

Explaining Effective HRM Implementation: A Middle Versus First-Line Management Perspective

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Abstract

In this article, we explore one of the key underlying mechanisms that mediates the human resource management (HRM)–performance link, namely, the (effective) HRM implementation by line managers. In particular, the purpose of our study is to compare middle and first-line managers' experiences of their human resource (HR) role and the factors explaining effective HRM implementation at each managerial level. By employing survey data of two Belgian federal government organizations, we examine the effect of a number of organizational, individual and interpersonal factors on the effectiveness of line managers in HRM implementation. Results indicate that both middle and first-line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness is related to organizational support, autonomous motivation, and coworker support. For the group of first-line managers, specifically, age and local office position are important in the execution of their HR tasks. For the group of middle managers, however, personnel red tape, length of service, and supervisory experience contribute to their HRM implementation effectiveness. As a result, an organization's HR department can create the internal organizational conditions necessary to facilitate successful HRM implementation by the line. At the same time, it is worth adapting the approach according to the different managerial levels.

Keywords

line management, HRM implementation effectiveness, middle managers, first-line managers, HR devolution, strategic HRM

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Introduction

In the field of strategic human resource management (HRM), several theoretical perspectives and models have been proposed in trying to understand the relation between HRM and performance. One of those perspectives in the literature has pointed toward the critical role of line managers mediating the HRM–performance relationship (e.g., Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, & Gatenby, 2013; Harney & Jordan, 2008; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Specifically, Wright and Nishii's (2013) process model of strategic HRM has drawn attention to the distinction between intended HRM (policies developed by decision makers), actual HRM (implemented human resource [HR] practices), and perceived HRM (employee perceptions of HR practices). The overall idea is that line managers are in charge of actually implementing the intended HR practices in order that they influence the attitudes and behaviors of employees, which in turn results in individual and organizational performance outcomes (Wright & Nishii, 2013). In other words, through performing their HR role, line managers are crucial in translating the HR policy to the workplace. All in all, this highlights the importance of line managers' HRM implementation in explaining the overall HRM–performance link.

Despite increased (research) attention for line managers' role in HRM, the effectiveness of HRM implementation by line managers still remains to be seen (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Where the earlier studies mainly focused on delineating line management's role in HRM implementation (e.g., Hall & Torrington, 1998; McGovern, Hope-Hailey, & Stiles, 1997), some of the more recent work looks at the effectiveness of this implementation and factors explaining successful HRM implementation by the line (e.g., Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, & Looise, 2013; Gilbert, 2012). From these studies, it appears that a simple, seamless transfer of HR responsibilities from HR to the line is difficult to achieve. For that reason, several authors emphasize the need for more research on HRM implementation effectiveness (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). We, therefore, study the conditions under which HRM implementation by line managers is likely to be effective, focusing on the impact of various organizational, individual and interpersonal factors.

In addition, we find that existing research on the HR role of line managers mainly focuses on first-line management (e.g., Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003; Lowe, 1992), and only in some occasions middle management (e.g., Currie & Procter, 2001). However, all line managers (first-line, middle, and to some extent also top managers) have a certain amount of HRM responsibilities (Hall & Torrington, 1998; Stanton, Young, Bartram, & Leggat, 2010), although distinctions can likely be made dependent on different considerations at different levels of management (Currie & Procter, 2001). Although current research largely ignores the existence of (possible distinctions between) these managerial levels, the topic has sparked our interest. With this article, we, therefore, contribute to the literature by focusing on the comparison between middle and first-line managers' experiences of their HR role and which factors explain effective HRM implementation at each managerial level.

By employing survey data of two Belgian federal government organizations, we examine the effect of a number of organizational, individual, and interpersonal factors

on the perceived effectiveness of line managers in HRM implementation. More specifically, we compare the different effects of these factors across both middle and first-line managers. This allows us to answer our main research questions:

Research Question 1: Which organizational, individual, and interpersonal factors affect middle and first-line line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness?

Research Question 2: How does the influence of these factors on HRM implementation effectiveness differ across middle and first-line management?

Explaining Effective HRM Implementation

The implementation of HRM is regarded as an important factor in unraveling the HRM–performance link. As such, the effective implementation of HRM may eventually lead to an increase in both individual and organizational performance (Wright & Nishii, 2013). The reference to HRM implementation was primarily adopted from Wright and Nishii's (2013) distinction between intended, actual, and perceived HRM (cf. *supra*). The authors describe HRM implementation (actual HRM) as the application and translation of the HR policy and practices designed or intended by the decision makers (intended HRM) in the workplace with the ultimate goal to elicit the desired employee reactions and behaviors. This is where line managers are assigned a major responsibility, holding a vital position between the HR decision makers and the employees (Harris, Doughty, & Kirk, 2002). It is now widely acknowledged, both in academia and among practitioners, that line managers have a key and increasing role to play in the implementation of HRM, a trend that is also referred to as "HR devolution." Hence, line management's involvement in HRM may positively affect employee commitment and overall organizational performance (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). Many researchers believe though that line managers have failed in their HR role (McGovern et al., 1997), indicating that the mere involvement of line managers in HRM does not necessarily mean that policies are implemented effectively and consistently. Even well-designed HR practices may become ineffective if they are not properly implemented (Khilji & Wang, 2006). Despite the large body of literature on line management's role in executing HR tasks, however, only little attention has been paid to (the factors explaining or constraining) the effectiveness of implementation.

Given the importance of effective HRM implementation, several factors constraining line managers' execution of HR tasks are identified in the (devolution) literature. This is where the theory on role dynamics by Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964; also adapted by Gilbert, 2012) provides an interesting framework. Their model distinguishes between three sets of factors that may influence an individual's role behavior (i.e., HR role performed by line managers): organizational, individual, and interpersonal factors. As such, it states that a person's role behavior is determined by the broader organizational conditions surrounding and defining that person's role. Furthermore, it says that a person's predispositions (individual factors) will act as conditioning variables in relation to that person's role behavior. Finally, they account for

the patterns of interaction between a person and his or her role senders and how these relationships may affect that person's role behavior (Kahn et al., 1964).

Organizational Factors. First, several organizational factors, describing the interface between individual employees (i.e., line managers) and their organization (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980), may affect the effectiveness of line management's HRM implementation. We included two organizational factors in our empirical analysis: organizational support and (personnel) red tape.

Organizational Support. According to organizational support theory, an employee's behavior is contingent on the organizational context. Also, the organizational context is an important factor in stimulating employees (or line managers) to get involved in the implementation of contemporary management practices, such as HRM (Shadur, Kienzle, & Rodwell, 1999). A key concept in this area of research is that of perceived organizational support (POS), which refers to employees' "beliefs concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986, p. 504). Based on the reciprocity in the social exchange relationship, greater POS is assumed to increase an employee's affective commitment to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and to be positively related to different desirable individual and organizational outcomes, including performance and job satisfaction (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008; Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999). As such, support for the employee from the organization is considered a strong predictor of employee behavior (Shore & Wayne, 1993, in Shadur et al., 1999). Although an organization may support its employees in a number of areas, this study focuses specifically on organizational support for line management's HRM responsibilities. In this context, organizational support generally signals the importance and commitment that is attached to line managers' execution of HR tasks by the organization (McGovern et al., 1997; Watson, Maxwell, & Farquharson, 2007). As a result, line managers experiencing a supportive organization are more likely to reciprocate by demonstrating favorable attitudes and behaviors, that is, performing their HR role effectively.

