management of their staff and to reduce the extent to which human resource departments control or restrict line management autonomy in this area (Brewster & Larsen, 2000). HR professionals no longer have sole responsibility for the management of people, but share this responsibility with line managers. There is evidence that HR responsibilities are increasingly decentralized and devolved to line managers (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; Renwick, 2002; Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006). Brewster and Larsen (1992, p.412) define devolvement as “the degree to which HRM practices involve and give responsibility to line managers rather than personnel specialists”. The HR responsibilities of line managers include day to day operational HR activities like individualized pay awards, appraisal, training and development, motivating teams and on the job training (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995). With this development HR professionals focus more on strategic and long term aspects like HR-planning and industrial relations (Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006).

Overlapping reasons of why line involvement in HRM is greater in recent years are indicated by Brewster and Larsen (2000). One of the reasons is that there is *a need for a comprehensive approach to HRM*. This approach is argued to be best achieved by unifying responsibilities under the manager with the day-to-day responsibility for employees since they are in constant contact with the employees. Another reason is *the growing influence of the service industries*. The focus is more and more on fast responsiveness to the customer and delivery quality, time and flexibility. Human Resources are a critical factor in cost and efficiency of delivery and their decisions often have to be made literally in front of the customers. Therefore it is more logical to give management responsibility to the same manager who is responsible for the service to the customers. Furthermore, the fact that *decisions are increasingly made in real time* is a rationale for the line involvement in HRM. HR decisions like task allocation and competences are often hard to isolate from other

decisions. Besides this, waiting for the decision of a HR professional will slow down the decision-making process. The *development of cost-centre or profit-centre approaches* in organizations is another reason for the growing HR responsibilities of line managers. These organisations do not want to exclude Human Resources as the most substantial part of operational cost from line managers responsibilities. The final reason for line involvement in HRM is *changes in the philosophy and organizational structure*. Organizations want to be more competitive by trying to reduce overhead. One of the ways to do this is reducing specialists and employees in the HR department, which results that some of their responsibilities are devolved to line managers.

1.1.3 HRM implementation by line managers

HR professionals are responsible for the design and development of HRM practices in an organization, while line managers are responsible for the implementation of these practices on the operational work floor. The way that HRM practices, designed by HR professionals, are implemented by line managers, has become an important determinant of success or failure of those practices. The implementation of HRM practices by line managers is more salient for employee behaviour, motivation and satisfaction than the design of the HRM practices by HR professionals. Therefore, line managers play a critical role in influencing employee attitudes and behaviours by the way in which they translate the designed HRM practices into practice, and can be vital in making the difference between low performing and high performing organizations (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003).

Unfortunately, research has pointed out that line management involvement in HRM is not without its difficulties (Renwick, 2002; McGovern et al., 1997; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; Hall & Torrington, 1998, Gennard & Kelly, 1997). Line managers express reluctance to accept new responsibilities pushed upon them (Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). Several researchers suggest a number of limitations that explain the reluctance of line managers in implementing HRM, which are expected to decrease the effective implementation of HRM practices (Renwick, 2002; McGovern et al., 1999; Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Brewster & Larson, 2000). Line managers can have a lack of *desire* or *capacity* to perform their HR responsibilities. Besides, they sometimes do not have the *competences* for managing people. Furthermore, line managers can experience difficulties because of a lack of *support* from the HR department or a lack of *procedures and policies* on how to perform their HR responsibilities.

1.1.4 Research motive

Line managers are responsible for executing centrally developed HRM practices on the operational work floor and therefore have a crucial role in implementing HRM (Nehles et al., 2006). However,

line managers experience limitations that can inhibit their effective HRM implementation (Renwick, 2002; McGovern et al., 1997; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; Hall & Torrington, 1998, Gennard & Kelly, 1997). This research aims to contribute to existing literature by examining whether line managers can implement HRM effectively and to what extent the limitations that line managers experience in performing their HR responsibilities are salient for their effectiveness in implementing HRM. The principal of my research is the University of Twente, since it contributes to a PhD research on the HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers. It will be conducted within the department of Operations, Organizations & Human Resources (OOHR).

1.1.5 Definition of core concepts

In the research question a few concepts are mentioned. These concepts are explained and framed below.

(First)Line managers: (the lowest) line managers at the operational level who manage a team of operational employees on a day-to-day basis and are responsible for performing HRM activities (Nehles et al., 2006, p. 256).

Limitations: factors that can constrain a line manager in implementing HRM successfully, for example a lack of capacity, motivation, competences, support or policies and procedures (Renwick, 2002; McGovern et al., 1999; Gennard & Kelly, 1997; Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Brewster & Larson, 2000).

Effectiveness of HRM implementation: degree of satisfaction to which HRM practices are enacted or put into practice as judged by employee experience (adapted from Gratton & Truss, 2003).

1.2 Relevance

1.2.1 Theoretical relevance

The devolution of HR tasks to line managers is a topic that is highly discussed in literature. In this “devolution” literature researchers have identified several limitations that can hinder line managers in executing their HR activities based on case study research (Renwick, 2002; McGovern et al., 1997; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; Hall & Torrington, 1998, Gennard & Kelly, 1997, Harris et al., 2002). Although these case studies provided useful insights on line managers’ HR limitations, it lacks a valid instrument to measure these limitations. For this research, line managers’ limitations are measured by means of a reliable instrument (developed by Nehles, 2006). Therefore, I am able to analyze

whether line managers are as constraint by limitations in their HR work as suggested in the devolution literature and which limitation(s) line managers perceive as most hindering.

Another contribution of this research is the examination of limitations from line managers' point of view instead of HR professionals' point of view. Previous case study research used HR professionals (sometimes in combinations with line managers) to identify limitations that line managers experience in their work. Line managers themselves have rarely been asked to what extent they perceive their limitations as hindering.

Besides, this research contributes to the discussion about the effect of line managers' limitations on their HR performance. Because of the case study nature of earlier research, we do not know what the effect of line managers' limitations is on their actual HRM implementation effectiveness and which of the limitations is most salient. This research examines the relationship between line managers' limitations and their HRM implementation effectiveness.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the discussion about HRM effectiveness. When HRM effectiveness is researched, the design of HRM practices or the performance of HR professionals is measured (Huselid, 1995; Delery & Doty, 1996; Arthur, 1994;). The implementation of HRM practices has received less attention in literature, although the importance is underlined (Schuler, 1992; Gratton & Truss, 2003). HRM implementation is certainly an important aspect of HRM effectiveness, because even bad HRM practices can be implemented in such a way that they are perceived by employees as effective. And the other way around: HRM practices can be properly designed, but if line managers are unable to implement HRM practices successful on the work floor they are still not effective (Nehles et al., 2006). This research contributes to the discussion of HRM effectiveness by examining how effective line managers' HRM implementation is as perceived by their employees. Thereby this research also contribute to the discussion that HRM effectiveness should be evaluated by employees and not by HR managers and senior managers (Bowen & Ostrof, 2004; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). HRM practices are designed by HR managers and senior managers, but employees experience and interpret HRM practices and are therefore the best group to judge HRM effectiveness.

1.2.2 Practical relevance

This research also has practical relevance for organizations. First of all, it provides organizations with a research instrument which enables them to measure their line managers' limitations in implementing HRM and the influence of these limitations on their effectiveness.

This will present organizations with useful insights on what hinders line managers in implementing HRM successfully. Organizations will be aware of which limitations line managers perceive and which of them are most hindering. Besides, it will provide an understanding on how well line managers

perform their HR activities according to their subordinates. Research of Purcell and Hutchinson (2003) shows that the higher employees rated their line managers in terms of the way they managed people, the more satisfied and committed they are. This in turn results in higher performance.

Moreover, organizations get insights in to what extent the limitations that line managers experience in performing their HR responsibilities influence their effectiveness in implementing HRM. In other words: do they actually have an effect on line managers' effectiveness? In addition, organizations will be aware of which of the limitations are most salient for line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness. Based on this information, HR managers can support line managers in their work to reduce the limitations and improve their effectiveness.

Therefore, organizations can make decisions that will help line managers to implement HRM practices more effectively which will contribute to improved HRM for the organization. Furthermore, organizations can decide whether it is sensible to devolve more HR responsibilities to line managers in the future.

1.3 Research strategy

In the devolution literature line managers' limitations are discussed extensively. The seriousness of these limitations is often emphasized, since they are expected to reduce the HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers (Renwick, 2002; McGovern et al., 1997; Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Brewster & Larson, 2000). In this research I will examine whether this is in fact the case, as I will study the effect of line managers' limitations on the implementation effectiveness of HRM. Therefore, I will test existing empirical insights in practice. Based on the outcomes of this research these insights can be adjusted and refined.

This research is explanatory, since it aims to explain the relationship between line managers' limitations in implementing HRM (independent variable) on their HRM implementation effectiveness (dependent variable).

1.3.1 Plan of approach

To answer the research questions, I will perform statistical data analysis. The data was collected by Nehles (2007-2008) in earlier research and it will be analysed by means of the statistical program SPSS to explore the statistical association between the independent variable (line managers' limitations in implementing HRM) and the dependent variable (line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness). To answer the first research question, I will examine line managers' perceived limitations and line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness according to their employees. Next, to answer the second research question, I will examine the relationship between line

managers' limitations (independent variables) and their HRM implementation effectiveness (dependent variables).

Nehles (2007-2008) collected data by means of a questionnaire in two case organizations; an international naval defence company and a construction company. For measuring the independent variable (line managers' limitations in implementing HRM), the research population is line managers at various levels of an organization responsible for the supervision of a team of employees. For measuring the dependent variable (line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness), the research population is line managers' most important stakeholders: their subordinates.

1.4 Thesis structure

The next chapter of this thesis concerns the literature review, which discusses the importance of HRM implementation, the distribution of HR roles and responsibilities in an organization and line managers' limitations in implementing HRM. Several hypothesis are developed based on the literature review. At the end of the literature review I present my research model. The third chapter explains the methodology applied for this research: the operationalization and reliability assessment of the variables, research population & data collection and preparation for data analysis. In the fourth chapter the results of this research will be presented: first the means of the independent and dependent variables (research question 1) and second the relationship between the variables (research question 2). The fifth chapter concerns a discussion and explanation of the results in comparison with the literature. The last chapter is the conclusion, which answers the research questions, discusses research limitations and provides suggestions for further research and recommendations.

2. Literature review

2.1 The importance of HRM implementation

Researchers are looking for the holy grail of the connection between HRM and organization performance within the HRM literature (Huselid, 1995; Arthur, 1994; Wright, 1995; Gratton & Truss, 2003; Schuler & Jackson, 1987). Despite research about the “best practice” concept to discover a universal set of best HRM practices (Huselid, 1995; Arthur, 1994) and “best fit” research that focus on aligning HRM strategies to organizational strategies and environment (Wright, 1995; Gratton & Truss, 2003), there is no agreed conceptualization of how this relationship actually works. Many researchers advocate that for HRM to be successful, it should be embedded in the strategic needs of the firm. This means that there has to be a vertical alignment between the HRM strategy and the business goals (Gratton & Truss, 2003). HRM policies and practices should support and reinforce the business objectives in order to have a significant strategic role in the organization. For HRM policies and practices to reflect the business objectives, they should also be consistent and coherent to each other (Gratton & Truss, 2003). This is called horizontal alignment. The importance of horizontal and vertical alignment is discussed intensively in literature. They seem to go hand in hand but the two alignments operate at different levels. The fit of HRM with the business strategy, followed by consistency in HR choices was argued to be the initial purpose of HRM (Boxall & Purcell, 2008). Much writing about HRM argues that the horizontal and vertical alignment is sufficient. However, Schuler (1992) advocates that next to horizontal and vertical integration, HRM should ensure that HRM practices are accepted and used by line managers and employees as part of their everyday work. He suggested that HRM is comprised of five underlying levels: philosophy, policies, programmes, practices, and processes. According to Schuler (1992), a firm’s *HR philosophy* reflects “how the organization regards its human resources, what role the resources play in the overall success of the business, and how they are to be treated and managed. This statement is typically very general, thus allowing interpretation at more specific levels of action within an organization.”(Schuler, 1992, p.21) *HR policies* are statements that provide a procedure for action on HRM-oriented business matters related to strategic needs. *HR programmes* are coordinated HR efforts that assist in implementing strategic business needs and *HRM practices* are used to obtain and reinforce needed behaviours by workers. Even the effectiveness of highly skilled employees can be limited when they are not motivated, but HRM practices can affect employee motivation by encouraging them to work better and harder (Huselid, 1995). Last but not least, *HR processes* define how activities are to be carried out.

Strategic Human Resource Management Activities
Human Resource Philosophy: Expressed in statements defining business values and culture
Human Resource Policies: Expressed as shared values (guidelines)
Human Resource Programs: Articulated as Human Resource Strategies
Human Resource practices: For leadership, managerial, and operational roles
Human Resource processes: For the formulation and implementation of other activities.

