Effective Implementation of HR Practices: A Multi-Actor Perspective

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DOCTORAL THESIS

Title   Effective Implementation of HR Practices:
             A Multi-Actor Perspective

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To those who are passionate about

        the unpredictable human factors…

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Acknowledgement

Abstract

HR implementation, as a process through which the relationship between HRM and firm performance can be explained, is indeed an important and relevant topic which is understudied and requires more attention. Being brought to the spotlight by the process-based view of HRM, the dynamic nature of this multi-actor and multi-stage process needs further exploration. In doing so, due to the lack of a unified understanding of HR implementation and its effectiveness, this thesis first clarifies the meanings of these two concepts. Second, it provides a literature review on the factors influencing effective HR implementation, categorizing them into content, context, and process antecedents. Third, focusing on the dynamic nature of HR implementation and conducting a multiple comparative case study approach, this thesis looks at the power dimensions of the involved actors and how these dynamics influence HR implementation effectiveness. Finally, taking advantage of a natural shock and using a multiple comparative case study approach, this thesis looks at the roles of one of the powerful actors, the CEO, and explores how this actor influences the HR implementation process directly and indirectly through affecting the strategic role of HR departments. Overall, this thesis emphasizes on the roles of the involved actors and how they impact HR implementation and its effectiveness.

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Introduction

Throughout decades, human resource management (HRM) scholars have tried to address the link between HRM and firm performance, i.e. unlocking the HRM black box (Guest, 2011; Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchinson, Rayton, & Swart, 2003). In doing so, two main approaches have attempted to address this relationship: 1) one is through studying the influence of HR practices on the perception, attitude, and behavior of employees, which would in turn influence firm performance (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013), and is more focused on the *content* of HR practices; 2) the other is through the effective implementation of HR practices and HR effectiveness (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013), which is about the *process* through which HR practices are implemented. In the HRM literature, there has been a shift from *content-based* approach to *process-based* approach (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), changing the focus from high performance work systems (Becker & Huselid, 1998; Huselid, 1995) and high commitment work systems (Walton, 1985) to the process through which meaning is attached to HR practices and their effects on firm performance by employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Sanders, Shipton, & Gomes, 2014; Sanders & Yang, 2016).

When adopting the process-based approach, the implementation of HR practices and its effectiveness become important (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013), especially because of the intended-implemented gap (Khilji & Wang, 2006) that may result in situations where high quality HR practices in terms of content, impact the wellbeing and performance of

employees negatively due to poor and uneven implementation (Harrington, Rayner, & Warren, 2012; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Consequently, there have been various calls for more attention on HR implementation (e.g. 'Comparative Perspectives on HR and Line Manager Relationships and their Effects on Employees' in the International Journal of Human Resource Management, 2011; 'Human Resource Management and the Line' in Human Resource Management, 2013) and its effectiveness (Bondarouk, Trullen, & Valverde, 2016). The present thesis, having the *overarching objective* of understanding *how HR policies and practices can be implemented effectively*, connects with this research stream by reviewing the current literature, analyzing potential antecedents of effective HR implementation, as well as providing a more nuanced picture of HR implementation that recognizes the role played by different actors (e.g. top management, middle management, HR practitioners, employees, etc.) in the implementation process.

1.1   HR implementation and its effectiveness

There has been an increased interest in HR implementation in the past decade. Despite the amount of research done on HR implementation, there remains a certain confusion about the meaning of HR implementation and its effectiveness. These concepts are taken for granted, and this has resulted in a lack of consolidated research in this field. Therefore, one of the aims of this thesis is to shed light on HR implementation, a topic that has traditionally been assumed to be a practitioners' issue and somewhat an automatically done process.

In this regard, it is important to show explicitly what is meant by HR implementation and its effectiveness. Consistent with Guest and Bos-Nehles's (2013) view, in this thesis, HR implementation is considered as a process that includes three stages: *adoption*, *formulation*, and *execution*. The first stage, adoption, is about the decision to introduce HR practices. Formulation is focused on the content of the HR practice, while execution refers to the actual use of the practice on the ground. This is consistent with Klein and Sorra's (1996) approach from innovation literature, where implementation is considered as a gateway from decision to adopt a practice to its routine use.