(Personnel) Red Tape. Line managers in government organizations are in particular subjected to administrative constraints, including red tape, which may hinder their performance. Often regarded as an effect of bureaucracy, red tape has become an important variable in public administration research (Bozeman, 1993; Feeney & Rainey, 2010). An often adopted definition of red tape refers to "rules, regulations, and procedures that remain in force and entail a compliance burden for the organization but have no efficacy for the rules' functional object" (Bozeman, 1993, p. 283). In practice, it may imply excessive paperwork, inefficiency, unjustifiable delays, unnecessary rules, a high degree of formalization, and, as a result, leads to frustration (Bozeman, 1993). In the context of HRM, Rainey, Pandey, and Bozeman (1995) find that rules and laws concerning public personnel administration are the main sources of red tape.

Therefore, personnel red tape is generally considered as a distinct concept (e.g., Rainey et al., 1995). Although not limited to the public sector, empirical research has shown that (personnel) red tape is more prevalent in public organizations than in private sector organizations (e.g., J. N. Baldwin, 1990; DeHart-Davis & Pandey, 2005). Despite efforts to neutralize burdensome rules and procedures in public organizations (cf. government reform under the umbrella of New Public Management), public managers, compared with private and nonprofit managers, still perceive significantly higher levels of red tape and less flexible personnel rules and regulations (Brewer & Walker, 2013; Feeney & Rainey, 2010; Rainey et al., 1995). Not surprisingly, researchers find that employees experiencing red tape may become dissatisfied, demotivated, and unproductive (J. N. Baldwin, 1990; DeHart-Davis & Pandey, 2005). As such, line managers' perceptions of (personnel) red tape are believed to decline their motivation and diminish their flexibility and autonomy in performing their tasks (J. N. Baldwin, 1990). For example, line managers may experience difficulties in recruiting, motivating, and retaining employees due to legislative and procedural limitations (e.g., lack of control over rewards; McConville, 2006). As a result, formal rules and regulations may sharply constrain line managers in performing their HR role, which will in turn affect their HRM implementation effectiveness.

Hypotheses – organizational factors:

Organizational support is expected to be positively related to line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness.

(Personnel) red tape is expected to be negatively related to line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness.

Individual Factors. A second category of explanatory factors is based on the idea that an individual's reactions and behavior in a role can be determined by a number of personal characteristics of the individual himself or herself (Kahn et al., 1964), that is, the line manager in this case. Individual factors included in our study are the line manager's HR-related competency, capacity, willingness, and autonomous motivation.

HR-Related Competency. A successful HRM implementation requires the necessary HR-related competencies (Bos-Nehles, 2010). Generally, line managers should have insight in their organization's HR policy and (how to implement) the HR practices as they are intended. In addition, several supporting skills can be identified, such as managing change, motivating, communicating, interpersonal skills, team building skills, and involving employees (McGovern et al., 1997; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). All too often, line managers lack the expertise necessary to tackle increasingly complex HR issues. For example, Maxwell and Watson (2006) found that line management's HR competency was assessed to be inadequate by both HR professionals and line managers themselves. Also, for many (new) line managers, HR issues were never before appraised or recognized as part of their job (Napier & Peterson, 1984). Line managers who are feeling unskilled may try to avoid their HR role due to their discomfort with it (de Jong, Leenders, & Thijssen, 1999). Another issue here relates

to the fact that line managers are often promoted because they are the best in their profession rather than because of their having good people skills (Hutchinson & Wood, 1995). This is especially valid in the public sector, where the closed career system is still in place (Brewer, 2005). As a result, line managers may not feel equipped to handle their new HRM responsibilities (Hutchinson & Wood, 1995). Whittaker and Marchington (2003), therefore, emphasize that more attention should be paid to how line managers are “recruited, inducted, appraised and rewarded, and trained up in the HR aspects of their jobs” (p. 259). Investing in the appropriate training in people management can provide a solution to line managers feeling incompetent and also make line managers feel more confident in carrying out HR tasks (Bach, 2001; Harris et al., 2002). Also, possessing HR competencies helps line managers in coping with uncertainty regarding their HR role (e.g., role ambiguity; Gilbert, 2012). All too often, however, formal HR training tailored to an audience of line managers is limited (Harris et al., 2002; Hope-Hailey, Farndale, & Truss, 2005). Generally, we hypothesize that a lack of HR-related competencies will have a negative effect on a line managers’ overall HRM implementation effectiveness.

Motivation. The (successful) enactment of HR practices by line managers will also depend on the extent to which line managers feel adequately interested and motivated. Line managers should be willing to take on their HR tasks (Bos-Nehles, 2010). Often, however, line managers do not recognize the value of adopting HR practices (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998) or they are reluctant to accept their “new” HRM responsibilities (McGovern et al., 1997). In addition, and as stated above, line managers’ priorities often lie in meeting operational goals, while paying little attention to people management activities (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). Overall, effective HRM cannot be delivered by line managers who do not take their HR role seriously or who do not reflect a belief in HRM (Watson et al., 2007; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). Line managers’ motivation can generally be graded from controlled to autonomous on what is called the “self-determination¹ continuum” (cf. self-determination theory; Deci & Ryan, 2004). Controlled motivation originates from external sources (extrinsic), where people engage in an activity to obtain a reward or avoid a negative sanction. In this case, the individual experiences an obligation to behave in a specific way. The motivation would disappear if the sanction/reward is removed because the motivation is not at all internalized (Coursey & Vandenabeele, 2012; Guay, Vallerand, & Blanchard, 2000). This controlled type of motivation has been negatively related to organizational outcomes and personal well-being (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2004). Also, other research has already pointed out that rewards, such as performance-related pay, consistently fail to deliver in the public sector, possibly because of its incompatibility with public institutional rules or other powerful motivations including people pursuing public service (J. L. Perry, Engbers, & Jun, 2009). Autonomous motivation, however, stems from the person itself (intrinsic) and states that people engage in an activity because they find it inherently enjoyable and satisfying (Coursey & Vandenabeele, 2012; Guay et al., 2000). This type of motivation is found to positively affect organizational and personal outcomes (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2004). Looking into line managers’ HRM

responsibilities, Harris et al. (2002) found, for example, that line managers are more reluctant to get involved in HRM when those tasks are pushed onto them (controlled motivation). A study by Watson et al. (2007), however, found that line managers felt a strong personal responsibility for their employees and HR, indicating a sense of ownership of their HR role (autonomous motivation). Altogether, we would expect line managers who are autonomously motivated to be more effective in implementing their HRM responsibilities.