Figure 1: The 5-P Model of Schuler (1992)

The last level of HRM, HR processes, refers to implementation of HRM. Gratton and Truss (2003) advocate that this is a significant part of HRM although it has received little attention in literature. “The question of what actually happens once the strategy statement has been written or the policy document signed off has received scant attention” (Gratton & Truss, 2003, p.76). While HR managers are in general responsible for horizontal and vertical alignment, line managers have to make it happen in the day-to-day life of the organization. They are responsible for action and implementation of HRM practices.

Several researchers underline the difference between “intended” HRM practices and “implemented” HRM practices (Khijji & Wang, 2006; Wright & Nishii, 2006). Intended HRM practices are practices formulated by HR professionals and senior management, whereas implemented HRM practices refer to practices implemented in organizations and experienced by employees (Khijji & Wang, 2006). Although the presence of well designed intended HRM practices is important, implemented HRM practices impacts employees’ behaviour, motivation and satisfaction much more concrete than intended HRM practices. In other words, employees will be influenced not simply by management’ values and formal procedures but by the reality of what they perceive and experience on a daily basis (Boxall & Purcell, 2008).

The more consistency there is between intended HRM practices and implemented HRM practices, the more effective HRM outcomes the organization will achieve (Boxall & Purcell, 2008; Khijji & Wang, 2006; Wright & Nishii, 2006). The responsibility to convert the intended HRM practices into implemented HRM practices lies with line managers in organizations. Therefore, for HRM to be successful in organizations, implementation of HRM practices by line managers is essential.

2.2 Distribution of HR roles and responsibilities in an organization

Given this wide remit in HRM levels (Schuler, 1992), it should be obvious that HRM can never be the exclusive property of HR professionals. HRM is an aspect of all management jobs because it is an essential organizational process. Line managers, those who directly supervise employees engaged in the operations of the firm, are closely involved in HRM and almost always accountable for the performance of their team (Boxall & Purcell, 2008). “The HR function is not understood simply as the set of activities by the HR department, but as all managerial actions carried out at any level regarding the organization of work and the entry, development and exit of people in the organization so that their competencies are used at their best in order to achieve corporate objectives” (Valverde, 2001a, p. 19). Valverde et al. (2006) advocate that HRM activities are diverse in a wide range and are executed by a several different agents; this depends on the organization, its environment and other characteristics. They state that next to the HR department, top management, line management and external agencies are involved in HRM in organizations. The outcome of their research results in seven different groups with different ways to allocate HRM to the various agents. The group in which the HR function is the domain of the HR department supported by the line received the most support in their research.

Ulrich (1997) introduced a model that reinvented a new set of proactive roles of HR professionals. He defines four roles along two axes: strategy versus operations, and process versus people (see figure 2). “Strategic partners” aim to align the HRM practices with the organization’s choice of strategy and the organizations environment. “Administrative experts” implement an effective and efficient infrastructure. “Employee champions” increase the competences and commitment of employees. And “change agents” deliver organizational transformation and culture change.



Figure 2: Four HR roles of Ulrich (1997)

Ulrich (1997) suggests that all four roles should be carried out simultaneously to create added value. But recent studies report an increased emphasis on the strategic partner role of HR professionals (Hall and Torrington, 1998), which includes for example the design of HRM practices, HRM planning and industrial relations (Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006). People-focused and operational HR roles are being devolved to line management as a consequence of the increased focus of HR professionals on the strategic partner role (Hope-Hailey et al., 2005). What exactly is devolved and how it is devolved will vary considerably depending on each organization (Cascoín-Pereira et al., 2005). In general line managers are increasingly responsible for HR tasks like allocating individualized pay awards, appraisal, training and development, motivating teams and on-the-job coaching (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995).

Some researchers state that the devolvement of HR roles to line managers is the end of the HR professional function (Storey, 1992), while others see opportunities for HR professionals to improve their presence at strategic level (Lowe, 1992; Gennard & Kelly, 1997). Both HR professionals and line managers are responsible for HRM and have to collaborate in a work relationship. Ulrich (1997) describes a vision of a successful and unproblematic partnership between line managers and the HR department: "Line managers of HR professionals acting in isolation cannot be HR champions, they must form a partnership. Line managers bring authority, power and sponsorship and have overall responsibility for the HR community. HR professionals bring technical expertise and a domain of final necessary competency credibility (Ulrich, 1997, p. 236)". This is easier said than done, Schuler and Jackson (1997) note that this is not happening in all companies. According to Caldwell (2003) there is role conflict and ambiguity within the HR function because of competing demands made upon it by senior managers and employees.

2.3 Line managers' limitations in implementing HRM

Line managers' increased involvement in HRM has positive as well as negative sides (Renwick, 2003). "For example, by pushing HR decision making down to line managers, they should be able to make faster decisions that are more tailored to individual circumstances (Perry & Kulik, 2008, p. 263)". Perry and Kulik (2008) examined the effect of devolution of HR tasks to line managers in organizations and they found that this has a positive effect on HRM effectiveness, as perceived by HR professionals. However, many researchers expressed concern about line managers' HR performance. Francis & Keegan (2006, p. 242) advocated that "it might be naïve to assume that line managers have the time, the training or the interest to give employee well-being the kind of priority it deserves". Furthermore, McGovern et al. (1997) predicted that the prospects for devolvement to the line are not promising. "Attempts to devolve HRM to the line in any grand sense can only be regarded as quixotic" (McGovern et al., 1997, p. 26).

The literature on devolution suggest that there are a number of limitations that can limit the performance of line managers in putting HRM policies in to practice (Renwick, 2002; McGovern et al., 1997; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; Hall & Torrington, 1998, Gennard & Kelly, 1997). Line managers can have a lack of *desire* or *capacity* in implementing HRM. Besides, they do not have the right *competences* for managing people. Furthermore, line managers can experience difficulties because of a lack of *support* from the HR department or *procedures and policies* on how to execute their HRM responsibilities.

Line managers' limitations in implementing HRM effectively are identified in case study research. In this research is underlined that these limitations are expected to reduce HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers (Renwick, 2002; McGovern et al., 1997; Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Brewster & Larson, 2000). Based on these case studies hypothesis will be developed about the effect that line managers' limitations have on their HRM implementation effectiveness.

Line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness is defined as the degree of satisfaction to which HRM practices are enacted or put into practice as judged by employee experience (derived from Gratton & Truss, 2003). Employees can evaluate line managers' HR performance utmost, since they experience how line managers implement HRM practices on a daily basis. In literature there is emerging growing support for assessing HRM from the employee perspective (Gibb, 2001; Bowen & Ostrof, 2004; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

2.3.1 Desire

Line managers can have a lack of desire or willingness to execute their HR responsibilities (McGovern et al., 1997; Harris et al., 2002; Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Brewster & Larsen, 2000). However, willingness is essential for someone to perform effectively (Huselid, 1995). Some line managers are excited to have HR responsibilities as part of their function, but others are not and they express reluctance to execute these responsibilities. This reluctance can be the result of a lack of *personal motivation*. Line managers feel HR responsibilities are pushed upon them, while beforehand they were the responsibility of the HR department (Harris et al., 2002).

Another reason for line managers' lack of desire is that they do not feel any motivation in the form of *institutional incentives*. Their HR responsibilities are often not formally part of their performance objectives or job descriptions (McGovern et al., 1997). Line managers have little motivation to invest in standardised and formal performance appraisals with subordinates because this would have scant influence on managers' immediate performance goals. While such activity might be beneficial to both the organization and the individual it was not something which line managers considered to be a priority.

Line managers' desire to perform HR tasks also depends on their understanding that executing HR tasks has *added value* for themselves, their employees and the organization. Line managers who recognize that executing HR tasks will benefit them are more willing to perform these tasks. However, some line managers feel that certain HR tasks should not be their responsibility (Hall & Torrington, 1996) and do not see the added value of spending time on the development of their employees because they do not understand that this can benefit themselves and their employees.

It is remarkable, however, that more recent research of Whittaker & Marchington (2003) indicates that line managers claimed to be satisfied with the HR responsibilities that have been devolved to them and they are keen to take on activities that relate explicitly to the development of their team. When line managers want to perform HR tasks and realize that this gives them certain advantages, it is expected that they will perform their HR tasks more effectively:

Hypothesis 1: The more desire line managers have to perform HR tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.

2.3.2 Capacity

Capacity is another limitation that can hinder line managers in implementing HRM successfully. Organizational restructuring can lead to higher workloads for line managers that remain in the organization (McGovern et al., 1997). Due to organizational restructuring, line managers often have a wider span of control, resulting in that they have a larger amount of subordinates reporting to them

than previously (McGovern et al., 1997). Besides, HR responsibilities are often devolved to line managers without reducing their original responsibilities (Brewster & Larsen, 2000). This places considerable pressure on their capacity to implement HRM next to their operational responsibilities. "Line managers report frustration that they are not able to devote sufficient time to HR issues, because harder priorities tend to dominate" (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003, p. 250). Cunningham and Hyman (1999) also observe in their research that dominance of hard priorities leave little time for line managers to devote to intangible areas, like the HRM aspects of their job.

The pressure of the operational tasks and the increasing HR responsibilities put excessive demands on line managers' time and energy, and might result in role overload for line managers (McConville, 2006). Line managers perceive HR activities as a "poor second" to their more short term goals and this can result in devoting less attention to HR activities. "This short-range focus may result in people management that is fragmented, inconsistent and generally less effective" (Perry & Kulik, 2008, p. 263). To implement HRM practices effectively, it is important that line managers have sufficient capacity to implement HRM practices besides their (dominating) operational responsibilities. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The more capacity line managers have to execute HR tasks next to their operational tasks, the more effectively they will them on the work floor.

2.3.3 Competences

Many companies tend to promote line managers for their technical and engineering skills regardless of their business and people management competences (Gennard & Kelly, 1997). But when executing HRM responsibilities, line managers need knowledge and skills in HRM (Hall & Torrington 1998, Harris et al. 2002; Cunningham & Hyman, 1999). Many line managers lack these competences because they do not get sufficient training in HRM. Consequently, some authors have suggested that devolution may only be successful when organizations provide line managers with adequate training (Hall & Torrington, 1998; Renwick, 2003; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). McGovern et al. (1997) suggests that low HRM competences of line managers are a significant constraint on effective devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers.

Whittaker and Marchington (2003) advocate that many line managers feel uncomfortable and ill-prepared when it comes to legal implications of certain issues. "In the light of the increasing legal complexity, line managers challenged the wisdom of increasing their responsibilities in an area where they lacked specialist knowledge" (Harris et al., 2002, p. 226). Therefore, line managers themselves also report concerns about the level of specialist expertise they feel is needed to manage HR issues and that this might decrease their performance.

“Line managers’ skills and competences in HRM practices are limited and a lack of training in this area will undoubtedly affect a line managers’ effectiveness” (McGuire et al., 2008, p.11). It is argued that line managers cannot execute their HR responsibilities effectively without the right competences or skills and therefore researchers advocate a need for their continual training (McGovern et al., 1997; Renwick, 2000). When line managers consider themselves more competent to execute HR responsibilities, for example because of training courses they followed, I assume their HRM implementation effectiveness will benefit:

Hypothesis 3: The more competent line managers perceive themselves to perform HR tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.

2.3.4 Support

Line managers need support from HR professionals to perform their HR tasks. Brewster and Larsen (2000) state that devolution of HR tasks to line managers is not possible without monitoring of HR professionals. Similarly, Lowe (1992) argues that if line managers were given sole responsibilities for HRM, they cannot perform at acceptable levels without the assistance of HR professionals. “In general are line managers without the support of HRM unlikely to acquire sufficient competences in people management skills to improve organizational effectiveness” (Gennard & Kelly, 1997, p. 35). HR professionals can coach and encourage line managers to perform their HRM activities. Unfortunately, HR professionals are not always willing to give line managers proper support because they do not want to give away responsibilities to the line managers (Hall & Torrington, 1998). The issue of accepting a changed role and using different skills applies to HR professionals as well as to line managers (Hall & Torrington, 1998). Some authors propose a partnership approach between line managers and HR professionals, where HR professionals need to become more involved in supportive, collaborative relationships with line managers (Tyson & Fell, 1992). However, Schuler and Huselid (1997) advocate that a partnership approach is an ideal situation between line managers and HR professionals but that it is not actually happening in practice.

Nevertheless it is argued that line managers are not capable to perform the HR aspects of their jobs effectively without support from personnel practitioners. Some researchers suggest that the amount of support HR professionals provide to the line will be very important in determining whether a devolution strategy will result in effective people management (Gennard & Kelly, 1997, Perry & Kulik, 2008). The research of Whittaker and Marchington (2003) reports that line managers themselves express concern that a lack of support from HR professionals during the executing of an HRM practice can detract from their overall effectiveness. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: *The more and better HR support line managers perceive to receive from HR professionals in performing their HR tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.*

2.3.5 Policies and procedures

Line managers need to know *what* their HR role implies. Thus, what are their exact responsibilities? Still, many line managers believe that managing people is HR's responsibility (McGovern et al., 1997). Case studies reveal there is significant perceptual divergence between line managers and HR professionals on aspects of line manager involvement in HRM (Maxwell & Watson, 2006; Harris et al., 2002). This implies that line managers are unclear about their HR role and responsibilities. According to McConville (2006), line managers can perceive role dissonance and ambiguity when their role is not clearly defined.

