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EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF LINE MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE: APPLYING THE AMO THEORY TO EXPLAIN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LINE MANAGERS' HRM IMPLEMENTATION

ANNA C. BOS-NEHLES, MAARTEN J. VAN RIEMSDIJK, AND JAN KEES LOOISE

Line managers are today seen as increasingly important in effectively implementing HRM practices. Based on the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) theory, we predict that line managers' performance in this regard will depend on their ability *to apply HRM practices, and that their motivation and the opportunity provided will enhance this effect. Through a survey of 174 line managers and 1,065 of their direct subordinates in two organizations, we found* ability *to be the best predictor of a line manager's HRM performance.* Motivation *did not moderate the effect of ability on performance as predicted, and our results suggest this relationship needs further attention.* Opportunity *did enhance the effect of ability on HRM implementation effectiveness. Therefore, HRM departments should aim to enhance line managers' abilities and provide adequate opportunities for them to carry out the expected HRM duties. © 2013 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.*

Keywords: HRM implementation effectiveness, line management, AMO theory

Correspondence to: Anna C. Bos-Nehles, Department of Business Administration, School of Management and Governance, University of Twente, P.O. Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede, the Netherlands, Phone: (0031) 53489 3648, Fax: (0031) 53489 2159, E-mail: a.c.nehles@utwente.nl.

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Introduction

In many studies, the quality of HRM is measured by assessing the HRM practices that a company has in place (Chang, 2005; Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997; Kane, Crawford, & Grant, 1999; Wright, McMahan, Snell, & Gerhart, 2001) rather than the effectiveness of their implementation (Gratton & Truss, 2003; Huselid et al., 1997). However, the effectiveness of HRM depends on more than the presence of good HRM practices: the manner and context in which these practices are applied also plays a vital role (Han, Chou, Chao, & Wright, 2006; Wright & Nishii, 2006). Even if the intended HRM practices are well designed, they will be ineffective if they are not properly implemented (Khilji & Wang, 2006).

In what ways do ability, motivation, and opportunity predict the effectiveness of line managers in HRM implementation?

As more and more HRM responsibilities have been devolved to line managers, they have become increasingly responsible for implementing HRM practices in their daily work with employees (Guest, 1997; Storey, 1992). However, line managers are generally seen as reluctant (Hall & Torrington, 1998; Harris, Doughty, & Kirk, 2002; Lowe, 1992) and "neither capable nor motivated" to take on these issues (Hope Hailey, Farndale, & Truss, 2005, p. 64). McGovern, Gratton, Hope Hailey, Stiles, and Truss (1997, p. 26) even go as far as to observe that "attempts to devolve HRM to the line in any grand sense can only be regarded as quixotic." In short, line managers do not seem to perform very well in this respect.

If line managers seem reluctant, and maybe even incapable, what makes them so? Their performance in a given task can often be explained using three well-known factors. Line managers will perform well when: (1) they are *able* to do so (they can do the job because they possess the necessary skills and knowledge); (2) they have the *motivation* to do so (they will do the job because they want to and are adequately rewarded for their behavior); and (3) their working environment provides the *opportunity*—that is, the support and avenues necessary to enable the desired behavior. The third aspect requires not only avenues to be opened but also that line managers are actively supported in implementing HRM effectively. We argue therefore that the asserted "reluctance" might very well be an effect of *inability*, *non-motivation,* or *a lack of opportunities* to perform HRM tasks.

Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) theory (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000; Boxall & Purcell, 2003) is often used in HRM performance research (Paauwe, 2009). In these studies, the AMO theory guides the choice of HRM practices to be used. According to Gerhart (2005, p. 175), HRM practices can influence people's *ability* (e.g., by using the appropriate selection, hiring, and training instruments), *motivation* (e.g., by using performance-related pay), and *opportunity* (e.g., by using teams or suggestion systems) to contribute to firm performance. In this article, we apply the AMO theory differently: rather than focusing on employees' attitudes and behavior as a result of applied HRM practices (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Becker, Huselid, Pickus, & Spratt, 1997; Guest, 1997), we anticipate that line managers' ability, motivation, and opportunity will predict their HRM performance. Taking this position, we therefore operationalize the AMO theory in order to explain the effectiveness of the implementation of HRM practices by line managers. Hence, our research question is: *In what ways do ability, motivation, and opportunity predict the effectiveness of line managers in HRM implementation?*

The contributions of this article are twofold. First, by applying the AMO theory to the role of line managers in HRM delivery, we are able to determine the performance of line managers in implementing HRM practices on the work floor. Second, we operationalize the AMO factors based on the reasons for ineffective line management performance described in the devolution literature (Brewster & Larsen, 2000; Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Kulik & Perry, 2008; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003), and empirically test the role of the AMO factors in line managers' effectiveness in implementing HRM practices.

In structuring this article, we first explain how we apply the AMO theory to the HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers. We then develop hypotheses concerning how ability, motivation, and opportunity relate to the HRM performance of line managers. After presenting the research methodology, we move on to present the results and then test our hypotheses. The results are then discussed before finally presenting the limitations, implications, and conclusions of this study.