Capacity. Notable among the drawbacks of HR devolution is that line managers often experience a lack of time to perform HR tasks and an increase in their workload (Bach, 2001). This is because additional HRM responsibilities are not always accompanied by a reduction in other daily duties, thereby increasing an often already full workload. Also, in dealing with competing demands, long-term goals often suffer under pressure from short-term, operational targets. As a result, line managers' short-term, operational tasks are frequently given priority over HR tasks (Napier & Peterson, 1984; Watson et al., 2007; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). These different demands are also present in the broader leadership literature, which distinguishes between multiple leadership roles for (public sector) managers. As such, line managers are expected to be a steward, bureaucrat, manager, entrepreneur, professional, and should, at the same time, take up a role as coach or leader (including HR aspects; Van Wart, Hondeghem, Bouckaert, & Ruebens, 2012). Altogether, line managers may easily become "overloaded" by their HR role, which may lead them to be less successful in performing that role (Bos-Nehles, 2010; Hope-Hailey et al., 2005; McConville, 2006; Renwick, 2000). Therefore, having the capacity to spend sufficient time on HR tasks will help line managers to effectively implement their HRM responsibilities.

Hypotheses – individual factors:

HR-related competency and capacity are expected to be positively related to line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness.

Line managers are hypothesized to achieve higher HRM implementation effectiveness if they are more autonomously motivated.

Interpersonal Factors. Third and finally, the interpersonal factors, suggested by Kahn et al. (1964), refer to the appreciation of interactions between the role receiver (i.e., line manager) and his or her role senders (i.e., HR professionals, supervisor, colleagues). Despite formal organizational structures and highlighting the importance of organizational relationships, Krackhardt and Hanson (1993, p. 104) state rightfully that much of the work in organizations is facilitated by the "networks of relationships that employees form across functions and divisions to accomplish tasks" (in Power, Milner, & Garavan, 2008). As such, line managers who are able to share their experiences and frustrations with others may feel encouraged and supported in their HR role (McConville, 2006). In this article, we examined the influence of line managers' appreciation of support from HR professionals, their supervisor, and coworkers.

Support theory and the “norm of reciprocity” (cf. organizational support) are the main theoretical underpinnings regarding the effect of these different sources of support on line managers’ HRM implementation effectiveness. Simply put, support entails some kind of exchange with the expectancy of reciprocity, that is, people usually return the favors they receive from others (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). As such, providing support will likely result in favorable attitudes and behaviors at the receiver’s end, that is, line managers performing their HR tasks effectively. Support is said to function as a coping mechanism, helping line managers to deal with the difficulties associated with their HR role (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Shumaker & Brownell, 1984; Vigoda-Gadot & Talmud, 2010). Although prior research on the relationship between support and different (performance) outcomes have not been consistent (Luthans et al., 2008), several studies do find evidence of a direct relationship between support and outcomes such as commitment, turnover intention, and job performance (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Randall et al., 1999; Rogg, Schmidt, Shull, & Schmitt, 2001; Vigoda-Gadot & Talmud, 2010). Below, we briefly elaborate on the impact of HR, supervisor, and coworker support on line managers’ effective HRM implementation.

HR Support. As line managers are not HR specialists, they will rely on support, encouragement, and advice from HR professionals to effectively implement their HRM responsibilities (E. L. Perry & Kulik, 2008). Recent studies confirm this assumption, and find that HR support is positively related to effective HRM implementation (Bos-Nehles, 2010) and negatively related to HR role stressors (Gilbert, De Winne, & Sels, 2011). In general, line managers expect HR “to provide the right people, at the right time, with the right skills; to advise on problem cases and difficult issues; and to encourage long-term staff development, nurturing skills within current roles and preparing workers for future advancement” (S. Baldwin, 2007, p. 8). Nevertheless, previous studies identified a lack of support or a sense of distance between line managers and HR (Bos-Nehles, van Riemsdijk & Looise, 2011; McGuire, McGuire, & Sanderson, 2011), showing that successful HR support also requires willingness of HR to help line managers and provide accurate information (Hutchinson & Wood, 1995). Altogether, line managers rely on HR support to effectively carry out their HRM responsibilities (E. L. Perry & Kulik, 2008; Renwick, 2003).

Supervisor Support. Line managers’ own supervisors are considered as another source of support. In line with the definition of organizational support, Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, and Rhoades (2002) define perceived supervisor support as the degree to which employees form impressions that their superiors care about their well-being, value their contributions, and are generally supportive. Also leader–member exchange theory suggests that an interpersonal relationship evolves between employees and their supervisors (Wayne et al., 1997). A supportive supervisor may motivate line managers and, hence, increase their work performance. More specifically, their own supervisor may not only motivate line managers but also control and manage the immediate resources available to line managers (Bhanthumnavin,

2003). Furthermore, line managers' own supervisor can provide information on the expectations regarding their (HR) role (Lankau, Carlson, & Nielson, 2006), which may in turn result in positive outcomes. For example, Wayne et al. (1997) concluded that supportive treatment by supervisors was in earlier research found to be positively related to subordinates' affective commitment, job attitudes, and performance.

Coworker Support. Finally, the literature suggests that coworkers can be an important source of support. Zhou and George (2001) define coworker support as "coworkers assisting an employee with his/her tasks when needed by sharing knowledge and expertise or providing encouragement and support" (p. 685). Social comparison theory, for example, teaches us that interaction with coworkers may be helpful to an individual's work as they are exposed to the same work environment and often execute similar tasks (Cohen & McKay, 1984; Joiner, 2007; Zhou & George, 2001). As such, coworkers at the same hierarchical level may motivate line managers through sharing their personal experiences and providing overall support. Consequently, being able to rely on a supportive relationship with coworkers is generally believed to contribute to an individual's job performance (Paarlberg, Perry, & Hondeghem, 2008; J. L. Perry & Porter, 1982). In other words, line managers who perceive their coworkers to be supportive may perform better in executing their HRM responsibilities.

Hypothesis – interpersonal factors:

HR, supervisor, and coworker support are expected to be positively related to line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness.

Middle Versus First-Line Management

Several levels of line management typically exist within an organization. Generally, three managerial levels can be distinguished: top, middle, and first-line management. Each of these is considered to have an HR role (Hall & Torrington, 1998). With a few exceptions (e.g., Currie & Procter, 2001; McConville, 2006), however, research on HR devolution has mainly been focused on first-line management (e.g., Lowe, 1992; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). We believe, though, that distinctions are likely to exist dependent on different considerations at different levels of management (Currie & Procter, 2001). As such, each managerial level will also have its own peculiarities regarding the HRM implementation issue. The line managers we want to concentrate on in this article are middle and first-line managers.