Furthermore, line managers need to know *how* they should execute their HRM responsibilities. Therefore, policies and procedures on how to execute HRM practices are important for line managers to perform their HR responsibilities successfully (Gennard & Kelly, 1997). If line managers lack these policies and procedures they might execute HRM practices according to their own understanding which can lead to inadequate and conflicting working methods (Harris et al., 2002). For that reason, HR professionals introduce frameworks, handbooks, toolkits and telephone headlines to make sure line managers use HRM practices the way they should. For example, line managers should know how to apply the appraisal system of an organization: on what qualities should they evaluate their employees, when do employees qualify for rewarding, what is the procedure after completing an appraisal and what is the role of the HR department?

Thus, it is important to consult line managers about their HR responsibilities and authorities (Lowe, 1992) and to remove potential bias in (and interpretation of) HRM practices by defining the way in which HR activities should be performed in practice. If this is not done, the lack of clarity on line managers' HR role and responsibilities can reduce line managers' HR performance (Gennard & Kelly, 1997).

Hypothesis 5: *The more policies and procedures line managers have on their HR responsibilities and on how to execute HRM practices, the more effectively they will implement HR tasks on the work floor.*

2.4 Research model

Based on the formulated hypotheses, the research model is stated below:

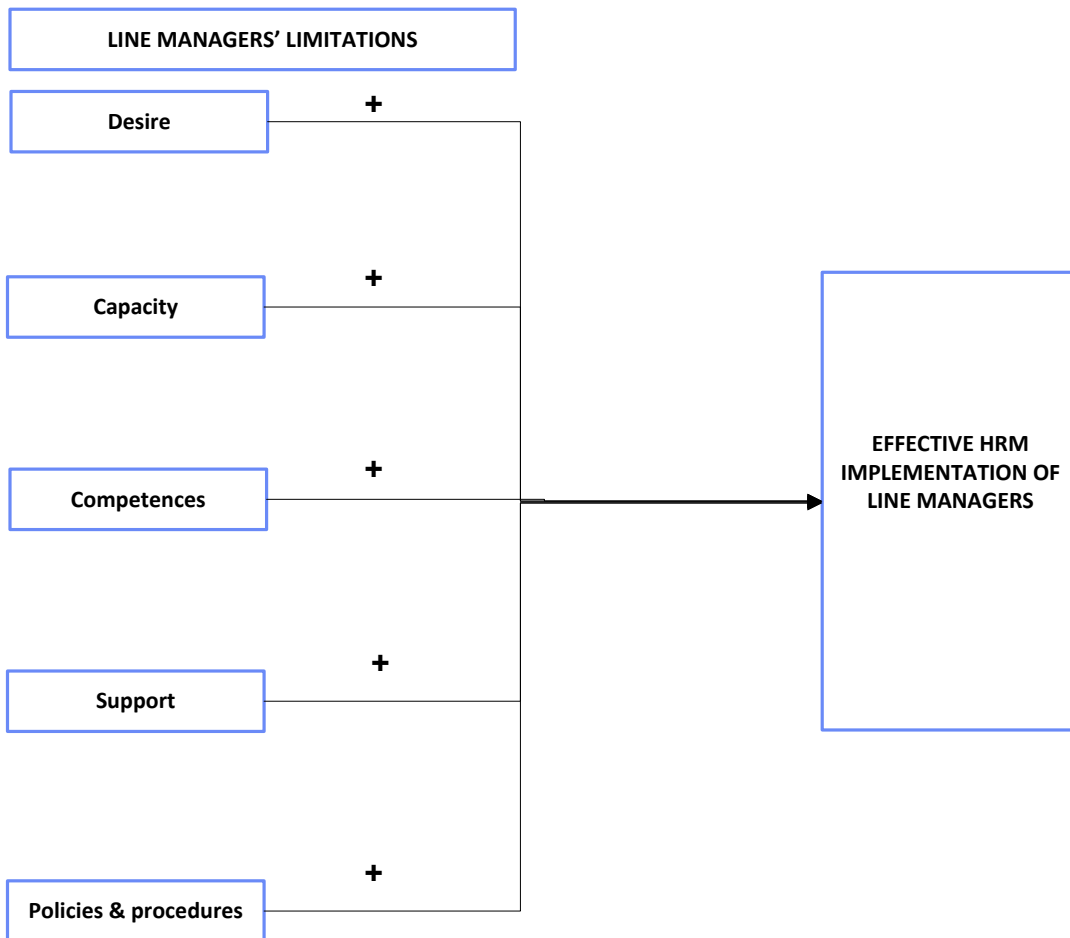


Figure 3: Research model

3. Methodology

To answer the research questions, I will perform statistical data analysis based on data that was collected by Nehles (2007-2008) in earlier research. In this chapter I will describe the operationalization of the independent and dependent variables and the reliability assessment performed to the test homogeneity of the items in the scales. Furthermore, I will describe the research population and data collection. Lastly, the preparation of data for the data analysis will be explained.

3.1 Operationalization of concepts

3.1.1 Independent variable- Line managers' limitations in implementing HRM

In order to measure the limitations that line managers can experience in their work, Nehles (2006) developed a questionnaire to examine how the limitations desire, capacity, competence, support and policies & procedures are perceived by line managers. The data referring to line managers' limitations were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). Below the operationalization by Nehles (2006) for the five concepts are described.

Desire

To measure line managers' desire to implement HRM practices, the constructs "self-determination" and "added value" are used.

In devolution literature authors distinguish between personal motivation and institutional motivation of line managers to implement HRM. The self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) also differentiates between personal and institutional incentives. According to this theory, different types of motivation underlie human behaviour listed on a continuum from high to low levels of self-determination: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation. An intrinsically motivated person is engaged in activities for his own sake, for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from performing them (Deci, 1971). Extrinsic motivation refers to behaviours where the goals of action extend beyond those inherent in the activity itself, for instance by rewards (external regulation) or goals as being chosen by oneself (identified regulation). The amotivated behaviours are the least self-determined; a person experiences no sense of purpose and no expectations of reward or possibility of changing the course of events. The self-determination theory is measured by means of the Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS: Guay, Vallerand & Blanchard, 2000).

Furthermore, the desire to perform HR tasks depends on the understanding of line managers that executing HR tasks has added value for themselves and for their employees. Therefore, Nehles (2006) added items on the perceived added value of implementing HRM practices to the SIMS,

because it is expected that line managers are more willing to perform HR tasks when they see the added value in these activities. These items were developed based on a pilot case study where 30 first line managers were interviewed. The added value items were developed based on the received answers on the question: “Why do you perform HR activities?”

Capacity

To measure whether line managers experience problems in spending sufficient time on HRM implementation, the construct “role overload” was used.

A very important reason for line managers’ capacity problems in implementing HRM is managerial short-termism. “Line managers report frustration that they are not able to devote sufficient time to HR issues, because operational tasks tend to dominate” (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003, p. 250). The pressure of operational tasks and the increasing HR responsibilities put excessive demands on line managers’ time and energy and might result in role overload for line managers (McConville, 2006). Line managers’ role overload is measured with a scale developed by Reilly (1982) on the role overload of housewives. Role overload of housewives occurs when the sheer volume of behaviour demanded of the wife exceeds her available time and energy. Nehles (2006) argues that line managers face a similar kind of role overload as housewives, but with different conflicting demands; operational tasks versus HRM responsibilities. The items on the housewife’ scale were translated into time demands for line managers. For example, the original item reads: “I just can’t find the energy in me to do all the things expected of me”. This item is translated in: “I just can’t the energy in me to perform all the HR activities expected of me”

Competences

To measure line managers perceived competences, the constructs “occupational self-efficacy” and “training” are used.

The perception of someone’s own work is called occupational self-efficacy: “one’s belief in one’s own ability and competence to perform successfully and effectively in different situations and across different tasks in a job” (Schyns & Von Collani, 2002, p. 227). This concept is based on theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) which refers to “the conviction that one can successfully execute a given behaviour required to produce certain outcomes” (p. 193). Schyns and Van Collani (2002) developed the occupational self-efficacy scale in order to produce a scale that relates to self-efficacy in the work-related domain. Nehles (2006) chose this scale, because this scale enabled measuring the competences of line managers to perform HR tasks based on their own perceptions about their competences in HRM.

Furthermore, items on the importance and sufficiency of the training courses were added, which were developed based on a pilot case study. The importance and sufficiency of training is discussed to have an effect on line managers' competences and therefore researchers advocate a need for their continual training (McGovern et al., 1997; Renwick, 2000).

Support

To measure how line managers perceive the support they receive from HRM, the constructs "HR support service" and "HR support behaviour" were used.

The support that line managers receive from HR professionals can be regarded as HRM services. These HRM services imply content related advice and coaching on how to perform HR activities. The quality of services can be defined as the customers overall perception of the service (Parasuraman, 1988). According to theory of Parasuraman et al. (1988) service quality exist of 5 dimensions: tangibles (physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel), reliability (ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service), assurance (knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence) and empathy (caring, individualized attention for the customers).

These items are based on the SERVQUAL scale on service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This scale originally consists of these of five items, but Nehles (2006) used four of these items: reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance. Tangibles was not used because it is not applicable to the services delivered by HR professionals but more to the services provided for products.

Factor analysis showed that reliability and responsiveness refer to the construct "HR support service", whereas respectively empathy and assurance refer to the construct "HR support behaviour".

Policies & Procedures

To measure how line managers perceive the policies & procedures available on (how to execute) their HR responsibilities, the constructs "perceived clearness about HRM responsibilities" and "user friendliness of HR forms" are used.

Perceived clearness about HR responsibilities in line managers' HR responsibilities refers to clearness about *which* HRM practices line managers' should implement. This construct is measured by using the scale of Rizzo et al. (1970) on role conflict and role ambiguity. This scale was chosen because researchers (McGovern, 1999; Harris et al., 2002) suggest that line managers are unclear about their HR responsibilities and thus their HR role and therefore perceive role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict implies that expected behaviours of individuals are inconsistent and role ambiguity refers to the lack of necessary information available to a given organizational position (Rizzo et al.,

1970). The items on this scale were reformulated so that they address the HR role of line managers, for example; the expression “policy” is reformulated into “HR policy”.

In addition, based on a pilot case study, items were developed on the user friendliness of HRM forms. This refers to clearness about *how* line managers should implement HRM practices. These items were added because if line managers lack clear policies and procedures on *how* to implement HRM practices, they might execute HRM practices according to their own understanding which can lead to inadequate and conflicting working methods.

Summary

Table 1: Operationalization of the independent variable

Concept	Construct	Measure
Desire	Self determination to implement HRM practices	Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS; Guay, Vallerand & Blanchard, 2000): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intrinsic motivation - Identified motivation - Amotivation (R)
	Perceived added value of implementing HRM practices	Nehles (2006); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Value added
Capacity	Time for implementing HRM practices	Role overload of housewives scale (Reilly, 1982): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Role Overload (R)
Competences	Self-perceived knowledge of HR tasks	Occupational self-efficacy (Schyns & van Collani, 2002): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-efficacy
	Importance and sufficiency of HR-related training courses	Nehles (2006): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training
Support	HR support services HR support behaviour	SERQUAL scale on service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reliability and responsiveness - Assurance and empathy
Policies & Procedures	Clearness about HRM responsibilities	Role ambiguity and role conflict scale of Rizzo et al., 1970) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Role conflict (R) - Role ambiguity (R)
	User friendliness of HR forms	Nehles (2006): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - User friendliness of HR forms

3.1.2 Dependent variable- HRM implementation effectiveness

In order to measure HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers, Nehles (2006) developed a questionnaire to measure how subordinates judge the HR performance of their line managers. The dependent variable, HRM implementation effectiveness, is thus measured based on perceptions of employees about their satisfaction of the way line managers implement HRM practices. The data referring to line managers' implementation effectiveness were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (satisfied).

HRM implementation effectiveness is operationalized by Nehles (2006) based on the following HRM practices:

- Personnel administration;
- Recruitment & selection;
- Career management;
- Evaluation & rewarding;
- People management.

The selection of HRM practices is based on Truss (2001) and the operationalization is based on a selection of a list of 25 selected HR activities used by line managers identified by the contact HR manager in the case company (Nehles, 2006). For each HRM practice the respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of line managers on several activities.

3.1.3 Control variables

I included some control variables in the statistical analysis to reduce the possibility of incorrect results because of correlations between variables. First of all, demographic variables are taken into account: line managers' age, experience, education and span of control. Older and more experienced line managers may implement HRM more successfully than younger colleagues, not because of higher motivation or better policies & procedures, but simply because they have done it more often. Higher educated line managers might be more capable of applying knowledge in executing HRM practices than lower educated line managers. The span of control for smaller or larger groups of subordinates might affect line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness because it might be more difficult to be responsible for a large group of employees. Secondly, one contextual variable is taken into account: the organization. The two organizations examined are different per sector, size and production.

All these variables were dummy coded. I included five age dummies, three experience dummies, three education dummies, three span of control dummies and two organization dummies.

3.2 Reliability assessment

Reliability assessment refers to the homogeneity of the items in a construct or the extent to which item responses correlate with the total test score (Hinkin, 1995). The most commonly accepted measure is internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's Alpha. The Cronbach's Alpha gives an indication of the extent to which a number of items in a scale measure the same construct.