Theory and Hypothesis Development

Performance is defined in various ways in different strands of the literature. Which performance indicators should be used in relation to HRM effectiveness is still debated. Many criteria are used to measure performance (Guest, 2011), such as specific HRM outcomes, behavioral outcomes at the individual or group level, or performance outcomes (e.g., profit or sales) at the department or even company level (Guest, 1997). Work performance theory (Cummings & Schwab, 1973) defines performance as behavior associated with the accomplishment of expected, specified, or formal role requirements on the part of individual organizational members (Campbell, 1990). In this study, our goal is not to measure the performance of the HRM practices themselves, but of the line managers as their implementers. Performance is therefore defined as the effectiveness of line managers in implementing HRM practices on the work floor, and is measured in terms of employee satisfaction regarding this implementation. This is a subjective measure that can be understood as a performance outcome (Guest, 1997) concerning the accomplishment of a formal HRM role (Campbell, 1990) by line managers. The effectiveness dimension has also been used in performance research by Chang (2005), Han et al. (2006), Huselid et al. (1997), Lawler (2005), and Wright, McMahan, McCormick, and Sherman (1998).

Work performance theory considers *ability* (A), *motivation* (M), and *opportunity* (O) to influence behavior (Cummings & Schwab, 1973); but the question is how. Classic work-performance theories hypothesize complementarity among A, M, and O aspects (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982; Vroom, 1964). In this perspective, A, M, and O must all be present, at least to some degree, in order for a task to be performed, and performance will drop as any of these values decrease (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982). In this reasoning, A, M, and O interact (Delery, 1998), and their ultimate influence depends on which of these factors an individual possesses (Lepak, Liao, Chung, & Harden, 2006). The implication is that neither ability nor motivation nor opportunity can ensure performance on their own. In the extreme situation (extreme complementarity), when one or more of the antecedents is absent, individual performance becomes impossible (Siemsen, Roth, & Balasubramanian, 2008). The function that reflects this interactive (i.e., complementary) interpretation of the AMO model is: $P = f(\mathrm{A} \times \mathrm{M} \times \mathrm{O})$.

In this study, our goal is not to measure the performance of the HRM practices themselves, but of the line managers as their implementers.

According to Boxall and Purcell (2003), performance is better described by an additive function of the form $P = f(\mathrm{A} + \mathrm{M} + \mathrm{O})$. If this is the case, each antecedent of performance will have a direct and independent contribution regardless of the other antecedents. With such an additive effect (Delery, 1998), boosting any one factor should result in increased levels of performance (Lepak et al., 2006). According to Siemsen et al. (2008), the interactive model of the AMO theory has much theoretical support to suggest that interactive effects will take place, but it has never been empirically validated. Since performance in the multiplicative model is expected to be very limited or nonexistent in the event of extreme combinations (e.g., when any of the factors would be zero, the resulting performance would be zero too), Cummings and Schwab (1973) support the use of a simple additive approach.

We argue, however, that motivation and opportunity by themselves cannot directly influence HRM performance without the

necessary skills and knowledge to implement the HRM practices on the work floor. Ability is therefore a prerequisite for performance to occur. Motivation and opportunity are also essential, but only after sufficient ability is ensured. Thus, ability is predicted to have a direct effect on performance, whereas motivation and opportunity can only increase or decrease this effect.

Our position therefore is that the AMO theory should not be represented by either a fully additive or a fully interactive effect, but by a combination of both. Motivation and opportunity have no additive effect on their own but only in combination with ability. Thus, we argue that the AMO theory should be based on a formula of the form $P = f\mathrm{A}(1 + \mathrm{M} + \mathrm{O})$. We hypothesize that there will be interactive effects of ability and motivation ($\mathrm{A} \times \mathrm{M}$) and of ability and opportunity ($\mathrm{A} \times \mathrm{O}$), but not of motivation and opportunity since we predict that alone they cannot enhance performance. Only ability, we argue, will have an independent, direct, and positive effect on performance, and this effect can be positively or negatively influenced by motivation and opportunity.

We argue that motivation and opportunity by themselves cannot directly influence HRM performance without the necessary skills and knowledge to implement the HRM practices on the work floor.