First-line managers (or front-line managers, or supervisors) are at the lowest level in the organization's management team and are mostly involved in operational tasks, controlling the daily work practices on the shop floor. They supervise the work of operating employees and report to middle management (Bos-Nehles, 2010; McConville, 2006). Hales (2006) defines a first-line manager as a manager "to whom non-managerial employees report" (p. 473). The group of middle managers is considered more difficult to distinguish, as the boundaries between levels of hierarchy are often blurred. Simply put, middle managers are often considered "the piggy's in the

middle” positioned below top management and responsible for supervising other managers (McConville, 2006). According to Floyd and Woolridge (1997, p. 466), they “mediate, negotiate and interpret connections between the organisation’s institutional (strategic) and technical (operational) levels” (in Currie & Procter, 2001). They are also responsible for finding the best way to organize human and other resources to achieve the objectives of their particular department or unit (Bos-Nehles, 2010). Finally, “middle managers are removed from the work floor and are accountable for a range of outcomes beyond detailed work elements” (McConville, 2006, p. 639). Given the difference in their position, the HR role of middle and first-line managers is also expected to take different forms (Bos-Nehles, 2010).

After stating our interest in both middle and first-line managers and delineating each group, we now look for possible differences between both managerial groups and in how they may experience their HRM responsibilities. Compared with middle managers, for example, first-line managers feel more constrained overall (Brewer & Walker, 2013). While mediating between higher level managers and front-line employees, first-line managers are considered the most important leadership asset due to sheer numbers and direct impact. In this sense, the importance of the group of first-line managers lies in their direct influence on employees’ attitudes and motivations toward their work (Brewer, 2005; McConville, 2006). Middle managers, however, have their own peculiarities. They are closer to the top, and hence, closer to individual HR professionals/managers. Middle managers are also involved in the development as well as the implementation of HRM (Currie & Procter, 2001). As a result, middle managers may have more insight into the rationale behind and the intent of the HR practices they are implementing. In addition, middle managers’ “middleness” creates conflicts in objectives as middle managers are caught between the directives from their seniors and the demands and problems from their subordinates (line managers) below (Hallier & James, 1997; McConville, 2006). Furthermore, middle managers are expected to be a role model for first-line managers, demonstrating their commitment to HRM (Jackson & Humble, 1994; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Besides the regular conflicts inherent to a managerial position (cf. *supra*: multiple leadership roles), middle managers may, therefore, face additional stress being pulled into different directions. At the same time, middle managers are expected to control, coordinate, and balance the various tensions and demands (McConville, 2006).

In relation to our topic of HR devolution, some researchers have studied the reactions of various managerial levels to their HRM responsibilities. For example, Watson et al. (2007) found that strategic managers are more involved in HRM than first-line managers. Also Bos-Nehles (2010) says that higher level managers are probably in a better position to recognize and execute their HRM responsibilities, whereas lower level managers still need to explore (the boundaries of) their HR role. The author also finds that higher level managers have more desire (or willingness) and greater capacity to perform their HRM responsibilities (Bos-Nehles, 2010).

From the previous paragraphs, it seems meaningful to distinguish between middle and first-line managers. The differences inherent to their respective position will likely manifest themselves in different approaches toward their HRM responsibilities.

Hence, we may also expect differences in the way both groups perform their HR role (effectiveness of HRM implementation) and the contextual factors that may influence their HR role (e.g., motivation, capacity).

Altogether, we formulated three main hypotheses based on which data analyses and results are structured.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Both middle and first-line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness is significantly related to several organizational, individual, and interpersonal factors (more detailed hypotheses are presented in the section above).

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Middle and first-line managers are expected to have different perceptions of (some of) the explanatory factors.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The relationship between the explanatory factors and line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness is affected by the middle versus first-line manager position.

Research Design

Data

Our analyses are based on data gathered in June 2013 through an online survey in two organizations within the Belgian federal government. These purposely selected organizations differ on some key elements to this topic, including the degree of HR devolution as well as their maturity regarding leadership development. Both are, however, large organizations (>1,000 employees) with a geographically decentralized structure and mostly subjected to the same legislative framework regarding personnel issues, which increases their comparability (most similar, comparable case study design with variation on key elements). Our population is made up of middle managers (MM) and first-line managers (FLM) in both organizations. After data cleaning, our data set contained 1,222 observations in total, of which 372 are middle managers and 850 are first-line managers (response rate = 34%; sample representative for the examined organizations). We distinguished between middle and first-line managers based on the question whether a manager leads a group of managerial employees (supervisors). A positive response to this question implies a middle manager position, whereas a negative answer implies a first-line manager position.

Measures

The variables included in our analyses were mainly based on existing measurement instruments as well as adapted operationalizations. Below, we describe the measures for the dependent, independent, and control variables. A detailed overview table with the concepts, operationalizations, and survey questions/items used to measure the variables can be found in the appendix.

Dependent variable. For the dependent variable, that is, line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness, we rely on a self-reported (HR role) performance measure. More specifically, we used a four-item scale that was previously used by Vandenaabeele (2009) and attuned it to the context of our research. A sample item is, "I think I am performing well in executing my HRM responsibilities." Such self-rated measures are regularly used within public administration (e.g., Bright, 2007) and HRM research (e.g., Rodwell, Kienzle, & Shadur, 1998). Nevertheless, we acknowledge that confirmation by more formal, independent, and "objective" ratings of performance might have been preferable, but these were unfortunately not available. Given the self-reported performance measure, we will refer to "line managers' perceived effectiveness of HRM implementation" in the remainder of this article. The "HRM responsibilities" or "HR tasks" referred to in the survey items relate to a list of 26 HR tasks (originally constructed by Gilbert, 2012) that was part of another question in the survey. The list includes tasks such as determining future personnel needs, providing feedback on the work and performance to employees, and monitoring and redirecting the career of employees. In other words, we asked line managers to assess their own performance of effectiveness in implementing HRM for their team, keeping that list of HR tasks in mind.

Independent variables. Note that self-reported, perceptual measures were also used for all independent variables. All organizational, individual, and interpersonal variables are based on middle and first-line managers' perceptions and experiences.

To measure organizational support, we used a four-item scale developed by Zhou and George (2001) and adjusted it to our research topic. A sample item is, "The execution of HR tasks by line managers is encouraged in my organisation."

The measures for both red tape and personnel red tape were based on Rainey et al. (1995). The general scale of red tape was measured using the following question: "If red tape is defined as 'burdensome administrative rules and procedures that have negative effects on the organisation's effectiveness,' how would you assess the level of red tape in your organisation?" Respondents were asked to indicate the appropriate response between 0 and 10, with 0 indicating *almost no red tape* and 10 indicating *great deal of red tape*. Personnel red tape was measured by means of a five-item scale indicating the effect of formal personnel rules on people management practices. An example item is, "Even if an employee is a poor performer, formal rules make it hard to remove him or her from the organisation."

Line management's HR-related competency was initially measured using a six-item scale, based on the Occupational Self-Efficacy Scale of Schyns and von Collani (2002). A sample item is, "I am sufficiently trained to execute my HR tasks."

To measure line management's capacity, we used four items that were adapted from the Role Overload Scale of Reilly (1982). Capacity problems often manifest themselves in a role overload, where line managers lack sufficient time to execute their HR tasks. A sample item is, "I feel I have to perform HR tasks hastily and maybe less carefully in order to get everything done" (reversed scoring).