A Cronbach's Alpha of 0,70 or higher is considered acceptable. The constructs in this research show good internal consistency. Except for the construct "personnel administration"; this construct is somewhat lower than the acceptable level of consistency. Nevertheless, "personnel administration" is kept as a construct in this research because it has theoretical value to form part of the dependent variable "HRM implementation effectiveness".

Table 2: Cronbach's alpha of constructs for the independent variable (line managers' HR limitations)

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
Independent variables		
Role overload	0.88	5
Self determination	0.79	9
Added Value	0.77	4
Self efficacy	0.80	5
Training	0.80	2
HR support services	0.76	3
HR support behaviour	0.80	4
Perceived clearness about HRM responsibilities	0.77	9
User friendliness of HR forms	0.88	3

Table 3: Cronbach's alpha of constructs for the dependent variable (line managers' implementation effectiveness)

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
Dependent variable		
Personnel administration	0.64	5
Recruitment & selection	0.78	2
Career management	0.82	4
Evaluation & rewarding	0.87	5
People management	0.84	5

3.3 Research population & data collection methods

Nehles (2007-2008) collected data in two case companies. The first company is a large international naval defence company that employs about 2000 employees in the Netherlands. The second case

study company is a medium sized construction company located in the North East of the Netherlands employing about 750 employees.

3.3.1 Independent variable: Line managers' limitations in implementing HRM

For the independent variable, the research population is line managers at various levels in an organization, responsible for the supervision of a team of employees. The questionnaire was adapted to the company language and situation by the HR managers of the company. Nehles (2007-2008) developed an online survey to use in both case companies, but could only use this in the construction company. In the naval defence company employees have no access to the internet and therefore the questionnaire was sent to line managers' home addresses by mail. The population consisted of 254 line managers: 149 from the naval defence company and 105 in the construction company. Nehles (2007-2008) used a four-phase administration process as suggested by Salant and Dilman (1994). This included sending a short advance notice e-mail to the whole population. Next, the actual survey or e-mail with the link to the online survey was send, together with a signed letter to the respondent or some information about the survey in the e-mail respectively. This was sent to the respondents a week after the short advance notice e-mail. After that, Nehles (2007-2008) send reminder e-mails one and three weeks after sending the survey, without distinguishing between respondents and non-respondents, since the survey was anonymous.

Line managers had three weeks to complete the survey which took about twenty minutes to fill in. 179 line managers participated in the research. After cleaning the responses, Nehles (2007-2008) ended up with a sample of 174 line managers: 108 in the naval defence company and 66 in the construction company. This represents a response rate of 69 percent. According to Babbie (2003) a response rate of 60 percent or more is considered good and a response rate of at least 70 percent is considered very good. Below are a few characteristics of the line managers sample:

Table 4: Gender of line managers

Gender	Percentage	Frequency
Male	97,1	169
Female	2,9	5

Table 5: Age of line managers

Age	Percentage	Frequency
20-30	1,8	3
30-40	30	50
40-50	34,1	57
50-60	33,5	56
60 or older	0,60	1

Table 6: Educational level of line managers

Education	Percentage	Frequency
Secondary	4,6	8
Vocational	19	33
Tertiary	76,4	133

Table 7: Experience as line manager

Years of experience as line manager	Percentage	Frequency
0-1 year	2,9	5
1-2 years	6,9	12
2-5 years	17,2	30
5-10 years	17,2	30
Longer than 10 years	55,8	97

Table 8: Line managers' span of control

Span of control	Percentage	Frequency
0	0,6	1
1 up to and including 5	17	29
6 up to and including 10	25,6	44
11 up to and including 15	12,8	22
16 up to and including 20	17	29
21 up to and including 25	7	12
26 or more	20	35

3.3.2 Dependent variable- HRM implementation effectiveness

For the dependent variable (the effectiveness of HRM implementation), the research population is the most important stakeholders of line managers: their subordinates. Subordinates are in the utmost position to judge line managers' implementation effectiveness, since they experience the implementation of HRM practices by line managers on a day-to-day basis.

For the construction company Nehles (2007-2008) used an online questionnaire. The link to the online questionnaire was sent to 71 employees by email. 46 employees did not have an e-mail address, therefore the questionnaire was sent to them by mail. The population consisted of 117 employees. Those employees were selected that worked for the line managers in the research population of the independent variable. This entailed about 3-5 employees per line manager. Next, the actual survey or e-mail with the link to the online survey was sent, together with a signed letter to the respondent or some information about the survey in the e-mail respectively. The employees

had three weeks to fill in the questionnaire. During these three weeks, Nehles (2007-2008) send three reminder emails per e-mail as well as per mail. The response rate was 62 percent, which includes a sample of 72 employees.

For the naval defence company the procedure was different. For this company the questionnaire was sent as part of the yearly employee people survey to all employees of the company. The population consisted of 1907 employees. The questionnaire was sent by mail to the home address of the employees. The administration of the questionnaires for the naval defence company was performed by the Oakdale Group Consultancy. 993 employees participated in the sample. This represents a response rate of 52 percent.

The sample of both companies together is 1065 employees. Below are a few characteristics of the subordinates sample:

Table 9: How long do you work for your company?

Number of years working for the company	Frequency	Percent
0-1 years	78	7,4
1-2 years	61	5,8
2-5 years	70	6,6
5-10 years	141	13,4
Longer than 10 years	702	66,7

Table 10: How long do you work for you current manager?

Number of years working for your manager	Frequency	Percent
0-1 years	300	28,8
1-2 years	247	23,7
2-5 years	329	31,6
5-10 years	117	11,2
Longer than 10 years	48	4,6

3.4 Preparation for data analysis

For the data analysis I used datasets with responses from line managers and responses from line managers' subordinates from both case companies. I started with calculating means per constructs ad per constructs for all the datasets, because multiple questions were asked per construct. The respondents of the questionnaires had the possibility to answer a question with "I don't know" or "not applicable". These answers were defined as missing values. While calculating the means, I took these missing values into account in order to generate reliable means. The mean was not calculated when a respondent had filled in too many missing values for a construct. For example: when a construct consisted of six questions, the respondents needed to give at least four (number of

questions/2 + 1) valid answers. After calculating the means, some constructs needed to be reverse coded, since some questions were asked negative instead of positive.

Next, I cleaned up the datasets; I kept only the means per construct. I merged the datasets for the two case companies and generated two datasets: one for the line managers sample and one for the employee sample.

In order to conduct analysis about the relationship between line managers' limitations and their effectiveness as perceived by employees, the dataset from line managers needed to be matched with the dataset of their subordinates. Unfortunately, it was not possible to match subordinates individually to their line managers, because of the quarantined anonymity of the line managers in the organizations. However, it was possible to determine which employee belongs to which line manager based on department numbers. But in most cases, a department consisted of multiple employees (average 9,8 per department). Sometimes, there were also multiple line managers per department (average 1,9 per department). Therefore, the datasets needed to be aggregated in order to calculate means of line managers and employees per department.

However, in order to do this, the answers of line managers in a department and the answers of employees in a department should not vary too much from each other. The mean is not a reliable indicator when the variation in responses is high. To verify this, I calculated an intraclass correlation coefficient. This assesses the inter-rater reliability within and between groups (Bliese, 2000). It describes how strongly units in the sample resemble each other. There are different forms of intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC). I used a ICC(1) calculation which represents a form of proportional consistency. James (1982) interprets the ICC (1) as the degree of reliability associated with a single assessment of the group mean. He interprets the ICC (1) as an index of inter-rater reliability, which is why he recommends using it as a criterion for aggregating. The ICC's (1) are as following:

Table 11: Intraclass correlation coefficients

Concepts Independent variable	Intraclass correlation coefficient	Constructs Dependent variable	Intraclass correlation coefficient
Capacity	0.42	Personnel administration	0.13
Motivation	0.12	Recruitment & selection	0.06
Competences	0.14	Career management	0.12
Support	0.17	Evaluation & Rewarding	0.07
Policies & procedures	0.02	People management	0.12

Bliese (2000) advocates that ICC(1) values between 0,05 and 0,20 are common. Therefore, the values of the dependent variable show excellent inter-rater reliability for all of the construct. For the independent variables are also most of the construct coefficients are between these values, except for the concepts capacity and policies and procedures. Fortunately, most of the values demonstrate very good inter-rater reliability for the concepts and constructs.

Next to the ICC(1) calculations, standard deviations of the responses per department were calculated. A standard deviation is a measure of the variability or dispersion of a population. In other words: it is the average dispersion of the mean. A low standard deviation indicates that the responses tend to be very close to the same value (the mean), while a high standard deviation indicates that the responses are spread out over a large range of values (Moore & McCabe, 2006). A standard deviation lower than 0,8 is considered acceptable, based on a five point Likert scale. The standard deviation of in the responses of the line managers and employees per departments were in general low, in most cases lower than 0,8. This entails that employees and line managers gave similar responses per department, which produces a reliable mean. The average standard deviations for the departments are presented in table 12.

Table 12: Average standard deviations for the departments

Concepts	Standard deviation	Constructs	Standard deviation
Independent variable		Dependent variable	
Capacity	1.10	Personnel administration	0.66
Motivation	0.61	Recruitment & selection	1.03
Competences	0.72	Career management	0.83
Support	0.71	Evaluation & Rewarding	0.87
Policies & procedures	0.63	People management	0.77

Based on these calculations, it was possible to aggregate the data of line managers and the data employees working in the same department into a line management and employee group. Therefore, the department is the level of analysis. The aggregated sample is 74.

4. Results

In this chapter, the means of line managers' limitations are presented in order to find out whether line managers actually perceive hindrances in their HR work. Furthermore, the means considering subordinates' evaluation of their line managers are presented. I conducted multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between line managers' limitations and their HRM implementation effectiveness as perceived by employees. These results will also be described in this chapter.

4.1 Line managers' limitations in implementing HRM

According to the devolution literature, line managers experience several limitations in implementing HRM practices. Researchers advocate that line managers are unwilling to take on HRM responsibilities, have little capacity to implement HRM next to their operational responsibilities, are incompetent to implement HRM practices, get insufficient support from the HRM department and are hindered by a lack of policies and procedures on (how to execute) their HR role. (Renwick, 2002; McGovern et al., 1997; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; Hall & Torrington, 1998).

For this research, I measured whether line managers are indeed reluctant to take on their HR responsibilities. The means, standard deviations and correlations of the line managers' limitations in implementing HRM (independent variable) are shown in Table 13. For the complete correlation table, including the dependent variable and control variables, see appendix 1.

There are a few correlations between the variables, this implies that some limitations are dependent on each other. Motivation correlates with competences, support and policies & procedures, but not with capacity. Capacity is only correlated to policies & procedures. Both competences and support only correlate with motivation and policies & procedures. Policies and procedures correlates with all of the other limitations. Therefore, the limitations are most dependent on motivation and policies & procedures and vice versa.

Table 13: Means, standard deviations and correlations of line managers' limitations

	Means 1-5	Standard deviation	Capacity	Motivation	Competences	Support	Policies and procedures
Capacity	3.08	1.01	1.00				
Motivation	3.97	0.50	-0.09	1.00			
Competences	3.83	0.58	-0.02	0.48***	1.00		
Support	3.46	0.63	0.18	0.22*	0.08	1.00	
Policies and procedures	3.56	0.50	0.31***	0.47***	0.39***	0.40***	1.00
*** <=0.01							
** <= 0.05							
* <= 0.10							

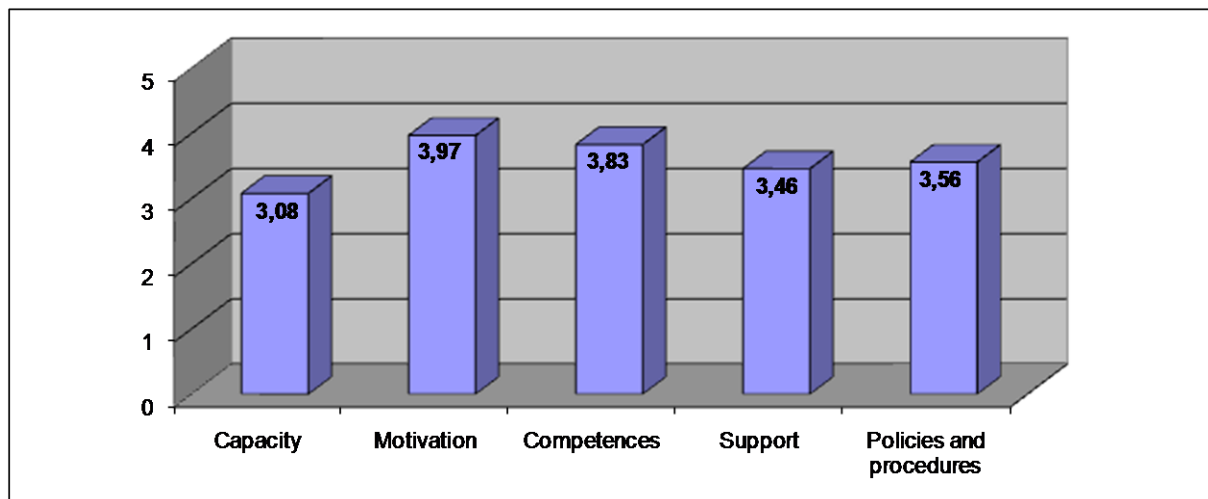


Figure 4: Limitations as perceived by line managers

The means shows that line managers themselves do not perceive many limitations in implementing HRM practices. Line managers are willing to execute their HR responsibilities and see the added value of these responsibilities (mean 3.97). Therefore, they do not experience a lack of desire as hindering in implementing HRM. Furthermore, line managers do not experience many capacity problems to implement HRM next to their operational responsibilities (mean 3.08). However, capacity is the limitation that they perceive as most hindering compared to the other limitations. Line managers consider themselves competent to implement HRM practices and are satisfied with the training courses they have received (mean 3.83). Therefore, they do not perceive a lack of competences as hindering in implementing HRM practices. Besides, line managers are not hindered by a lack of support from the HR department, as they are satisfied with the support they receive from HR

professionals (mean 3.46). Lastly, line managers have a clear view on what their HR responsibilities are and on how to execute these HR responsibilities (mean 3.56). Therefore, they are not hindered by a lack of policies and procedures on (how to execute) their HR tasks.