Ability and Performance

Ability is defined here as the HRM-related competences necessary to successfully implement HRM practices on the work floor. Many examples of line managers having insufficient HRM abilities and the detrimental effects of this are advanced in the HRM literature (Hope Hailey et al., 2005; Maxwell & Watson, 2006; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). According to Brewster and Larsen (2000, p. 208), "there is a danger in allocating HR responsibilities to line managers who do not know about relevant legislation, pay too little attention to managing trade union relationships, or resolve problems in unnecessary expensive ways." Hope Hailey et al. (2005) and Whittaker and Marchington (2003) argue that line managers' skills and competences in HRM practices are inadequate and that a lack of training will undoubtedly affect line managers' effectiveness. Line managers often lack specialist knowledge of HRM (for example, on legal requirements and agreed practices; Hall & Torrington, 1998; Lowe, 1992), lack the knowledge of and experience with the information they need for their responsibilities, and have limited people management skills (McGovern et al., 1997). They implement HRM practices based on what they see as "commonsense" (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999) and often fail to deal with issues early enough (Harris et al., 2002). It is generally accepted that competence in performing HRM practices can be developed through training. Some authors have shown the need for continuous and systematic training in HRM practices (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; McGovern, 1999). However, they also recognize the lack of sufficient or adequate training courses for certain HRM issues (Bond & Wise, 2003; Lowe, 1992) and a "leave well alone syndrome" (Harris et al., 2002, p. 222).

We posit that ability is a necessary requirement for effectively performing HRM tasks. If one lacks the necessary skills and knowledge, it will simply be impossible to implement HRM practices in an effective manner, no matter how motivated one is and how good the opportunities provided are. On this basis, we can formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The greater the ability of line managers in terms of performing HRM practices, the more effectively they will implement these practices on the work floor.

Motivation and Performance

Previously, we have argued that, without ability, neither motivation nor opportunity would add much to performance, although both, of course, are still very important.

Although an incentive system that stimulates HRM implementation by line managers may simply frustrate them if they do not know how to do it, it will boost their efforts if they do and now see it as potentially enhancing rewards or promotion opportunities.

Motivation is defined as the line manager's desire and willingness to perform HRM tasks. While some managers are enthusiastic about acquiring HRM responsibilities, many feel that these tasks are pushed onto them and are therefore reluctant to get involved (Harris et al., 2002). Motivation can be stimulated by personal incentives (Harris et al., 2002; McGovern, 1999) or institutionalized incentives (McGovern, 1999; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). In terms of personal incentives, line managers seem to show little interest in the subject (Brewster & Larsen, 2000) and remain unconvinced that HRM is something they should spend much time on (Renwick, 2003). When it comes to wider institutional incentives, the HRM role is often not included in line managers' performance objectives, and line managers are often evaluated on achieving targets related to profits or sales and not in areas related to managing people (McGovern et al., 1997). Such a lack of extrinsic factors can also affect the intrinsic motivation of line managers to perform HRM practices, and this can result in line managers' prioritizing operational issues over HRM issues (Harris et al., 2002; McGovern et al., 1997). Whittaker and Marchington (2003, p. 250) explain that "because line managers have many other pressing priorities than managing and developing the people working for them, it is likely that people management issues will be taken less seriously than production or service goals." This could explain the poor HRM implementation results since managers would neither see nor "feel" the benefits of implementing HRM practices, even if they exist.

On the other hand, many companies, especially in industries where people are seen as the key assets, do have elaborative incentive schemes for line managers in place. In knowledge-intensive industries, line managers have more and clearer HRM tasks and responsibilities than elsewhere (Despres & Hiltrop, 1995), and are monitored on whether and how they appraise their staff (Swart & Kinnie, 2003). Provided such managers are able to implement HRM practices, good incentives will enhance their motivation to do so, and hence increase implementation effectiveness.

This is in line with motivational theory that posits that performance is affected by both motivation and ability as they interact with each other (Maier, 1955; Vroom, 1964). Based on the efficacy perspective, Siemsen et al. (2008) argue that employees who are not able to perform well may also not be motivated because they may feel that performing is too difficult for them or that they have a low likelihood of success. According to MacDuffie (1995, p. 199), "motivated workers who lack skills or knowledge may contribute discretionary effort with little impact on performance." Thus, a line manager who not only knows what to do with HRM practices but also likes to put this ability to good use, and is stimulated to do so, will probably be more effective than someone who knows what to do but has little interest in doing it (Lepak et al., 2006; MacDuffie, 1995). Therefore, our second hypothesis reads:

Hypothesis 2: The motivation to implement HRM practices effectively moderates the relationship between line managers' ability and their HRM implementation effectiveness.

Opportunity and Performance

Even if individuals have the ability and are motivated to perform HRM practices effectively, organizations must provide them with appropriate opportunities to use their skills (Lepak et al., 2006, p. 233). Opportunities are represented by environmental or contextual mechanisms that enable action (Siemsen et al., 2008), where the work environment provides the necessary support and avenues for expression (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). In previous studies, *opportunity* has been operationalized for an individual's immediate work environment using leadership processes, job design, person/system fit, and situational constraints (Waldman, 1994), and for employees as engagement in problem-solving or wider involvement schemes (Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchinson, Rayton, & Swart, 2003).

For line managers, it is argued that opportunity should be rather understood as situational or operational constraints (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982; Mathieu, Tannenbaum, & Salas,

1992). Blumberg and Pringle (1982) see opportunity as reflecting assistance, organizational policies and procedures, time availability, task preparation, and the necessary services and help from others. Translated into the HRM domain of line managers, opportunity can be understood as covering the following aspects. First, line managers need good support from the HRM professionals. Second, there should be adequate capacity in terms of time to get involved in HRM implementation. Third, roles should be clearly defined and allocated, such that role ambiguity is minimized, and hence policies and procedures should be clear and supportive.