Autonomous motivation was measured using eight items representing the controlled–autonomous motivation continuum. Although adapted to our research context, this scale is originally based on the Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; previously used by Coursey & Vandenabeele, 2012, and Vandenabeele, 2008). The relative autonomy index is further calculated as an additive weighted score based on the eight items, in which external, introjected, identified, and intrinsic regulation (cf. continuum controlled–autonomous motivation) are each measured by two items. In calculating the index, external regulation was weighted -2 , introjection -1 , identification 1 , and intrinsic motivation 2 . Therefore, the additive scale presenting the relative autonomy index (or the extent of autonomous motivation) ranges in this case from -12 to 12 . A sample item, representing identification, is, “I try to do my best in executing my HR tasks, because I consider it my duty.”

HR support, supervisor support, and coworker support were all measured using the same five-item scale, adjusted to the support provider in question. This measure was developed by Gilbert et al. (2011) based on support scales by E. L. Perry and Kulik (2008) and House (1981). A sample item is, “If necessary, I can count on the expertise of the HR department/my supervisor/my co-workers to execute my HR tasks.”

Control variables. To control for individual differences, the line managers’ gender, age (and age squared), length of service in the organization, supervisory experience, span of control, central versus local office position, and organization were taken into account.

All items on our dependent and independent variables (except for red tape, cf. supra) were formulated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from one (*entirely disagree*) to five (*entirely agree*). As our key variables were measured using a multiple-item scale, an index was calculated averaging the relevant items (with the exception of “autonomous motivation,” cf. supra) based on exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using a polychoric correlation matrix.² Based on the EFA analysis, a number of changes were made. The most noticeable result is that items from our performance (perceived implementation effectiveness) and competency measures are being combined in a single factor. This may be explained by the fact that we make use of a self-rated performance measure, where we ask line managers how they are doing in performing their HRM responsibilities. At the same time, we ask them whether they find themselves suitable, skilled, and competent to execute their HR tasks. Instinctively, these issues are closely related, as is, thus, also apparent from the EFA results. To resolve this problem, we have chosen to remove HR-related competency as an independent variable and also drop the competency-related items from the measure for perceived HRM implementation effectiveness. Consequently, the measure for line managers’ perceived HRM implementation effectiveness only includes the performance items. In addition, one of the performance items and one of the capacity items were dropped after factor analysis (factor loadings below $.5$). The final measure for line managers’ perceived HRM implementation effectiveness is made up of three items (cf. Table A1 in the appendix). The reliability of the final scales is demonstrated by Cronbach’s alphas all ranging between $.73$ and $.94$. Finally, the correlation analysis among our variables showed nothing out of the ordinary. Not surprisingly, the highest correlation

is found between age, age squared, length of service, and years of supervisory experience (cf. correlation matrix in Table A2 in the appendix). Leaving out “age squared,” the test for multicollinearity, using the variance inflation factor (VIF), however, showed a mean VIF equaling 1.42, whereby, as expected, the highest VIFs exists for age (2.32), length of service (1.87), and supervisory experience (1.87). These values indicate that no collinearity exists between the variables.

Analyses and Results

In general, the results (partly) confirm our three main hypotheses. First, we find significant differences between middle and first-line managers in how they perceive several variables included in our analyses (H2). From Table 1, presenting the descriptive statistics, we can derive that a significant perceptual difference is found between middle and first-line managers on the dependent variable, two of the independent variables, and almost all control variables. Middle managers’ perceived HRM implementation effectiveness is significantly higher than that of first-line managers. Furthermore, middle managers are more autonomously motivated and rate HR support higher than their first-line colleagues. Regarding the control variables, middle managers are on average older than first-line managers, they have a longer length of service and a greater supervisory experience. Also, the span of control is larger among middle managers. Finally, we can see that there are fewer women in the group of middle managers (26%), compared with the first-line managers (40%). Although this may be an indication of women experiencing difficulties to entering the higher ranks of the organization, a phenomenon labeled as the “glass ceiling” (Powell & Butterfield, 1994), these figures are not that bad. For example, the overall figure of 36% is in line with the target of 33% women in management positions set in the federal government (Bossens, Cautaert, Demuzere, & Op de Beeck, 2013). Although there is still work to be done in the higher echelons of management, women do appear to occupy an increasing percentage of management positions (Wynen, Op de Beeck, & Ruebens, 2015).

We employed a linear regression model (ordinary least squares [OLS]) with robust standard errors to analyze both middle and first-line managers’ perceived HRM implementation effectiveness and how it can be explained by several organizational, individual, and interpersonal factors.³ Given our interest in the middle versus first-line difference and the fact that both groups differ significantly on the dependent variable, we completed the remainder of our analyses for each group separately. From these analyses, we found evidence for perceived HRM implementation effectiveness to be significantly related to factors at organizational, individual, and interpersonal level (H1). However, not all expected effects were confirmed. In addition, different explanatory effects are found for middle versus first-line managers (H3). The full results are presented in Table 2 and discussed further below.

First-line managers’ (hereafter FLM) perceived HRM implementation effectiveness (Column A in Table 2) is positively related to organizational support, autonomous motivation, coworker support, age, and local office position. A negative relationship exists between FLMs’ perceived HRM implementation effectiveness and age squared.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	Total sample (N = 1,222)		FLM sample (N = 850)		MM sample (N = 372)		Significant difference
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
HRM implementation effectiveness	3.517185	0.6577518	3.476863	0.6789605	3.609319	0.5972356	***
Organizational variables							
Organizational support	2.415712	0.7686759	2.4	0.7681836	2.451613	0.7696291	—
Red tape	6.762684	2.059154	6.783529	2.072357	6.715054	2.030625	—
Personnel red tape	4.401309	0.5789637	4.400706	0.5878627	4.402688	0.5588719	—
Individual variables							
Autonomous motivation	4.361702	6.547385	4.097647	6.643443	4.965054	6.289628	**
Capacity	3.149209	0.9702157	3.174902	0.9764925	3.090502	0.9544238	—
Interpersonal variables							
HR support	3.005237	0.8589494	2.968941	0.8551514	3.088172	0.8629979	**
Supervisor support	3.151277	1.001707	3.154353	1.001288	3.144086	1.003977	—
Coworker support	3.127332	0.8502362	3.140706	0.8515015	3.096774	0.8476957	—
Control variables							
Gender	0.3559738	0.4790034	0.3976471	0.4896999	0.2607527	0.4396365	***
Age	50.69149	8.378275	49.36941	8.340233	53.71237	7.660629	***
Age squared	2,639.765	808.4775	2,506.816	793.5544	2,943.546	759.6578	***
Length of service	21.89607	11.10628	20.29647	10.70095	25.55108	11.16478	***
Years of supervisory experience	14.31424	9.240855	12.14	8.442722	19.28226	9.074321	***
Span of control	11.75777	8.532076	9.195294	6.03031	17.6129	10.34138	***
Local office	1.843699	0.3632893	1.845882	0.3612741	1.83871	0.3682939	—
Organization	2.211129	0.408277	2.194118	0.3957528	2.25	0.4335959	**
Middle manager position	0.304419	0.4603493	—	—	—	—	—

Note. Depending on the data, specific statistical tests (t test, ANOVA) have been applied to test the significance between the two groups. FLM = first-line managers; MM = middle managers; HRM = human resource management; HR = human resource.
Significance levels: * $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

Table 2. OLS Regression Results.