These results are very different from the overall findings in the devolution literature. Authors from the devolution literature underlined that line managers have trouble implementing HRM due to a lack of desire, capacity, competences, support and policies & procedures. This research shows, however, that line managers are not constraint by the limitations in their HR work: they neither are unwilling to execute HR tasks, nor experience many capacity problems between HR tasks and operational tasks, not consider themselves incompetent to execute HR tasks, nor are dissatisfied about the HR support they receive, nor miss policies and procedures on (how to execute) their HR roles.

4.2 Line managers’ HRM implementation effectiveness

The means and standard deviations of the dependent variable (line managers’ HRM implementation effectiveness) are shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Line managers’ HRM implementation effectiveness as perceived by subordinates

	Means 1-5	Standard deviation
Personnel administration	3.74	0.46
Recruitment & Selection	3.39	0.66
Career management	3.52	0.61
Evaluation and rewarding	3.29	0.63
People management	3.68	0.54
HRM implementation effectiveness	3.54	0.45

Subordinates are rather positive about the HR performance of their line manager and thus perceive line managers’ HRM implementation effectiveness as reasonably high (mean 3.54) Line managers are therefore successful in implementing HRM. HRM implementation effectiveness was measured based on subordinates’ opinion of line managers HR performance on five HRM practices, from which the results are also presented in table 14.

Employees appear to be most satisfied with how their line managers perform personnel administration and people management (means 3.74 and 3.68 respectively) and least satisfied with how their line managers perform their evaluation and rewarding (mean 3.29).

4.3 The effect of line managers' limitations on their HRM implementation effectiveness

In order to investigate whether the limitations (that do not really hinder line managers in implementing HRM practices on the work floor) have an effect on line managers' effectiveness in implementing HRM practices, I performed a multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses. Since all the hypothesis propose a direct effect of line managers' limitations on their HRM implementation effectiveness and some independent variables are dependent on each other (see Table 13), all the independent variables are included in the same model to test the effect on line managers HR performance. I performed three regression models (Table 15): (1) without control variables, (2) with demographic control variables, and (3) with demographic and contextual control variables.

Table 15: Multiple regression analysis: Line managers' limitations and HRM implementation effectiveness

	Model 1: excluding control variables	Model 2: including demographic control variables	Model 3: including demographic and contextual control variables
	Line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness	Line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness	Line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness
Constant	3.24***	3.39***	3.28***
Capacity	0.08*	0.09*	0.03
Motivation	-0.35***	-0.30**	-0.28**
Competences	0.16*	0.18*	0.21**
Support	0.22***	0.25***	0.15
Policies & Procedures	0.02	-0.11	-0.01
Vocational education		-0.43*	-0.45*
Secondary education		0.13	0.07
31-40 age		0.00	0.01
51-60 age		0.04	0.07
61+ age		0.05	0.04
10-20 subordinates		-0.15	-0.14
20 or more subordinates		-0.15	-0.11
0-5 years experience		-0.17	-0.08
6-10 years experience		0.09	0.90
Construction company			0.28
N	64	64	64
F	3.70***	1.98**	1.98**
R ²	0.24	0.36	0.38
Adj. R ²	0.17	0.18	0.19
*** <= 0.01			
** <= 0.05			
* <= 0.10			

- F: Our regression model results in significantly better prediction of HRM implementation effectiveness than if we used the mean value of HRM implementation effectiveness. The regression model overall predicts the HRM implementation effectiveness significantly well. (Howitt and Cramer, 2005). However, the F-ratio decreases after adding control variables to the model, indicating that the regression model without the control variables predicts HRM implementation effectiveness better than the regression models with the control variable. However, the F-ratio stays significant at 95 percent confidence interval.
- R squared (R^2): The R squared of model 1 is 0.24 and implies that this model explains 24 percent of the variance of HR implementation effectiveness of line managers. There seems to be other influences on HR implementation effectiveness next to the limitations of line managers. When adding the control variables, the R squared increases to 0,36 and 0,38 respectively. Therefore, when adding the control variables to the model, the prediction of HRM implementation effectiveness is improved.
- Adjusted R squared: This option displays the change in R squared resulting from the inclusion of a new predictor (or block of predictors). It gives some idea of how well the model generalizes and ideally we would like its value to be the same, or very close to, the value of R squared. The adjusted R squared of model 1 is 0.17, thus differs 0.07 of the R squared value. This implies a deviation of 8percent, which is a reasonably small deviation (Field, 2009). The adjusted R squared of model 2 is 0.18, which implies an somewhat larger deviation of 18 percent. Similarly applies for model 3: the adjusted R squared is 0.19, which implies an deviation of 19 percent.

4.3.1 Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 was formulated as: *The more desire line managers have to perform HR tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.*

This hypothesis is rejected. There is an significant relationship between the willingness of line managers and their HRM implementation effectiveness at 99 percent confidence level. However, the effect is opposite of the effect that was hypothesized. The regression analysis shows that the more willing line managers are to implement HRM practices, the less effective they will implement HR tasks on the work floor. This will also imply that the less motivated a line manager is to implement HRM, the more effectively he or she will perform according to subordinates. The relationship between the willingness of line managers and their HRM implementation effectiveness does not

change much with adding the demographical and/or contextual control variables to the regression model; it stays significant at 95 percent confidence interval.

4.3.2 Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 stated: *The more capacity line managers have to execute HR tasks next to their operational tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.*

This hypothesis can only be accepted without taking into account the organization as a control variable. According to the regression model 1 capacity significantly increases line managers' effectiveness at 90 percent confidence interval. The same applies to model 2, in which demographic control variables are included. However, when the organization is added as a control variable (contextual control variable), this effect is no longer significant. The generally formulated hypothesis can therefore be supported, but must be rejected when controlling for the organization.

4.3.3 Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 was formulated as: *The more competent line managers perceive themselves to perform HR tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.*

This hypothesis is accepted. It turns out that the more competent line managers perceive themselves, the more effective they will perform their HR activities according to their employees. I can confirm the direct positive effect of line managers' competences on their effectiveness in implementing HRM practices on the work floor at 95 percent confidence level. This effect remains the same when I add control variables. With adding the contextual control variable, the effect is even stronger, since the effect is significant at 99 percent confidence interval.

4.3.4 Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 stated: *The more and better HR support line managers perceive to receive from HR professionals in performing their HR tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.*

This hypothesis can only be accepted without taking into account the organization as a control variable. In the first model without control variables there is a significant relationship between the support that HR professionals give to line managers and line managers' effectiveness in implementing HRM at 99 percent confidence interval. This effect remains when adding the demographic control variables in model 2. Furthermore, HR support is the limitation that is most salient for HRM implementation effectiveness. However, when I added the organization as a control variable in model 3, the effect was no longer significant. The generally formulated hypothesis can therefore be supported, but must be rejected when controlling for the organization.

4.3.5 Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 was formulated as: *The more policies and procedures line managers have on their HR responsibilities and on how to execute HRM practices, the more effectively they will implement HR tasks on the work floor*

This hypothesis is rejected. The availability of policies and procedures for line managers on their HR role and how to execute HRM practices are not salient for their HRM implementation effectiveness according to their subordinates. This effect remains insignificant with adding the demographical and contextual control variables. Even stronger, the effect becomes slightly negative.

Summary of hypotheses

The demographic control variables have very little effect on the relationship between line managers' limitations and their HRM implementation effectiveness. The contextual control variable, on the other hand, has a large effect on some of the predictors. Without controlling for the organization in which the research was performed, I can conclude that the more capacity line managers have to apply HRM practices, the more HR competences they have and the better they get supported by HR professionals, the more effectively they implement HRM practices on the work floor. However, when controlling for the organization, only line managers HR competences are significantly positively related to their effectiveness in implementing HRM.

Table 16: Rejected and accepted hypotheses

Hypotheses	Rejected / Accepted
Hypothesis 1: Motivation → higher effectiveness	Rejected
Hypothesis 2: Capacity → higher effectiveness	Accepted (without taking into account the organization)
Hypothesis 3: Competences → higher effectiveness	Accepted
Hypothesis 4: Support → higher effectiveness	Accepted (without taking into account the organization)
Hypothesis 5: Policies & procedures → higher effectiveness	Rejected

4.3.7 Effect of line managers' limitations on individual HRM practices

To get a more detailed insight on the effects of line managers' limitations, I examined the effect of the limitations on each of the individual limitations by means of multiple regressions analysis.

Table 17: The effect of line managers' limitations on HRM practices

	Personnel administration	Recruitment & selection	Career management	Evaluation & Rewarding	People management
Constant	3.43***	2.11***	3.24***	3.29***	4.30***
Capacity	0.11**	0.05	0.02	0.09	-0.16
Motivation	-0.34***	-0.23	-0.41**	-0.48***	-0.34**
Competences	0.15*	-0.06	0.25*	0.10	0.09
Support	0.30***	0.20*	0.16	0.19*	0.09
Policies & Procedures	-0.10	0.44**	0.10	0.18	0.05
N	64	65	63	61	64
F	5.30***	2.80***	1.53*	2.47**	0.92
R ²	0.31	0.19	0.12	0.18	0.07
Adj. R ²	0.25	0.12	0.04	0.11	-0.007
*** <= 0.01					
** <= 0.05					
* <= 0.10					

Line managers' HRM effectiveness in implementing **personnel administration** seems to be highly influenced by almost all of the limitations, except for policies and procedures. Capacity, competences and support have a significant positive effect on line managers' performance on personnel administration at 95 percent confidence interval, 90 percent confidence interval and 99 percent confidence interval respectively. Thus, the more capacity line managers have to implement HRM, the more support line managers receive from HR professionals and the more competent they perceive themselves, the more effectively they will implement personnel management. On the contrary, motivation has a negative significant effect on line managers' effectiveness at a 99 per cent confidence interval: the more line managers are willing to implement HRM, the less effective they implement personnel administration.

The implementation of the HRM practice **recruitment & selection** is affected by the limitations support and policies & procedures. HR support significantly increases line managers' HR performance at 90 percent confidence interval and policies & procedures increases line managers' HR performance at 95 percent confidence interval. Thus, the more support line managers receive from the HR department and the more policies and procedures line managers have available, the more effectively they will perform recruitment & selection. There are no significant relationships between capacity, motivation or competences and their HR performance in implementing recruitment & selection.

Line managers' HRM effectiveness in implementing **career management** is not influenced by the limitations capacity, support and policies and procedures. However, line managers' competences does significantly influence their HR performance in career management at 90 percent confidence interval. The more competent they perceive themselves in implementing HRM, the more effectively

they will implement career management. On the other hand, motivation has a negative significant effect on line managers' effectiveness at a 95 percent confidence interval: the more line managers are willing to implement HRM, the less effectively they implement career management.

Line managers' implementation effectiveness of the HRM practice **evaluation & rewarding** is negatively influenced by the limitation motivation at 99 percent confidence interval. Thus, an increase in line managers motivation decreases their HR performance in implementing evaluation and rewarding. Furthermore, the HR support line managers receive is significantly related to their performance on evaluation and rewarding at 90 percent confidence interval. There are no significant relationships between line managers' HRM effectiveness in evaluation and rewarding and the limitations capacity, competences and policies & procedures.

Motivation has a significant negative effect on line managers' effectiveness in implementing **people management** at 95 percent confidence interval. Therefore, the more motivated line managers are to implement HRM, the less effectively they will implement the HRM practice people management. There are no significant relationships between line managers' effectiveness in people management and the limitations capacity, competences, support and policies & procedures.

5. Discussion

This chapter concerns a discussion and explanation of my results in comparison with previous research. First of all, I will discuss the limitations that line managers experience in their HR role. Furthermore, I will discuss the HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers according to their employees. Lastly, the relationship between line managers' limitations and their HRM implementation effectiveness will be explained.