The devolution literature shows that line managers need content-related advice and coaching from personnel specialists on how to perform HRM activities (Hall & Torrington, 1998; Harris et al., 2002; Hope Hailey et al., 2005) if they are to perform well. It is even argued that line managers cannot carry out HRM responsibilities at acceptable levels without the assistance of HRM professionals (Brewster & Larsen, 2000; Lowe, 1992) who should coach and encourage them to meet their HRM responsibilities, and be available for consultation over nonroutine matters (Bond & Wise, 2003; Hall & Torrington, 1998). That is, HRM support for line managers should be available and hence this availability partially determines the opportunity for line managers to implement HRM.

If line managers sense a lack of capacity to spend what they see as sufficient time on HRM responsibilities, and complain about being overloaded with their operational and HRM roles, then clearly the opportunity to perform their HRM tasks is limited.

In addition, line managers might perceive conflicting demands and competing priorities between operational and HRM tasks, leading to a capacity problem (Hope Hailey et al., 2005; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). The "constant demand to deal with a range of problems" (McConville, 2006, p. 645), both operational and personnel, can result in a perception of overload in a line manager's HRM role (Harris et al., 2002; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). Often, time pressures and pressure related to achieving business targets lead to problems for line managers in devoting sufficient time to communicating and consulting with subordinates (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; McConville, 2006; McGovern et al., 1997). If line managers sense a lack of capacity to spend what they see as sufficient time on HRM responsibilities, and complain about being overloaded with their operational and HRM roles, then clearly the opportunity to perform their HRM tasks is limited.

Finally, in terms of their HRM role, line managers often lack a clear role definition (McConville, 2006) and are therefore unclear as to their responsibilities (Lowe, 1992). Case studies reveal that there are significant perceptual divergences between line managers and HRM professionals on aspects of line management involvement in HRM (Harris et al., 2002; Maxwell & Watson, 2006). HRM departments often worry that line managers might manage people in an inconsistent way (Bond & Wise, 2003; Harris, 2001; McConville, 2006), and so they try to prevent line managers from interpreting, adjusting, and fine-tuning HRM practices according to their individual idiosyncratic understandings (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Harris, 2001). Further, many line managers believe that managing people is HRM's responsibility (McGovern et al., 1997). One way to overcome this attitude is to provide line managers with clear policies and procedures since, if line managers lack guidance on which HRM practices they should follow, and how, they will be unclear as to their role and responsibilities regarding HRM implementation and, consequently, their effectiveness in implementing these practices is likely to suffer. Thus, both good policies and good procedures are important in creating adequate opportunity.

Overall, our understanding of opportunity thus combines situational support from HR professionals, the capacity to spend sufficient time on HRM responsibilities, and clear and valuable policies and procedures for performing the HRM role. Line managers who are provided with these opportunities to perform HRM practices are expected to be more

effective in implementing them. However, we argue that having the opportunity is not sufficient to ensure actual performance since one might not have the necessary skills and knowledge to do so. As such, *opportunity* (or lack of) can influence the effect of *ability* on performance, either positively or negatively, leading us to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: The opportunity provided to implement HR practices moderates the relationship between line managers' ability to implement and their HR implementation effectiveness.

Methodology

Population and Data Collection

Data have been collected through a survey in two organizations, an international naval defense company and a national construction company. For our independent variables (i.e., line managers' *ability*, *motivation,* and *opportunity*) to perform HRM practices effectively, our population is made up of line managers at various hierarchical levels in these two organizations, all supervising teams of operational employees. Our disaggregated sample amounts to 174 line managers. For measuring our dependent variable, *line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness*, the research population is all the subordinates supervised by the line managers investigated. Here, our disaggregated sample amounts to 1,065 subordinates. One-to-one matching of the data in the two samples was not possible because of the anonymity guaranteed to the line managers. Given this situation, the department, rather than the line manager, is the unit of analysis. The aggregated sample size (i.e., departments where responses were received from both line managers and subordinates) is 74.[1] In aggregating data, one needs to ensure consistency in the answers of respondents within the same group. If this is the case, the standard deviations and the interclass coefficients (ICCs) will be low since this reflects a low variance around the mean value. The standard deviations and ICCs of all variables are presented in Table I and the values indeed demonstrate that the mean is a good reflection of the data gathered. As indicated earlier, the AMO factors are measured at the line management level and performance at the employee level. With the line management group, we accepted standard deviations and ICC values that would usually be perceived as too high to just take the mean value. This was because, in approximately half of the departments, we only had a response from one line manager, and an average response of three subordinates evaluating his/her HRM implementation effectiveness.