	(A)	(B)	Significant difference
Variables	FLM	MM	
Organizational variables			
Organizational support	0.0858** (0.0351)	0.131*** (0.0457)	—
Red tape	−0.0186 (0.0120)	−0.00946 (0.0154)	—
Personnel red tape	0.0547 (0.0384)	−0.103** (0.0520)	**
Individual variables			
Autonomous motivation	0.0280*** (0.00345)	0.0385*** (0.00457)	*
Capacity (−)	−0.0309 (0.0250)	0.00983 (0.0325)	—
Interpersonal variables			
HR support	−0.000845 (0.0322)	0.0102 (0.0387)	—
Supervisor support	0.0337 (0.0250)	−0.0417 (0.0318)	*
Coworker support	0.0915*** (0.0281)	0.151*** (0.0376)	—
Control variables			
Gender	−0.0189 (0.0473)	0.0535 (0.0667)	—
Age	0.0663** (0.0271)	−0.0432 (0.0376)	**
Age squared	−0.000728** (0.000285)	0.000305 (0.000378)	**
Length of service	0.00103 (0.00272)	0.00867*** (0.00316)	**
Years of supervisory experience	0.00113 (0.00336)	0.00899** (0.00399)	—
Span of control	0.00238 (0.00378)	0.00236 (0.00289)	—
Local office	0.105* (0.0625)	−0.0839 (0.0778)	**
Organization	0.0760 (0.0621)	−0.0365 (0.0757)	—
Constant	0.889 (0.699)	4.421*** (1.019)	
Observations	850	372	
Adjusted R ²	.163	.280	

Note. Robust standard errors in parentheses. OLS = ordinary least squares; FLM = first-line managers; MM = middle managers; HR = human resource.

* $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

In other words, the higher a first-line manager's perception of organizational or coworker support, the higher is his or her perceived HRM implementation effectiveness. Also, a first-line manager reports his or her HRM implementation to be more effective when he or she is more autonomously motivated. In addition, FLMs who are employed in a local office (geographically decentralized unit) perceive higher HRM implementation effectiveness. Regarding age, we observe two things: (a) FLMs perform better as they get older and (b) the square age term indicates a concave (inverted U-shaped) relationship. Although the perceived effectiveness of HRM implementation increases as FLMs get older, it starts to decrease from a certain point. As depicted in Figure 1, we see an increase in perceived HRM implementation effectiveness until the age of 45.5 years, after which it decreases.



Figure 1. Effect of age on line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness.
Note. HRM = human resource management.

Middle managers' (hereafter MM) perceived HRM implementation effectiveness (Column B in Table 2) is positively affected by organizational support, autonomous motivation, coworker support, and length of service. A negative effect is found for personnel red tape. Just like the FLMs, the MMs' perceived HRM implementation effectiveness is, thus, higher when they feel supported by the organization and their coworkers. Also, MMs who feel more autonomously motivated will perceive their HRM implementation to be more effective. Personnel red tape, however, is confirmed to have a damaging effect on MMs' reported HRM implementation effectiveness. Finally, MMs perceive themselves to be more effective in their HR role as they have more seniority (length of service) in their organization.

Based on the regression results, we already found different outcomes for the middle versus the first-line managers. In other words, the determinants of perceived HRM implementation effectiveness differ between the two groups. Both MMs' and FLMs' perceived HRM implementation effectiveness is related to organizational support, autonomous motivation, and coworker support. However, where age (and age squared) and local office position are important toward FLMs' perceived effective HRM implementation, they are not found significant to the group of MMs. However, personnel red tape and length of service are only important in relation to MMs' perceived HRM implementation effectiveness. In addition to these findings, we did further tests indicating any significant differences between MMs and FLMs in the effects of various independent variables on the dependent. As to be expected, we found significant differences between the two groups of managers regarding the effect of personnel red tape, age (and age squared), length of service, and local office position. These variables are the ones that are only significant for one of the two management groups. Interestingly though, we also found a significant difference between MMs and FLMs with regard to the effect of autonomous motivation on their perceived HRM implementation effectiveness. Although autonomous

motivation is significant for both management groups, the effect is significantly higher in case of MMs compared with FLMs.

Discussion and Conclusion

In recent years, the topic of effective HRM implementation by line managers has gained ground in strategic HRM literature (Chow, 2012; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Involving line managers in HRM is, however, not at all straightforward. Therefore, the purpose of this article was to examine the conditions under which HRM implementation by line managers is likely to be effective, focusing on the impact of various organizational, individual, and interpersonal factors. More specifically, we compare middle and first-line managers' experiences of their HR role and the factors related to perceived HRM implementation effectiveness at each managerial level.

Discussion

Overall, our results are in line with our expectations from the literature and show that middle and first-line managers have different experiences regarding their HR role and the conditions fostering their perceived HRM implementation effectiveness. In general, some key defining elements distinguishing middle from first-line managers were apparent from our results. For example, middle managers are on average older than first-line managers, they have a longer length of service, a greater supervisory experience, and a larger span of control. Moreover, our results contained evidence of the so-called "glass ceiling," as women were less represented in the group of middle managers compared with the group of first-line managers. Apart from these "basic" differences, we also established a difference in perceived HRM implementation effectiveness between middle and first-line managers. Middle managers report significantly higher effectiveness than first-line managers, possibly due to the former group having more experience in their HR role, and hence, more confidence in their performance. This outcome is also in line with the literature, which finds higher level managers to be more involved in HRM and better able to recognize and execute their HRM responsibilities (Bos-Nehles, 2010; Watson et al., 2007). Furthermore, middle managers perceive HR support to be higher than their first-line colleagues, possibly because middle managers are closer to the top, and hence, closer to HR professionals in the organization (Currie & Procter, 2001). Finally, middle managers are more autonomously motivated than first-line managers. Again, this may be linked to their enhanced HR role experience. Also, their proximity to HR professionals may imply that middle managers have more insight into the intended HR policy and the rationale behind their HR tasks, which may spike their interest in HRM.

The main part of our findings, however, relates to the conditions underlying effective HRM implementation. As such, we found significant effects for organizational support, autonomous motivation, and coworker support among both middle and first-line managers. One of the larger effect sizes is found for coworker support, a factor that, up until

now, has hardly been studied empirically in relation to HR devolution (except for example, in one of our previous papers, (Op de Beeck, Wynen & Hondeghem, 2017)). Line managers, both middle and first-line, are clearly finding support for their HR role through sharing expertise and experiences with their coworkers, as suggested by support theory (Joiner, 2007; Zhou & George, 2001). As a result, the encouragement of their peers contributes to their perceived HRM implementation effectiveness. Not only coworkers but also the organization in general may provide support through signaling the importance attached to line managers' execution of HR tasks. In line with the literature, line managers experiencing a supportive organization are more likely to perform their HR role effectively (McGovern et al., 1997; Shore & Wayne, 1993, in Shadur et al., 1999). Next, the perceived HRM implementation effectiveness also depends on the extent to which line managers are autonomously motivated in executing their HR tasks, confirming the results from previous studies (Bos-Nehles, 2010; Vallerand & Ratelle, 2004; Watson et al., 2007). In other words, line managers who show a genuine interest in and a sense of ownership of their HRM responsibilities are likely to find themselves to be more successful in HRM implementation. Forcing their HR role upon them by obligation, reward, or sanction (controlled motivation) will, therefore, fail to deliver.