5.1 Line managers' limitations in implementing HRM

My results regarding line managers perceived limitations are different than expected. Line managers appear to be less hindered by limitations in performing their HR responsibilities than the qualitative devolution literature expressed. Line managers are neither unwilling to execute HR tasks, nor perceive capacity problems with HR tasks and operational tasks, nor consider themselves incompetent to execute HR tasks, nor are dissatisfied about the HR support they receive, nor miss policies and procedures on their HR role and how to execute HRM practices. These findings contradict with several findings and opinions in the devolution literature. For example, Hope-Hailey et al. (2005) advocated that line managers are neither capable nor motivated to take on people management responsibilities. Francis & Keegan (2006, p. 242) advocated that "it might be naïve to assume that line managers have the time, the training or the interest to give employee well-being the kind of priority it deserves". Furthermore, McGovern et al. (1997) predicted that the prospects for devolvement to the line are not promising. "Attempts to devolve HRM to the line in any grand sense can only be regarded as quixotic" (McGovern et al., 1997, p. 26). Nevertheless, this research shows that line managers have accepted their HR role and have found a way to perform the HRM practices to their own satisfaction.

5.1.1 Motivation

Line managers are willing to execute their HR responsibilities and see added value in performing these activities, because of personal motivation and/or institutional motivation. This research finding is different from findings of Hall and Torrington (1998) who claim that line managers feel that certain HR tasks should not be their responsibility. It also differs from findings of Harris et al. (2002) who advocate that line managers feel HR responsibilities are pushed upon them, while beforehand they were the responsibility of the HR department". However, it does correspond with findings of Whittaker & Marchington (2003) who indicate that line managers are satisfied with the HR responsibilities that have been devolved to them and that they are excited to execute activities that relate explicitly to the development of their team.

5.1.2 Capacity

McGovern et al. (1997) and Cunningham and Hyman (1999) argue that line managers see HR issues as a poor second to their more immediate operational tasks and this can result in less devotion of line managers to their HR responsibilities. However, this research shows that line managers are not that much constrained by the capacity limitation in their HR work. They do not experience many capacity problems to implement HRM next to their short term operational tasks. Nevertheless, capacity is perceived as the largest limitation in comparison with the other limitations. Capacity was also the only limitation that had a relatively high standard deviation (1.10). This indicates that the results of the various line managers differ for the capacity factor. Especially between both case companies differences regarding the perception of capacity could be found.

5.1.3 Competences

From this research it appears that line managers are confident enough to execute their HR responsibilities. This differs from case study findings of Whittaker and Marchington (2003) and Harris et al. (2002). These researchers advocated that line managers themselves report concerns about the level of specialist expertise they feel is needed to manage HR issues and that this might decrease their performance.

5.1.4 Support

Hall and Torrington (1998) advocate that HR professionals are sometimes not willing to give away responsibilities to the line and therefore fail to assist line managers in their HRM responsibilities. The research of Whittaker and Marchington (2003) reports that line managers themselves express concern that a lack of support from HR professionals during the executing of an HRM practice can detract from their overall effectiveness. This research shows, however, that line managers are quite satisfied with the support they receive from the HR department and thus are not hindered by a lack of support from HRM.

5.1.5 Policies & procedures

Case studies reveal that there is significant perceptual divergence between line managers and HR professionals on aspects of line manager involvement in HRM (Maxwell & Watson, 2006; Harris et al., 2002). This implies that line managers are not that clear about their HR role and responsibilities. This research shows, however, that line managers are clear about their HR role and are satisfied with the policies and procedures available to them in their organizations.

After discussing these results, one very important question arises: why are my results so different from other findings in case study research on devolution? Well, this can have three reasons:

Quantitative versus qualitative research

The differences in results can be explained by the fact that in my research the limitations are measured by means of a questionnaire. In the case studies from the devolution literature, the limitations are identified by means of interviews. So the nature of this research is quantitative, while earlier research was qualitative. For this research, questionnaires were used in order to ask in multiple ways whether line managers perceive limitations in their HR work. Several questions (items) were asked in order to find out whether a line managers is, for example, motivated to perform HR tasks. Furthermore, on a scale from 1 to 5 e.g. the degree of motivation can be asked more relative than being asked whether one is motivated or not.

Different research populations

The differences in results can also come forth out of different research populations. Earlier case study research focused mostly on HR professionals (sometimes in combination with line managers) to identify limitations that line managers experience in their HR responsibilities. Line managers themselves have rarely been asked to what extent they perceive their limitations as hindering. This is somewhat odd, because to examine the limitations that line managers experience, one should ask line managers and not HR professionals. I examined to what extent line managers *themselves* perceive their limitations as hindering.

Time

Another explanation for the differences in results can be the time in which the research is executed. The greater part of the case study research in the devolution literature is executed about ten to fifteen years ago. It could be that line managers are growing into their HR role more and more and thus are less hindered by limitations in comparison with a few years ago.

5.2 HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers

Subordinates are satisfied with their line managers performance in HRM. They judge their line managers' HRM implementation as reasonably effective based on the HRM practices personnel administration, recruitment & selection, career management, evaluation & rewarding and people management.

In earlier research, several authors expressed concern about line managers' effectiveness in implementing HRM. Research of Cunningham and Hyman (1995) indicated that HR professionals

place some doubt on line managers' HR performance due to a lack of skills and motivation. Hall and Torrington (1998) expressed concern about that line manager' involvement in HRM may result in employees being treated inconsistently within the organization. However, this research indicates that employees are satisfied with their line managers performance and consider their performance as quite effective. This finding corresponds with the research findings of Perry and Kulik (2008) who advocate that the devolution of HR tasks to line managers has a positive effect on HRM effectiveness.

My research findings are again different from the overall opinion in literature. A possible explanation for this can be:

Different research populations

In my research employees evaluate line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness. Employees can evaluate line managers' HR performance utmost, since they experience how line managers implement HRM practices on a daily basis. In literature there is emerging growing support for assessing HRM from the employee perspective (Gibb, 2001; Bowen & Ostrof, 2004; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). In the devolution literature, however, HR managers are the foremost used research group to evaluate the devolvement of HR tasks to line managers and their performance (Hall & Torrington, 1998; Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Harris et al., 2002). "Evaluating HRM from other stakeholder perspectives or positions may produce different views" (Gibb, 2001). However, although HR managers evaluated the HR performance of line managers in earlier research, this evaluation was never measured. It was purely based on opinions of HR managers, while in this researched the evaluation of employees about their line managers was measured with a questionnaire.

Nevertheless, HR managers and employees have somewhat different interests regarding effective implementation of HRM. HR managers want their designed HRM practices to be implemented by line managers as they were intended, according to the HRM strategy of the organization (Khijji & Wang, 2006). Employees are satisfied when implemented HRM practices fulfil their individual desires. For example, the provision of opportunities for the proper training and skill development benefits the employee by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to function autonomously and responsibly (Edgar & Geare, 2003). Therefore, in this research line managers' HR performance is measured as successful by their employees, while in earlier research HR managers expressed a less positive opinion.

5.3 The effect of line managers' limitations on their HRM implementation effectiveness

When examining the relationship between line managers' limitations and their HRM implementation effectiveness, I found some significant relationships. Below these findings will be discussed. Hereby I will also pay attention to the relationship between the limitations and the individual HRM practices.

5.3.1 Line managers' desire to implement HRM significantly decreases their HRM implementation effectiveness

Perhaps the most remarkable result in this research is that line managers' desire to implement HRM seems to decrease their HRM implementation effectiveness. This finding is different from the general opinion in literature that advocates that the desire of line managers to execute their HR responsibilities is salient for successful HRM implementation (McGovern, 1999; Harris et al., 2002, Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). It also contradicts with the opinion of Huselid (1995) who argues that willingness is a necessary condition to perform effectively. He advocates that the performance of even the best employees will decrease if they are not motivated to perform. This research shows different conclusions.

When line managers want to perform HRM activities and see added value in performing HRM practices, their HR performance will decrease. At first sight, this finding seems very strange. But a possible reason for this finding is that HRM implementation effectiveness was measured based on employee opinions. For employees it does not matter whether their line manager believes in HRM practices, since employees themselves might not see the added value of certain HRM practices. Employees might not value standardized procedures and depersonalized instruments but prefer a personal approach with individual decisions. Most employees are probably fine with some constructive and valuable feedback and do not see the need of a formal performance evaluation. Furthermore, it can be explained because employees can only judge actual implemented practice: they judge the behavior of their line manager in for example evaluating their performance during performance appraisals and not the instrument they use. Therefore, although line managers themselves might not be willing to perform the designed HRM practices, by adjusting them to employees' individual situation they are understood to be effective by their employees.

Line managers' desire to implement HRM significantly decreases their HRM effectiveness in implementing personnel administration, career management, evaluation & rewarding and people management

When looking at the individual HRM practices, line managers' motivation significantly decreases personnel administration, career management, evaluation & rewarding and people management. The findings with regard to evaluation & rewarding, career management and people management can be explained with the reason I gave earlier: employees might not value standardized procedures and depersonalized instruments but prefer a personal approach with individual decisions. With regard to the HRM practice personnel administration: when line managers are very motivated to perform personnel administration, they might devote more attention to it than employees consider necessary and therefore perform less effective (according to subordinates). Employees might prefer that line managers devote attention to employees and to the team goals, instead of personnel administration. Employees are probably satisfied when their line manager just performs the required administrative tasks and nothing additionally.

5.3.2 Line managers' capacity to implement HRM next to operational tasks significantly increases their HRM implementation effectiveness (without taking into account the organization)

Line managers' capacity to implement HRM significantly increases their HRM implementation effectiveness. This finding is in line with the general opinion in literature, that predicts that line managers' lack of capacity will reduce their effective implementation of HRM practices (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; Harris et al, 2002, Cunningham & Hyman, 1999). When line managers have more time to implement HRM practices, subordinates perceive them as more effective than when they have little time to implement HRM. This corresponds with the recent research finding of Perry & Kulik (2008), who suggest that the capacity problems of line managers to implement HRM next to short term operational responsibilities may result in of people management that is less effective.

However, when I added the organization as a control variable to the regression model, the effect became insignificant. Therefore, in one of the organizations examined the effect was present, while in the other organization it was not. It can be concluded that the context in which the effects of line managers' limitations are researched is important and should be taken into consideration when researching the effectiveness of devolvement.

Line managers' capacity to implement HRM next to operational tasks significantly increases their HRM effectiveness in implementing personnel administration

I found one significant effect when I examined the effect of capacity on the individual HRM practices: Capacity to implement HRM significantly increases line managers' HR performance in personnel administration. When line managers have a lack of capacity to implement HRM, certain administrative tasks might get little priority. Administrative tasks like filing of documents and registration of hours might be less urgent in comparison with other HRM practices.

5.3.3 Line managers' perceived competences significantly increases their HRM implementation effectiveness

This research shows a significant relationship between line managers' perceived competences and their HRM implementation effectiveness. The higher line managers perceive their own HR competences (for example because of training courses they followed) the more effectively they will perform their HR tasks. This finding is in line with the overall opinion in the devolution literature, which states that HRM skills and competences will be beneficial for line managers HR performance (Lowe, 1992; Hall & Torrington, 1998; Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; McGovern, 1999; Renwick, 2000). Line managers' confidence about their HRM skills and knowledge are important for them to perform effectively according to their employees. This implies that employees evaluate their line managers' HRM effectiveness more effectively when their line manager is confident about his HR competences than when their line manager is not. Therefore, it is important that organizations invest in line managers' HR competences, in order increase line managers' perception about their own competences.

Line managers' perceived competences significantly increases their HRM effectiveness in implementing personnel administration and career management

When line managers are more confident about their own competences, they will perform more effectively in implementing personnel administration and career management. This can be explained because line managers might feel they need more specific HRM competences for executing the HRM practices personnel administration and career management than for the other practices. With regard to career management, the research of Kulik and Bainbridge (2006) indicated that line managers have most trouble to execute activities that are seen as 'no win' situations, like career management. Therefore, line managers benefit when they perceive themselves as competent in HRM when implementing a difficult practice like career management (Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006).

5.3.4 The support that line managers perceive to receive from the HR department significantly increases their HRM implementation effectiveness (without taking into account the organization)

I found that support from HR professionals to line manager significantly increases line managers' HR performance. This finding is in line with findings from earlier research on devolution. The devolution literature shows that line managers need content-related advice and coaching from personnel specialists on how to perform HR activities (Hope-Hailey et al., 1997; Hall & Torrington, 1998). Some authors even advocate that line managers cannot perform their HR responsibilities at acceptable levels without the assistance of HR professionals (Lowe, 1992; Brewster & Larsen, 2000). I cannot confirm this statement, but my research does show that line managers' HRM effectiveness benefits from the support and assistance of HR professionals. Furthermore, HR support is the limitation that is most salient for HRM implementation effectiveness.

However, I can only accept this hypothesis without taking into account the organization as a control variable. When this control variable is taken into account, the effect is no longer significant. In one of the organizations examined the effect was present, while in the other organization it was not. Therefore, the context in which the effects of line managers' limitations are researched is important and should be taken into consideration when researching the effectiveness of devolvement.