TABLE I ICCs and Standard Deviations of Variables

	ICC	SD
Capacity	0.42	1.10
Desire	0.12	0.61
Competences	0.14	0.72
Support	0.17	0.71
Policy and Procedures	0.02	0.63
Personnel Administration	0.13	0.66
Recruitment and Selection	0.06	1.03
Career Development	0.13	0.83
Career Evaluation and Rewards	0.07	0.87
People Management	0.12	0.77

Measures

Independent Variables

In the previous literature on HRM devolution to line managers, the population used for investigating the reasons why devolving HRM responsibilities to the line is not effective is most often the HR managers (Bos-Nehles, 2010). In our study, the population for measuring the *ability*, *motivation,* and *opportunity* of line managers for performing HRM practices is the line managers themselves. This choice is supported by Bond and Wise (2003), Maxwell and Watson (2006), McConville (2006), and others.

According to Kulik and Perry (2008, pp. 550–551), "the devolution literature has tended to emphasize case-study methodology, which provides limited generalizability." Here, in order to measure the factors necessary

TABLE II Concepts, Scales, Items, and Cronbach's Alpha of the Variables

Theory	Concept	Operationalization/Scales	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Ability	**Competences**	Occupational self-efficacy (Schyns & van Collani, 2002)	5	0.81
		Training (developed on basis of pilot case study)	2	0.77
Motivation	**Desire**	Self-determination theory (SIMS; Guay, Vallerand, & Blanchard, 2000)	9	0.79
		Value-added (developed on basis of pilot case study)	4	0.85
	Capacity	Role overload (Reilly, 1982)	5	0.84
	Support	HR support services (SERVQUAL; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988)	3	0.77
		HR support behavior (SERVQUAL; Parasuraman et al., 1988)	4	0.84
Opportunity	**Policy and procedures**	Role conflict (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970)	5	0.78
		Role ambiguity (Rizzo et al., 1970)	4	0.68
		User-friendliness of HR forms (developed on basis of pilot case study)	3	0.89
	HRM implementation effectiveness	Personnel administration	5	0.64
		Recruitment and selection	2	0.78
		Career development	4	0.82
		Evaluation and rewarding	5	0.87
		People management	5	0.84

for successfully implementing devolved HRM tasks, we operationalized the AMO factors on the basis of the constraints perceived by line managers in implementing HRM practices (Nehles, Kok, van Riemsdijk, Kok, & Looise, 2006). The five devolution factors discussed by Nehles et al. (2006) were translated into reliable scales by adjusting scales validated in other, non-HRM fields to the HRM domain. Table II shows the operationalization, scales, number of items, and Cronbach's alphas of each AMO factor.

The *ability* factor was operationalized as the HRM-related competences of line managers for their HRM tasks. It was measured using five items based on the occupational self-efficacy scale of Schyns and van Collani (2002). A sample item is "I meet the goals I set for myself in performing my HR responsibilities." Two items on line management training were added. These were developed based on a pilot case study involving 30 first-line managers. A sample item added for HR training is "The courses I followed were relevant for performing my HR responsibilities." *Motivation* was operationalized as the line managers' willingness to perform HRM tasks and responsibilities, and it was measured using nine items from the situational motivation scale of Guay, Vallerand, and Blanchard (2000). A sample item is "I perform my HR responsibilities because I think this activity is interesting." A four-item scale on the value added by HR responsibilities was included based on the pilot case study (sample item: "I perform HR responsibilities because it helps me to supervise my team"). *Opportunity* was operationalized as having the *capacity* to spend sufficient

time on HR practices, *support* from HR professionals, and clear and supportive *policy and procedures*. *Capacity* was measured using five items from the role overload scale of Reilly (1982), including "I feel I have to perform HR responsibilities hastily and maybe less carefully in order to get everything done" (reverse item). *Support* was measured with seven items from Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's (1988) service quality scale (e.g., "The HR managers have the necessary knowledge to answer my questions"). Finally, *policy and procedures* was assessed using nine items from the role conflict and role ambiguity scale of Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) (e.g., "I work under incompatible HR policies and HR guidelines") plus three items labeled the "user friendliness of HR forms," developed on the basis of the pilot case study (e.g. "The HR instruments I am provided with are clear and understandable").

All of these factors were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("disagree") to 5 ("agree"). Before using these measures with our sample, the scales were validated for the HRM domain of line managers by performing a confirmatory factor analysis on a sample of 471 line managers in six other organizations. A factor analysis was carried out for each of the five concepts separately, and this revealed a model with a good fit. The goodness of fit and RMSEA measures, respectively, for each concept are as follows: 0.98 and 0.056 for competences (*ability*); 0.94 and 0.069 for desire (*motivation*); 0.99 and 0.043 for support (*opportunity*); 0.99 and 0.042 for capacity (*opportunity*); and 0.94 and 0.073 for policy and procedures (*opportunity*). The reliabilities of these scales, assessed using Cronbach's alphas, were between 0.68 and 0.88. Scales with a Cronbach's alpha of above 0.70 are generally regarded as good to excellent (Nunnally, 1978), and Cronbach's alphas of 0.60 and above are also viewed as acceptable (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