For the group of first-line managers, specifically, age and local office position contribute significantly to the execution of their HR tasks. As such, the perceived HRM implementation effectiveness of first-line managers increases as they get older. From the age of 45.5 years, however, we see a decrease in their HR role performance. An explanation may lie in the fact that leadership development has only recently been introduced in the organizations studied here (e.g., one organization started in 2009, the other in 2011). More specifically, the "younger generation" of first-line managers has been confronted with this issue at the early stages of their supervisory career, whereas the "older" first-line managers have hardly ever been assessed on their people skills. One could maybe carefully mention the term "generation effect" here. Also, first-line managers who are employed in a local office (geographically decentralized unit) indicate higher HRM implementation effectiveness. Although this finding is instinctively contradictory, it may be explained by first-line managers possibly experiencing greater freedom in decision making when employed in a local office. Or, maybe the organization's strategy is to move the best first-line managers to the local offices.

For the group of middle managers, however, personnel red tape and length of service are of importance to their perceived HRM implementation effectiveness. In line with the literature (J. N. Baldwin, 1990; McConville, 2006), personnel red tape constrains middle managers in performing their HR role. The fact that this is only significant for middle managers may be explained by their overall "middleness," which makes them susceptible to rules and regulations both at strategic and operational level. Being accountable to both their seniors and their subordinates (first-line managers; Hallier & James, 1997; McConville, 2006), middle managers may feel, even more so than others in the organization, obliged to adhere to the many burdensome rules. Finally, middle managers' perceived HRM implementation effectiveness increases as they have more seniority (length of service) in their organization. Likely, middle

managers will have built up experience in people management and will have invested in their career the longer they are employed within the same organization (Moynihan & Landuyt, 2008), possibly resulting in them performing better in their HR role.

Generally, there is not one particular category of explanatory factors that stands out to be important in predicting line managers' perceived HRM implementation effectiveness. At the organizational level, organizational support plays an important part, and also personnel red tape is significant in case of the group of middle managers. At the individual level, line managers' autonomous motivation is related to their perceived HRM implementation effectiveness. At interpersonal level, the coworkers are key in providing support toward line managers' perceived HRM implementation effectiveness. In addition, we did not detect any differences between both organizations included in our study. Although both organizations are at different stages of maturity regarding HR devolution and leadership development, this did not show in the results. Probably, any organizational difference is incorporated in the other explanatory factors. From a previous study, for example, differences between organizations were no longer significant when the interpersonal (support) variables were introduced to the equation. In other words, organizational differences were represented in different appreciations of support. Possibly, this is what also happened here.

Practical Implications

Overall, our results show that it is important to account for and possibly create the internal organizational conditions that facilitate successful HRM implementation by the line. In this regard, the HR department and the organization in general can take action in several domains.

First, it is worth to reflect on the distinction between middle and first-line managers. Our results indicated several differences between both managerial groups regarding the HR devolution issue. For example, both middle and first-line managers clearly have a role in implementing HRM, but may differ in the way they execute their HR tasks. Also, the conditions fostering perceived effective HRM implementation are somewhat different between middle and first-line managers. It is, however, not required to align both groups' ideas and perceptions. On the contrary, attention should be paid to identifying the different needs and wishes of each group. Afterward, HR's approach toward facilitating HRM implementation by the line should be adapted according to the different managerial levels.

Second, our results point to the importance of the right type of motivation for line managers to engage in HRM. More specifically, HRM implementation will benefit from line managers, both middle and first line, to be autonomously motivated when it comes to their HR tasks. The HR department should, therefore, foster this type of motivation. Instead of enforcing line managers' HR role in a controlled manner (obligate/reward/sanction), it is worth investigating ways to make it "enjoyable" and "satisfying" for line managers to take on their HR tasks. This will, however, be a difficult exercise as it likely requires a change in the line managers' mind-set toward HRM.

Third, it may be worthwhile to invest in networking activities specifically focusing on line managers' role as people managers (including HRM implementation). From our results, it appears that support from the organization and from coworkers is essential to achieve effective HRM implementation. Regular networking activities are, therefore, interesting to encourage interaction with coworkers and to signal the organization's commitment regarding line managers' HR role.

Finally, there is the significance of personnel red tape for middle managers and local office position for first-line managers. Both factors are difficult to remedy, if that is at all what one would want. Personnel red tape is generally inherent to public sector organizations and cannot be easily eliminated. Although middle managers may feel constrained in their HR role because of burdensome rules, it may be more useful to identify and highlight those areas in which middle managers do have the necessary room for maneuver. Also regarding first-line managers' local office position, it should first be examined what are the underlying reasons for those in the local office to indicate higher HRM implementation effectiveness than those employed in the central office.

Limitations

In interpreting the results of our study, it is important to take into account the following limitations. First, it is a cross-sectional study. Although our hypotheses are based on sound theoretical arguments, we cannot make causal inferences from our results. Hence, we also cannot rule out the possibility of reverse causality. Future research may, therefore, collect longitudinal data to assess the direction of these relationships. Second, as mentioned earlier, using a self-reported performance measure may lead to biased results. The problem encountered with the measure for HR-related competency demonstrates the imperfection of the performance measure. Probably, a more accurate measure of line managers' HR role performance would be to ask subordinates to assess the way their line managers execute HR practices on the work floor. In addition, common method bias may occur in our results as all data in our study are self-reported and were simultaneously collected. Third, limiting our study to only two organizations leaves us with little possibilities of generalizing our results. However, as they are two government organizations, some tentative conclusions may be made in the context of the Belgian federal government. Future research may, therefore, extend the research to multiple organizations, also outside the (federal) government context. Finally, an in-depth qualitative research approach may provide more detailed information on the actual experiences and feelings of both middle and first-line managers toward their HRM responsibilities.

Appendix

Table A1. Final Concepts and Measures.