The support that line managers perceive to receive from the HR department significantly increases their HRM effectiveness in implementing personnel administration, recruitment & selection and evaluation & rewarding

When examining the relationship between HR support and the individual HRM practices, it appears that line managers need HR support for the HRM practices personnel administration, recruitment & selection and evaluation & rewarding. The research of Whittaker and Marchington (2003) indicates that HR involvement tends to be the highest in HRM practices were consistency and specialist expertise is most important. Line managers benefit from HR professionals' expertise in implementing evaluation & rewarding, for example because of legal implications that may be involved in the rewarding of employees (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; Harris et al., 2002). Regarding recruitment & selection, line managers might make better decisions when hiring employees in conjunction with HR professionals in order to achieve consistency in the organization. The skills, knowledge and experience of new employees need to benefit organizational purposes and not just the team interests of a certain line manager.

5.3.5 Available policies & procedures for line manager on (how to execute) their HR responsibilities does not significantly increases or decreases their HRM implementation effectiveness

Policies & procedures for line managers (on how to execute) their HR responsibilities have no significant relationship on their HRM implementation effectiveness. This finding is different from the general opinion in literature, that claims how important clear policies & procedures are for line managers to perform successful in HRM (Gennard & Kelly, 1997; Maxwell & Watson, 2006; Harris et al., 2002).

Subordinates perceive HRM implementation of their line manager as successful, despite whether their line manager has policies and procedures on how to execute their HRM responsibilities. One explanation for this is that, after years of being responsible for HRM, line managers might not need job descriptions anymore about which HR responsibilities they have or guidelines on how to implement HRM practices. Another reason can be that line managers never needed any policies & procedures because they apply HRM practices to their own understanding. This is a development that HRM professionals actually wanted to avoid (Harris et al., 2001), but employees are probably not affected by this. For example: when line managers are unclear about how to guide an employee during sickness or absence, they might apply this according to their own understanding and thus inconsistently within the organization. However, employees probably will not notice this; they only know how their own line manager implements this HRM practice, and have no insight in how other line managers in the organization might implement this.

The slightly negative (non-significant) effect of policies and procedures on line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness can be explained by the fact that employees might prefer a individual and personalized approach to implement HRM over standardized instruments and depersonalized procedures.

Available policies & procedures for line managers significantly increases their HRM effectiveness in implementing recruitment & selection

I did find one significant effect when I examined the effect of policies & procedures on the individual HRM practices. Policies & procedures for line managers increases their implementation effectiveness in implementing recruitment & selection. Recruitment & selection is a HRM practice in which consistency is very important. Like stated before, the skills, knowledge and experience of new employees need to benefit organizational purposes and not just the team interests of a certain line manager. Furthermore, case studies suggested that recruitment & selection is a HRM practice

wherefore line managers and HR professionals are together responsible (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). For a line manager to be effective in recruitment & selection, it is important that they know what their responsibilities regarding recruitment & selection are and which responsibilities belong to HR professionals.

6. Conclusion

In the last chapter of this report, I will provide answers to the research questions. Furthermore, I will discuss the research limitations and provide suggestions for further research and recommendations.

6.1 Research conclusions

This research was conducted in order to find out whether line managers can implement HRM effectively and to what extent the limitations that line managers experience in performing their HR responsibilities influence their effectiveness in implementing HRM. The following research questions were formulated:

- 1. *To what extent can line managers implement HRM practices effectively?***
- 2. *What is the influence of the limitations that line managers experience in implementing HRM on their HRM implementation effectiveness?***

To answer the first research question I examined line managers' perceived limitations and line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness according to their employees. Next, to answer the second research question, I examined the relationship between line managers' limitations (independent variables) and their HRM implementation effectiveness (dependent variables). The most important conclusions will be discussed in the section below.

6.1.1 Independent variables (Line managers' limitations in implementing HRM)

Authors from the devolution literature suggested that line managers have trouble implementing HRM due to a lack of desire, capacity, competences, support and policies & procedures. My research shows, however, that line managers are not that constrained by the limitations in their HR work as suggested in the devolution literature. Line managers are neither unwilling to execute HR tasks, nor experience capacity problems between HR tasks and operational tasks, nor consider themselves incompetent to execute HR tasks, nor are dissatisfied about the HR support they receive, nor miss policies and procedures on (how to execute) their HR roles. Capacity problems between operational work and HR tasks is most hindering for line managers in comparison with the other limitations.

6.1.2 Dependent variable (line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness)

In earlier research on devolution, several authors expressed concern about line managers' effectiveness in implementing HRM. From my research appeared, however, that subordinates are quite positive about the HR performance of their line manager and thus perceive line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness as reasonably high.

Therefore, to answer the first research question, I conclude that line managers are ready to execute HRM responsibilities. Line managers perceive themselves as effective as they do not perceive problems in implementing HRM and they are also perceived as effective by their subordinates. Thus, line managers have found a way to perform their HR role to their own satisfaction as well as to the satisfaction of their subordinates.

6.1.3 Relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable

- *Desire & HRM implementation effectiveness*

Hypothesis 1 was formulated as: *The more desire line managers have to perform HR tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.*

This hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant relationship between the desire of line managers and their HRM implementation effectiveness. However, this is opposite to the effect that was hypothesized. It appears that the more willing line managers are to implement HRM practices, the less effective they will implement HR tasks on the work floor. This is a remarkable finding. It can be explained by the fact that HRM implementation effectiveness was measured based on employee opinions. For employees it does not matter whether their line manager believes in HRM practices, since employees themselves might not see the added value of certain HRM practices. Still, employees are the utmost group to evaluate line managers' HR performance, since they experience how line managers implement HRM practices on a daily basis.

- *Capacity & HRM implementation effectiveness*

Hypothesis 2 stated: *The more capacity line managers have to execute HR tasks next to their operational tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.*

This hypothesis can be accepted (without taking into account the organization as a control variable). Capacity significantly increases line managers' effectiveness when no control variables are added. The same applies to the model in which demographic control variables are included. However, when the organization is added as a control variable, this effect is non-significant.

- *Competences & HRM implementation effectiveness*

Hypothesis 3 was formulated as: *The more competent line managers perceive themselves to perform HR tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.*

This hypothesis is accepted. I can confirm that the higher line managers perceive their own HR competences (for example because of training courses they followed) the more effectively they will perform their HR tasks.

- *Support & HRM implementation effectiveness*

Hypothesis 4 stated: *The more and better HR support line managers perceive to receive from HR professionals in performing their HR tasks, the more effectively they will implement them on the work floor.*

This hypothesis can be accepted (without taking into account the organization as a control variable). HR support is the limitation that is most salient for HRM implementation effectiveness. The model without control variables shows that the support that HR professionals give to line managers significantly increases line managers' effectiveness in implementing HRM. This effect did not change when adding the demographic control variables. However, the effect was no longer significant when controlling for the organization.

- *Policies & procedures & HRM implementation effectiveness*

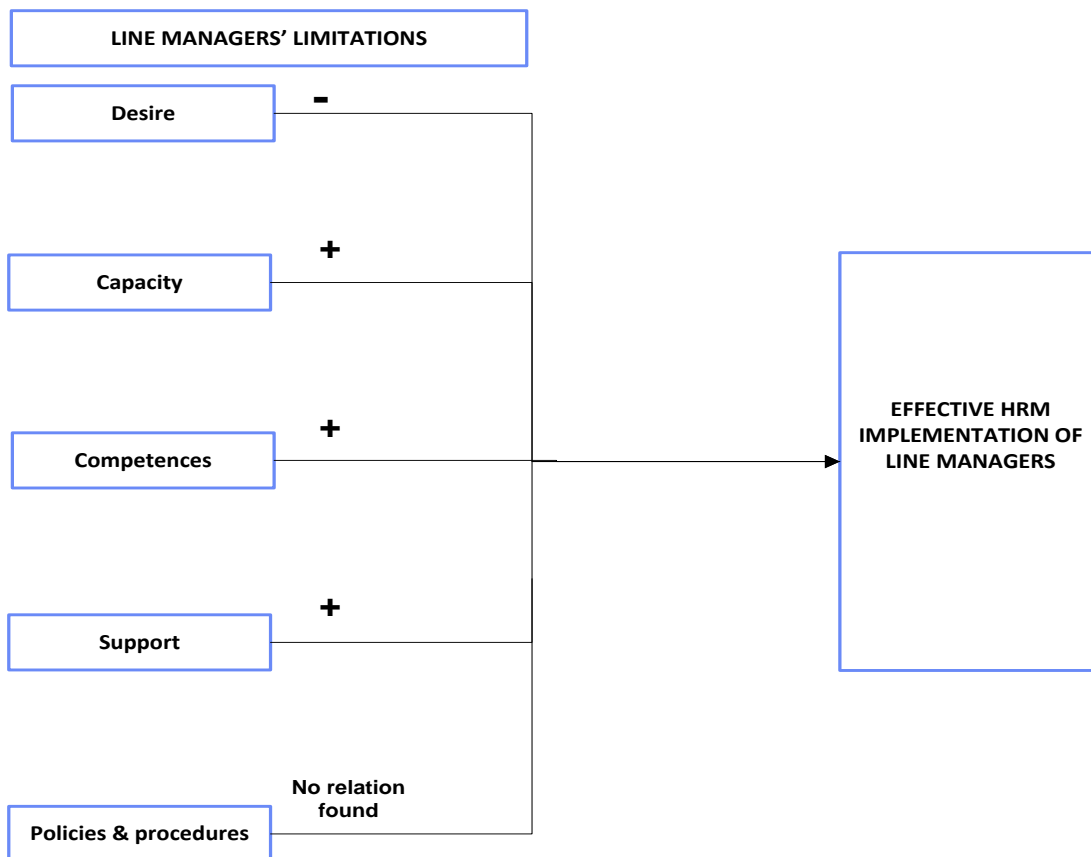
Hypothesis 5 was formulated as: *The more policies and procedures line managers have on their HR role and on how to execute HRM practices, the more effectively they will implement HR tasks on the work floor*

This hypothesis is rejected. The availability of policies and procedures for line managers on (how to execute) their HR responsibilities are not salient for their HRM implementation effectiveness according to their employees. Subordinates perceive HRM implementation of their line manager as successful, despite whether their line managers have policies and procedures on how to execute their HRM responsibilities.

Thus, to answer the second research question: The more HR competences line managers have, the more capacity they have, and the more and better they get supported by HRM professionals, the more effectively they can implement HRM practices. On the other hand, their desire to implement HRM decreases their HRM implementation effectiveness. Line managers' available HR policies & procedures does not influence their HRM implementation effectiveness.

Based on these conclusions, the research model looks as following:

Figure 5: Adjusted research model



6.2 Research limitations

6.2.1 Research population of independent variable

Focusing solely on line managers to identify limitations might be a limitation to this research. Line managers can be afraid to admit that they have trouble implementing HRM, especially when it comes to factors like motivation and competences. Line managers might give socially desirable answers, because they might not want to admit that they are not that enthusiastic about executing HRM responsibilities. The same applies to competences: line managers may be afraid to admit that their HR related competences are insufficient. As a solution, one could decide to include HR professionals in the research population for the independent variable in order to highlight a second opinion. However, I strongly believe that in order to examine line managers' HR limitations, one should ask line managers and not HR professionals. Furthermore, line managers responses did not deviate much from each other, indicating that their experiences with the limitations are comparable.

6.2.2 Relatively small sample of organizations

Data was collected in two various organizations. This is relatively few; I would have achieved a more diverse sample if more different kind of organizations had participated. Besides, because of the small sample of organizations and the aggregation process I ended up with a rather low N (74 departments). I controlled for the effect of the organization in the regression model and this had a large effect on some of the other predictors. Because of that, I can conclude that it is important to take the context into account when researching the effectiveness of devolvement. Therefore, it is plausible that the results would have been different researching more organizations, since the context of the organizations examined had such a large effect on my results.

6.2.3 Stakeholders for researching HRM implementation effectiveness

In this research I measured HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers solely on the opinions of employees. In my opinion are employees the best stakeholder group, since they experience and interpret the implementation of HRM practices by their line managers on a daily basis. However, one could have decided to also ask senior managers and HR professionals for their opinion of the HR performance of the line managers, in order to highlight more different opinions. "Evaluating HRM from other stakeholder perspectives or positions may produce different views" (Gibb, 2001). HR professionals, senior managers and employees have somewhat different interests regarding effective implementation of HRM. HR professionals and senior managers want their designed HRM practices to be implemented by line managers as they were intended, according to the HRM strategy of the organization (Khijji & Wang, 2006). Employees are satisfied when implemented HRM practices fulfil their individual desires. Therefore, when more different stakeholder groups would have participated, the dependent variable "HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers" might have different outcomes.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

6.3.1 More research on the effect of line managers' behaviour on HR performance

Based on the evaluation of employees about their line managers' effectiveness I can conclude that line managers are successful in implementing HRM practices. In this research subordinates judged their line managers' implementation effectiveness based on five HRM practices, however there are of course more variables that are of interest. Variables such as leadership attributes may exist (Chang, 2005). Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) found in their research that there is an interactive relationship between the leadership behaviour of line managers and the impact of HRM practices on employees. Variables like leadership behaviour will probably influence subordinates' opinion about their line managers and I did not take these variables into account in my research. According to

Gratton & Truss (2003), HRM implementation consists of two separate, but closely interrelated aspects. The first is the experience of employees of the HRM practices, which is examined in this research. The second focuses on the behaviour of line managers when they implement HRM practices. "In their attitudes, conversations and body language, managers send out very clear messages about their attitude and support of policy" (Gratton & Truss, 2003, p. 77). Therefore, it would be interesting to research what the influence of line managers' behaviour is on subordinates' opinion of their line managers' HRM implementation.