Dependent Variable

HRM effectiveness is commonly investigated by employee perceptions (Chang, 2005; Huselid et al., 1997; Kane et al., 1999; Mitsuhashi, Park, Wright, & Chua, 2000; Wright et al., 2001). In line with this, we base our measure of HRM implementation effectiveness on the employees' perceptions of a line manager's effectiveness in implementing HRM practices. As proposed and tested by Tsui (1990) and Huselid et al. (1997), HRM effectiveness was measured as subordinates' satisfaction—in our case, regarding the way their line managers carried out HRM activities in practice. Subordinates were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the way their line managers executed various aspects of HRM practices on the work floor using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("not satisfied") to 5 ("very satisfied"). The satisfaction level was indicated for line managers' implementation of the following five HRM practices: personnel administration; recruitment and selection; career development; evaluation and rewarding; and people management. The HRM practices and related items were selected based on Truss (2001). The 26 items making up the effectiveness measure were subjected to a factor analysis. Here, we used principal component analysis, with Varimax rotation, to seek out the most reliable factor structure. Five factors, representing the HRM practices named earlier, were retrieved, and these involved a total of 19 items. Their Cronbach's alphas ranged from 0.64 to 0.87. The overall line managers' effectiveness in HRM implementation was taken as the aggregated measure of these five HRM practices.

Control Variables

To reduce the risk of false results due to correlations among the variables in our constructs, we controlled for organizational context, experience as a line manager, and a line manager's education level. As the organizations investigated differed by sector, size, and product, the organizational context was also controlled for (construction company = 1; naval defense company = 0). According to Caza (2011), the education and experience of a manager is likely to influence the performance of the overall organization because talented and skilled managers can be expected to use managerial discretion more

successfully than those with less ability. These variables were dummy-coded. We also considered controlling for age and span of control, as proposed by McGovern et al. (1997), but these did not show significant results and were therefore excluded from the final model.

Results

A multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the formulated hypotheses. Given that all the independent variables are correlated with one another (see Table III), they were included in a single model to calculate the best fit with the HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers. The five operationalized AMO factors were standardized in order to reduce multicollinearity, and the control variables and interaction effects were added in a stepwise manner.

Line managers who have the ability to perform HRM practices but are not provided with policies and procedures will implement these practices less effectively than managers who are well provided with policies and procedures.

We used six regression models, as presented in Table IV: (1) without control variables, (2) with control variables, and (3–6) including various interaction effects. Competences (i.e., the *ability* factor) significantly enhance HRM implementation effectiveness having controlled for the organizational context and for the experience and the education level of line managers. On this basis, we can accept Hypothesis 1, because line managers who are able to perform HRM practices do implement them more effectively. As predicted, their motivation and opportunity to perform these practices are not significantly relevant when it comes to implementing HRM practices in an effective way. Line managers being motivated actually seem to decrease their effectiveness in implementing HRM (we will return to this in the Discussion section). The differences between the two organizations had a large impact on the results: when controlling for organization, the explained variance (R^2) increased from 0.28 to 0.41, a significant increase. In Models 3 to 6, we sequentially add four interaction effects to the model, one for the *motivation* moderator and three for the *opportunity* moderator (with opportunity being operationalized as capacity, support, and policy and procedures, as presented in Table II). Of these, only the interaction effect between competences and policy and procedures significantly affected the effectiveness of HRM implementation and also led to an improved model. The effect of a line manager's *ability* on their HRM implementation effectiveness becomes stronger when line managers receive clearer policies and procedures for executing their HR role. The direct effect of competences on the effectiveness of HRM implementation also increases when adding the interaction effect between competences and policy and procedures. As such, we cannot support Hypothesis 2 for the motivation moderator, but we can partially accept Hypothesis 3 for the moderating effect of policy and procedures on a line manager's ability to implement HRM practices effectively. Line managers who have the ability to perform HRM practices but are not provided with policies and procedures will implement these practices less effectively than managers who are well provided with policies and procedures (Figure 1). The explained variance in the HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers increases fivefold from an R^2 of 0.09 when only the control variables are included to 0.47 in Model 6.

Discussion

Based on the AMO theory, we argued that only *ability* has an independent and direct positive effect on the effectiveness of HRM implementation by line managers. At the same time, this effect can be influenced, positively or negatively, by *motivation* and *opportunity*. Hence, we hypothesized multiplicative effects only for *ability* and *motivation* and for *ability* and *opportunity*, giving a relationship of the form $P = f\ \mathrm{A}(1 + \mathrm{M} + \mathrm{O})$.

Results showed indeed, when controlling for organizational context, that only ability had a positive significant effect on performance. Having the skills and knowledge necessary to implement HRM practices effectively

TABLE III **Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

	Mean	SD	Capacity	Desire	Competences	Support	Policy and Procedures	Company A	Company B	Age	Experience	Education	Span of Control	HR Imp. & Effect.
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 and 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 and 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

Confidence level: *≤ 0.10, **≤ 0.05, ***≤ 0.01.