Dependent	Concept	Operationalization	Question/items	Scale
Organization	Line managers' perceived HRM implementation effectiveness (Cronbach's $\alpha = .7721$)	Self-reported performance (Vandenabeele, 2009)	In my opinion, I contribute to the success of the HR policy in my organization. I think I am performing well in executing my HRM responsibilities. With regard to my HR tasks, I think I am a good line manager.	1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree
	Organizational support (Cronbach's $\alpha = .7490$)	Perceived organizational support (Zhou & George, 2001)	The execution of HR tasks by line managers is encouraged in my organization. The role of line managers in executing HR tasks is respected by the leadership in my organization. The reward system in my organization encourages line managers to execute their HR tasks. The line managers who perform well in the execution of their HR tasks are publicly recognized by the organization. If red tape is defined as "burdensome administrative rules and procedures that have negative effects on the organization's effectiveness," how would you assess the level of red tape in your organization? Even when an employee performs poorly, formal rules make it hard to remove him or her from the organization. The rules governing promotion make it hard for a good employee to move up faster than a poor one. Due to formal rules, pay raises for employees are based primarily on seniority instead of performance. The formal pay structures and rules make it hard to reward a good employee with higher pay. The personnel rules and procedures that govern my organization make it easy for superiors to reward subordinates for good performance. (R)	1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree
	Red tape	Red tape (Rainey, Pandey, & Bozeman, 1995)		0 = almost no red tape to 10 = great deal of red tape
Individual	Personnel red tape (Cronbach's $\alpha = .7294$)	Personnel red tape (Rainey et al., 1995)		1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree
	Capacity (Cronbach's $\alpha = .8245$)	Role overload (Reilly, 1982)		
			I have to perform HR tasks which I do not really have the time for. (R) I feel I have to perform HR tasks hastily and maybe less carefully to get everything done. (R) My HR tasks lead to a workload that is too heavy. (R)	1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree

(continued)

Table A1. (continued)

Concept		Operationalization	Question/items	Scale
Autonomous motivation		Relative autonomy index (Coursey & Vandenabeele, 2012; Vandenabeele, 2008)	I try to do my best in executing my HR tasks, because Otherwise, I might create problems for myself (external regulation) Otherwise, I risk receiving a negative staff appraisal (external regulation) Otherwise, I will feel bad about it (introjected regulation) Otherwise, I will feel guilty about it (introjected regulation) I would like to be a good supervisor (identified regulation) I consider it my duty (identified regulation) I think my it is interesting (intrinsic regulation) I enjoy it (intrinsic regulation)	I = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree (combined into an additive weighted score)
Interpersonal	HR support (Cronbach's $\alpha = .9113$)	Perceived Support Scale developed by Gilbert, De Winne, and Sels (2011) based on support scales by E. L. Perry and Kulik (2008) and House (1981)	The HR department/HR professionals provide(s) the necessary resources to help me perform my HR tasks. The HR department/HR professionals support(s) me in executing my HR tasks. The HR department/HR professionals is/are always ready to help me with my HR tasks. If necessary, I can count on the expertise of the HR department/HR professionals to execute my HR tasks. If I encounter a problem in the execution of my HR tasks, I can always count on the HR department/HR professionals.	I = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree
	Supervisor support (Cronbach's $\alpha = .9428$)	Same as HR support, adapted for supervisor	My supervisor provides the necessary resources to help me perform my HR tasks. My supervisor supports me in executing my HR tasks. My supervisor is always ready to help me with my HR tasks. If necessary, I can count on the expertise of my supervisor to execute my HR tasks. If I encounter a problem in the execution of my HR tasks, I can always count on my supervisor.	I = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree

(continued)

Table A1. (continued)

	Concept	Operationalization	Question/items	Scale
Control variables	Coworker support (Cronbach's $\alpha = .9142$)	Same as HR support, adapted for coworker	My colleagues provide the necessary resources to help me perform my HR tasks. My colleagues support me in executing my HR tasks. My colleagues are always ready to help me with my HR tasks. If necessary, I can count on the expertise of my colleagues to execute my HR tasks.	I = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree
	Gender	—	If I encounter a problem in the execution of my HR tasks, I can always count on my colleagues. What is your gender?	Dummy
	Age	—	Which year were you born in?	Continuous (1940-2000)
	Length of service	—	What is your length of service in the current organization?	Continuous (<1 to >45 years)
	Supervisory experience	—	How many years have you been working in a supervisory position?	Continuous (<1 to >45 years)
	Span of control	—	How many people work under your direct supervision, that is, size of your team?	Continuous (0-30 or more)
	Central versus local office position	—	Do you work in a central office or in a local office?	Dummy
	Organization	—	Which organization do you currently work in?	Dummy

Note. HRM = human resource management; HR = human resource.

Table A2. Correlation Matrix.

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)
y	(1)																
Organizational support	(2)	.18***															
Red tape	(3)	-.16***	-.33***														
Personnel red tape	(4)	-.01	-.23***	.14***													
Autonomous motivation	(5)	.33***	-.02	-.11***	.05												
Capacity	(6)	-.17***	-.17***	.34***	.05*	-.26***											
Human resource support	(7)	.17***	.48***	-.35***	-.07**	.07**	-.30***										
Supervisor support	(8)	.15***	.39***	-.19***	-.07**	.09***	-.18***	.37***									
Coworker support	(9)	.20***	.25***	-.01***	-.04	.08***	-.12***	.33***	.33***								
Gender	(10)	.06	-.01	-.06**	-.01	.14***	-.11***	.04	.01	.08***							
Age	(11)	-.01	.07***	-.05	.01	-.08***	-.03	.01	.00	-.09***	-.26***						
Age squared	(12)	-.01	.08***	-.05	.01	-.08***	-.03	.01	.00	-.08***	-.27***	.99***					
Length of service	(13)	.04	.08***	-.04	.02	-.08***	-.02	.02	-.02	-.06**	-.14***	.65***	.65***				
Years of supervisory experience	(14)	.05	.05	-.01	.07**	-.02	-.06*	.05*	-.03	-.08***	-.21***	.63***	.64***	.54***			
Span of control	(15)	.10***	.13***	-.10	.05*	.04	.03	.14***	.03	.01	-.11***	.19***	.12***	.25***	.1		
Local office	(16)	.22	-.02	.08***	.12***	-.06**	.04	-.03	-.02	.10***	.04	.032	.03	.07**	.09***	.04	.1
Organization	(17)	.14***	.30***	-.26***	-.03	.11***	-.19***	.27***	.22***	.07**	.14***	-.015	-.01	.06**	.09***	.25***	-.12***

*p < .1. **p < .05. ***p < .01.

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Notes

1. "Self-determination involves a true sense of choice, a sense of feeling free in doing what one has chosen to do" (Guay, Vallerand, & Blanchard, 2000, p. 176).
2. Holgado-Tello, Chacón-Moscoso, Barbero-García, and Vila-Abad (2010) have shown that

when construct validity is analysed according to ordinal data obtained from Likert-type scales, the factor results show a better fit to the theoretical model when the factorisation is carried out using the polychoric rather than the Pearson correlation matrix . . . At all events, the factor results obtained (from both an exploratory and confirmatory point of view) when we use polychoric correlations reproduce better the measurement model present in the data, regardless of the number of factors. (p. 165)

The results of the exploratory factor analysis are available upon request.

3. Because the dependent is bounded between 1 and 5, we also did a robustness check using the Tobit model. However, the Tobit results did not significantly differ from the regular ordinary least squares (OLS) results. As Tobit results are more difficult to interpret (marginal effects), we decided to only report the OLS results. Tobit results are available upon request.

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