6.3.2 More research on the success or failure of devolution

More research on the success or failure of devolution in an organization is another suggestion I would like to make for further research. Researchers suggested that line managers perform their HR tasks ineffectively due to several factors and therefore indicated that devolution of HR tasks is unsuccessful (Lowe, 1992; McGovern et al., 1997; Francis & Keegan, 2006). This research shows very different results; line managers are actually performing quite effectively. Therefore, I am inclined to state that devolution of HR tasks to line managers is successful. But is it more effective than it used to be? Is HRM implementation more effective or less effective now that line managers are responsible? It would be very interesting to perform research that measures HRM implementation effectiveness, before devolving HR tasks to line managers and after devolving HR tasks to line managers in organizations. Hall and Torrington (1998) have conceptualized devolution as an ongoing process. Organizations achieve devolution in stages. Eventually, this transfer process might culminate in a state of full devolution with the line full primary responsibility for all HRM activities. Perhaps a longitudinal study at multiple different points in time is hard to achieve, since most organizations are already devolving HR tasks to line managers. However, a study would be feasible using organizational HRM effectiveness outcomes (like absence and turnover numbers) from before, during and after the devolvement of HR tasks to line managers. For a study like this, it is not possible to collect data in organization that do not devolve HRM, like small and medium sized firms.

Furthermore, it would be very interesting to develop a research instrument in order to measure whether initial motives for devolution are obtained. Brewster & Larson (2000) identified several reasons why organizations are devolving HR tasks to line managers (see page 10). But now that the HR tasks are devolved, I am curious whether these reasons are achieved. For example, have organizations obtained a more comprehensive approach to HRM and is the responsiveness time to the customers lower?

6.3.3 More research on how HR professionals can facilitate line managers

This research shows that HR support for line managers is salient for their HRM implementation effectiveness. Support that line managers receive from HR professionals significantly increases their HRM implementation effectiveness. Furthermore, based on this research we know that line managers need most support in executing the HRM practices personnel administration, recruitment & selection and evaluation & rewarding. But additionally, it would be very useful to know what kind of HR support is beneficial for line managers to implement HRM better. Some line managers might need more support on regulation and legal aspects of HRM, while other line managers might need support in developing their own HR competences, or advice on how to apply and implement HRM practices (Nehles & Boon, 2006). Other line managers might work more effectively when they share some of their HR responsibilities with line managers or certain line managers might prefer no support at all. Furthermore, it would be useful to examine from whom line managers need support. Logically, you think of HR professionals. However, perhaps do line managers benefit more support of their senior managers or fellow line managers. So far, research on this topic has been exploratory (Renwick, 2000; Currie & Procter, 2001). Therefore, I suggest to examine how HR professionals can be most successful in their assistance to line managers in order to achieve an effective partnership between HR professionals and line managers.

6.4 Recommendations

6.4.1 Effective HRM implementation

When developing and introducing a HRM practice, I recommend for organizations to pay close attention to the implementation aspect in order to achieve consistency between intended and implemented practices. Organizations should involve line managers in decisions about the design of HRM policies & practices. After all, line managers are responsible for the implementation of HRM. HRM professionals have the specific knowledge to design HRM practices, but line managers can estimate whether the implementation of a certain practice is feasible on the work floor as they work closely with shop floor employees. Research of McGovern et al. (1997) indicated that line managers feel uncomfortable working with a HRM instrument which credibility is lacking. "Line managers may be letting a policy die that they think is unworkable or against their interests. This can happen if senior managers or HR professional have introduced a policy without consultation with those who implement it" (Boxall & Purcell, 2008, p.219). This could have been avoided if the designers of this policy had consulted the line managers first. The involvement of line managers in the HRM policy making process can be crucial in achieving consistency between intended and implemented HRM practices.

Besides, I would recommend to organization to monitor the HRM implementation of line managers, since this is important for HRM to be successful in an organization. This research provides organizations with a research instrument on how to measure subordinates' opinion of their line managers' HRM effectiveness on certain HRM practices. This is excellent instrument for organizations that want to examine how effective the implementation of HRM practices is. Additionally, I would recommend for organizations to look at HRM outcomes, like absence numbers, sickness numbers and quit rates. These HRM outcomes of a certain team of employees will give a good indication of how well the responsible line manager is performing in HRM.

Below I will provide more recommendations on HRM implementation by discussing the implications for the significant relationships between line managers' limitations and their HRM implementation effectiveness.

6.4.2 The significant positive effect of line managers' capacity, HR support and HR competences on their HRM implementation effectiveness

From this research appeared that the factors capacity, HR competences and support from HR professionals increase line managers' effective implementation of HRM. For organizations it is therefore important to pay attention to these factors in order to achieve more effective HRM implementation.

Capacity & HRM implementation

For my research it appeared that it is important for line managers to have time to implement HRM, in order to be effective in HRM. Capacity also appeared to be the most hindering factor for line managers. Therefore organizations should make sure that line managers have sufficient the time to implement HRM.

First of all, organizations can reduce the number of operational tasks for line managers. They will remain responsible for the operational objectives, but some of the operational tasks that go along with these objectives can be delegated to line managers' subordinates. This will provide the line managers with more time to spend on HRM, which will be beneficial for the implementation of HRM. For organizations that are striving for a horizontal organizational structure, these tasks can be delegated to all the subordinates in the team of the line managers. In that way, employees are responsible for the tasks on a circulation basis, which will create flexibility and job enlargement for the employees. Organizations can also decide to delegate line managers' operational tasks to the

best performing or most ambitious employees, which will imply differences between the functions of subordinates and will create more hierarchy.

Secondly, it might be valuable for organizations to provide time management trainings for line managers who experience capacity problems in HRM. Time management implies personal planning (Dankers, 2003). With a proper personal planning time pressure and role overload can be avoided. Setting priorities is essential. In time management courses line managers learn to prioritize their activities, schedule fixed time for urgent matters and to plan their tasks daily. Therefore, line managers will be able to spend their working hours more efficiently.

HR competences & HRM implementation effectiveness

From this research appeared that line managers' competences are salient for their HRM implementation effectiveness. Line managers' confidence about their HRM skills and knowledge are important for them to perform effectively and therefore organizations should strive for a continuous development of their line managers.

Therefore, it is important that organizations invest in line managers' HR competences, in order to increase line managers' perception about their own competences. Organizations should provide line managers with continuous training on HRM. These training programs are focused on developing the right competences required to execute their HR-role, but also to keep line managers up-to-date on new developments in HRM.

Furthermore, I would recommend for organization to put more effort in the selection and development of new line managers. In organizations new line managers are often promoted because of their technical and engineering skills (Gennard & Kelly, 1997). This is not a problem when these new line managers are a natural talent in people management. But unfortunately, this is not too common. Therefore, I recommend to pay sufficient attention to HR competences when selecting a new line manager. Perhaps organizations can use assessments in which potential line managers can demonstrate their people management skills. Besides, I think it is essential to invest in the development of new line managers in order for them to implement HRM in an effective manner. Therefore, I would recommend a training program for new line managers in HRM. In this training program, line managers learn the basics of HRM: what are the HRM practices, and how should they implement this? But more importantly, they learn to develop specific HR competences to manage, develop and motivate employees. I would suggest that HR professionals develop this program in

conjunction with experienced, more senior, line managers. The experienced line managers know what inexperienced line managers need in the beginning of their management career. Furthermore, I think it is crucial that experienced line managers coach the new line manager on the work floor. They should monitor the new line managers during work and provide constructive feedback. Of course developing a training course and coaching new line managers implies extra effort for experienced line managers. Therefore, it might be sensible to make this activity part of their performance objectives and rewarding. When organizations provide line managers with proper training from the moment they start their management careers, line managers will be able to implement HRM practices more consistently. This can lead to smaller differences in intended and implemented HRM practices in organizations.

HR support & HRM implementation

One important conclusion from this research is that HR support is important for line managers to implement HRM effectively. Organizations have to make decisions to make sure that HR professionals can provide effective HR support to line managers.

First of all, I suggest to keep HR as a responsibility of both HR managers and line managers: whether HRM should be a responsibility of solely HR professionals, solely line managers or both is an ongoing discussion in literature (Lowe, 1992, Renwick, 2002; Gennard & Kelly, 1997). One important conclusion of this research is that line managers have found a way to perform HR tasks to their own satisfaction as well as to the satisfaction of their employees. Therefore, they are ready to execute HRM practices and have accepted their HR role. For that reason, some organization may want to put HR completely in the hands of the line managers. Line managers' expanding HR role have implied some detriments and changes in the HR department (Gennard & Kelly, 1997) and this will probably continue in the future. However, another very important conclusion from this research is that support from HR professionals to line managers is important for a line manager to perform effectively in HRM. Therefore I think that for HRM to be successful in organizations, HRM is the responsibility of both line managers and HR professionals and that they cannot work in isolation. After all, the overall objective of devolution is to give line management the ability to manage and develop the skills and talents of their people more effectively to enhance business performance- not to make them expert in the upkeep of personnel records or the impact of European legislation on the employment law (Sparrow & Marchington, 1998). Whereas line managers have responsibility to implement HRM practices in their team of employees, HR professionals are responsible for HRM

across the organization (Larson & Brewster, 2003). Both parties can bring unique competences to HRM, and these combined skills can be more than just the sum of both parts (Ulrich, 1997).

Furthermore, I would arrange the structure of the organization in such a way that HR professionals will be able to facilitate line managers most efficiently. I would recommend that there are no hierarchical differences between line managers and their supporting HR professional in order to achieve short communications lines. For organizations with multiple divisions, this can imply that HR professionals are located decentralized in the organization.

I would also suggest for organizations to examine what kind of support line managers need from HR professionals to anticipate on this with advice and consultation from HR professionals. The kind of support line managers need depends on the organization and on the individual needs of the line manager. Some line managers might need more support on regulation and legal aspects of HRM, while other line managers might need support in developing their own HR competences, or advice on how to apply and implement HRM practices (Nehles & Boon, 2006). Below I will provide some practical suggestions on how HR can facilitate the line:

- Informal meetings between a HR professional and line managers: organizations can schedule informal meetings between line managers and their HR professional in order to discuss line managers' concerns and questions. Line managers can ask the HR professional for specific HR expertise, but the line manager can also consult fellow line managers for advice. For some line managers it might be difficult to approach a HRM professional when they have a problem or question, but in this meeting line managers can discuss their problems in managing people openly with other line managers and a HR professional.
- Information meetings on regulation and legal aspects of HRM: Many line managers feel a need for HR support on legal aspects of HRM (Harris et al, 2002; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). Therefore, HR professionals could organize frequent information meetings in which they inform line managers in HR regulation. They can keep line managers up-to-date on changes and development of regulation. At the end of each meeting, HR professionals can provide line managers with a hand-out of what was discussed and line managers can consult this when they need to apply legal issues.
- HR consultation hours: Perhaps it might be somewhat distractive for HR professionals when line managers walk in and call for consultation any time they want. Therefore, HR professionals can schedule weekly consultation hours for line managers, for example four hours divided over two days. Or when necessary, one hour each day of the week. In this way

line managers know exactly when they can consult HR professionals. Furthermore, they have the guarantee that HR professionals are available for consultation and thus will provide them with an answer or advice.

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Appendix

Table 18: Correlation table with independent, dependent and control variables

	Means	Standard deviation	Capacity	Desire	Competences	Support	Policy & procedures	Company A	Company B	Age	Experience	Education	Span of control	HR Implementation Effectiveness
Capacity	3.08	1.01	1											
Desire	3.97	0.50	-0.09	1										
Competences	3.83	0.58	-0.02	0.48***	1									
Support	3.46	0.63	0.18	0.22	0.08	1								
Policy & procedures	3.56	0.50	0.31***	0.47***	0.39***	0.40***	1							
Company A	0.28	0.45	0.53***	-0.31***	-0.30***	0.43***	-0.06	1						
Company B	0.72	0.45	-0.53***	0.31***	0.30***	-0.43***	0.06	-1.00	1					
Age	44.94	7.51	-0.17	-0.08	0.21	-0.33***	-0.06	-0.27**	0.27**	1				
Experience	3.99	1.07	0.04	-0.10	0.16	-0.11	0.10	0.13	-0.13	0.50***	1			
Education	3.88	1.22	-0.20*	0.20	0.27**	-0.31***	0.07	-0.59***	0.59***	0.28**	-0.10	1		
Span of control	4.27	1.56	-0.08	-0.01	0.04	-0.07	-0.18	-0.04	0.04	-0.15	0.13	-0.13	1	
HR Implementation Effectiveness	3.54	0.45	0.27**	-0.23	0.05	0.28**	0.10	0.44***	-0.44***	-0.03	0.19	-0.17	-0.13	1