TABLE IV Multiple Regression Analysis

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Constant	3.55	4.00	3.96	4.04	4.00	3.98
Competences	0.10	0.12**	0.13**	0.12**	0.12*	0.17***
Desire	−0.17***	−0.10	−0.11*	−0.12*	−0.10	−0.10
Capacity	0.13**	0.02	0.01	−0.00	0.02	−0.01
Support	0.14**	−0.02	−0.01	−0.03	−0.01	−0.04
Policies and Procedures	0.00	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.04
Construction Company		−0.54**	−0.53**	−0.61***	−0.53**	−0.61***
Low Experience		−0.13	−0.10	−0.12	−0.16	−0.08
Low Education		0.08	0.05	0.09	0.09	0.06
Competences * Motivation			0.05			
Competences * Capacity				0.08		
Competences * Support					0.06	
Competences * PP						0.11**
N	62	62	62	62	62	62
F	4.51***	4.64***	4.23***	4.53***	4.31***	5.12***
R^2	0.28	0.41	0.42	0.44	0.42	0.47
Adj. R^2	0.22	0.32	0.32	0.34	0.33	0.37

Dependent variable: line managers' HR implementation effectiveness.
Dummies: naval defense company, high experience, high education.
Confidence level: *≤ 0.10, **≤ 0.05, ***≤ 0.01.

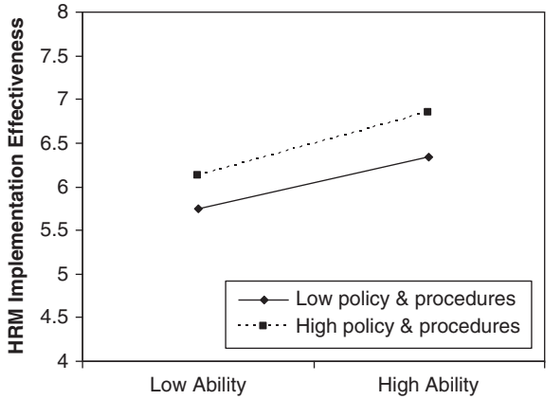

FIGURE 1. Effect of the Interaction Between Ability and Opportunity (in the Form of Policy and Procedures) on HR Implementation Effectiveness

will improve the performance of line managers in implementing HRM practices, a finding in line with Brewster and Larsen (2000) and Hall and Torrington (1998), among others. As predicted, motivation and opportunity had no significant direct effect on HRM implementation effectiveness. Most line managers in our study were motivated to play an HRM role in their organization as is visible from the high mean value and low standard deviation of the "desire" variable in Table III. This result is clearly at odds with the general view expressed in the devolution literature—that line managers are not motivated to execute HRM responsibilities and thus implement them ineffectively (Harris et al., 2002; McGovern, 1999; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). It could be that the line managers in our sample had been selected for a line management function because they were positively motivated toward HRM, or that they like performing HRM tasks because they find they have abilities in this area. Despite this, *motivation* had neither a significant direct nor a moderating effect on HRM implementation effectiveness. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. However, *opportunity* was found to strengthen the effect of *ability* on performance. The clearer and more supportive the policies and procedures provided to line managers are, the better the able ones implement

HRM practices. Line managers who are provided with a clear role definition (McConville, 2006) and clear expectations about their role, and thus know what their responsibilities are (Lowe, 1992), will be more effective in implementing HRM provided they have been adequately trained (McGovern, 1999; Renwick, 2003).

Applying the AMO theory to HRM implementation by line managers, we find that performance does not increase in the form of an additive effect of all three antecedents, nor as an interactive effect of all the antecedents. Rather, a mixture of both combinational forms seems to affect performance. The formula resulting from applying the AMO theory is of the form $P = f\mathrm{A}(1 + \mathrm{O})$: that is, *ability* in line management skills results in higher HRM performance, and an adequate *opportunity* enhances the performance of competent line managers.

The effect of *motivation* on performance needs further consideration given that, in our study, the most motivated line managers are surprisingly perceived as the worst performers when it comes to HRM practices on the work floor. Although controlling for the organizational context decreases this counterintuitive relationship to an insignificant level (albeit only just), the negative sign remains. It could be that the more that line managers want to do it right, the more they stick to the guidelines and rules set by HRM. By playing it "by the book," they perhaps give themselves insufficient room for maneuver and freedom in applying HRM practices. Such freedom to manage is the way that line managers deem the most appropriate has been shown to have a significant positive effect on performance (Caza, 2011). A lack of such leeway can have two negative consequences for employees. First, line managers disregard the particular circumstances within their departments that should ideally lead adjusted policies and instruments. Second, line managers behave like bureaucrats, and employees lose the benefits of striking mutually beneficial idiosyncratic deals between themselves and their line managers (Rousseau, 2001; Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006). Our result perhaps provides rich insights into what employees appreciate in terms of HRM implementation: a personal, context-specific, and even idiosyncratic way is maybe preferable to "doing it right."

The organizational context had a strong influence on our results. Once the control variables were added, only *ability* remained significant. The naval defense company and the construction company studied in this article differed a lot in terms of line managers' education level, organizational culture, and organizational structure. These contextual variables can influence the competences of line managers in terms of HRM (*ability*), the status of HRM and thus the effort line managers give to HRM (*motivation*), and the way they are supported and the amount of freedom and time they have for HRM activities (*opportunity*).

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is the fact that data were only gathered from two organizations. This limits the generalizability of our findings. We hope other researchers will replicate this study in other organizations and industries. The importance of including more organizations and further industries is highlighted by the fact that controlling for the differences between the two organizations revealed that organizational context had a strong effect on the results. When studying the effectiveness of line managers in HRM implementation, one clearly needs to take a range of organizational context variables into account. We would therefore recommend that future studies should include the effect of variables such as the organizational structure, perhaps represented by the span of control of line managers or the industry, on the effectiveness of line managers in HRM implementation.

Our result perhaps provides rich insights into what employees appreciate in terms of HRM implementation: a personal, context-specific, and even idiosyncratic way is maybe preferable to "doing it right."

A line manager's HRM performance was measured as the satisfaction of their subordinates with the way HRM practices were implemented on the work floor. In this way, the line

managers were evaluated on how they apply HRM practices. This points toward a second limitation of this study. Even if line managers were exceptionally good at implementing these practices, if the company's policies and practices themselves were unpopular with subordinates, this could negatively influence their perception of the line managers' implementation. In this study, we did not investigate the content of HRM practices (e.g. Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008) or the leader-member exchange relationship between line managers and subordinates (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). However, both could influence the effectiveness of HRM implementation (Farndale, van Ruiten, Kelliher, & Hope-Hailey, 2011) and should therefore be controlled for in future studies.

HRM professionals should be seen as having an important role in improving and facilitating the competences that line managers need to perform HRM practices.

Another limitation of our research is the fact that we only used subordinates to evaluate HRM implementation effectiveness. The multi-constituency approach (Tsui, 1987, 1990) suggests that it would be beneficial to collect data from multiple stakeholders surrounding the line manager, including not only subordinates but also senior managers and HRM managers (Paauwe, 2009; Wright et al., 1998). However, we would emphasize that, in the past, the voice of the employee has been seldom heard despite there being plenty of research describing the advantages of measuring HRM implementation effectiveness at the employee level (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

Practical Implications

As ability has a positive and significant effect on line management performance, HRM professionals should be seen as having an important role in improving and facilitating the competences that line managers need to perform HRM practices. They can boost these by: (1) selecting line managers based on their HRM or leadership competences and (2) training line managers to become competent implementers of HRM practices on the work floor.

In general, the effect of *opportunities* provided by the HRM department should not be overestimated. Opportunities on their own do not make line managers better implementers of HRM, but they can augment the effect of line managers' *ability*. What clearly helps is if HRM managers provide line management with clear and adequate policies and procedures. At the same time, these policies and procedures should avoid overly restricting line managers' discretionary powers to adapt them to individual situations. Line managers who like to "stick to the rules" are not perceived as performing well by their subordinates. However, the HRM department can only be confident that such inputs will help when line managers have the necessary and relevant HRM knowledge needed to execute the expected HRM role.

HRM managers should also ensure that line managers understand their HRM role and know what is expected of them, and how this relates to the role and position of the HRM department. Role clarity and a clear understanding about mutual expectations and responsibilities help to make able line managers successful HRM implementers.

Our research also suggests that the need to motivate line management might be overestimated. First of all, it seems that most line managers are inherently motivated, and more importantly, we failed to find any effect of motivation on line management performance. HRM departments could therefore reduce investments in improving line managers' motivation to implement HRM. What is important for effective implementation of HRM practices on the work floor is that line managers are HRM-competent. Supportive opportunities and instruments provided by HRM can increase the line managers' effectiveness.

Note

1. The figure of 62 reported in the regression analysis table equates to the valid (listwise) sample used in the regression analysis. This figure is lower than the aggregated sample of 74 because of missing data values that were required for the regression analysis calculations.

ANNA C. BOS-NEHLES is an assistant professor of human resource management within the School of Management and Governance at the University of Twente in The Netherlands. Her main research interests are the implementation of HRM by line managers, HRM effectiveness, and perceptions of HRM.

MAARTEN J. VAN RIEMSDIJK is a professor of human resource management at the Saxion University of Applied Sciences and chair of the HRM research group. His current research interests are HRM in small and medium-sized enterprises, leadership, proactive behavior, and employability under new labor relations.

JAN KEES LOOISE is a professor of human resource management and head of the HRM group within the School of Management and Governance at the University of Twente in The Netherlands. His current research interests are HRM innovation and the contribution of HRM to increasing the innovation capacity of organizations.

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