In this thesis, HR implementation effectiveness is understood as the outcome of the HR implementation process, i.e. the quality of implementation (similar to the fourth stage of the HR implementation process in Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). The quality of the routine use, which can range from nonuse to committed use, is considered as implementation effectiveness (Klein & Sorra, 1996). Therefore, following Klein and Sorra (1996), HR implementation can be considered as *effective* when the adopted HR practice is used *skillfully*, *consistently* and *committedly* by the organizational actors involved with the practice. Effective implementation can also be seen as when the implemented practice is similar to the formulated/intended one, i.e. minimizing the intended-implemented gap. But considering effective implementation as skillful, consistent and committed use would

also cover this concern since skillful use has the connotation of being able to implement the practice as planned according to its design. Whether or not the whole implementation process and outcome have resulted in employee satisfaction can be considered as *HR effectiveness* (Guest & Peccei, 1994; Tsui, 1987). In other words, implementation can be effective but it might not lead to HR effectiveness. But on the other hand, if an HR practice is not implemented effectively, for sure it will result in employee dissatisfaction and hence no HR effectiveness.

Taking the aforementioned aspects into consideration, Figure 1 presents the model proposed for how HR implementation and its effectiveness are understood in this thesis.
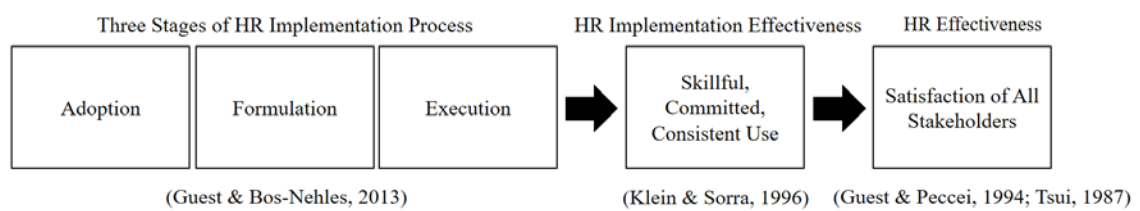
Figure 1 - A model for HR implementation and its effectiveness

This model is consistent with the process-based view of HRM. As mentioned earlier, this perspective focuses on how employees attach meaning to HRM when they try to explain the relationship between HRM and firm performance (Sanders et al., 2014) and the different understanding of employees and managers lead to different individual and organizational outcomes (Sanders & Yang, 2016). When applying this view to HR implementation, which is known to be an HRM process (Sanders et al., 2014), since there are multiple actors involved, the meaning that each of the actors attach to the new HR practice at each of the stages of the implementation would be different. Hence, there is the potential that the intended-implemented gap emerges. Moreover, conceptualizing HR implementation as shown in Figure 1, would help disentangle and analyze the actors and elements that affect the implementation success.

1.2   Overarching framework

Addressing the overarching research objective of this thesis, it can be seen that despite the relevance and importance of effective implementation of HR practices (Bondarouk et al., 2016), given that it is seen as a necessary condition to link HRM and firm performance (Woodrow & Guest, 2014), the HR implementation field lacks providing an organized set of findings regarding its antecedents. As a response to this situation, the first step is to address the following research question:

What factors contribute to the effective implementation of HR practices?

Therefore, as the first study of this thesis, a literature review is conducted to identify these antecedents.

Evident from the findings of the literature review in the first study, organizational actors play crucial roles in HR implementation and its effectiveness. This is in accordance with the conceptualization of a multi-actor HR implementation process introduced earlier. The importance of the multiple actors involved in the process led to the second concern of this thesis, which is having a multi-actor perspective and addressing the following question:

How do involved actors impact HR implementation and its effectiveness?

Trying to address this question, scholars have mainly focused on examining the role of line managers (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), considering them the agents who directly impact employees' perception (Townsend, Wilkinson, Allan, & Bamber, 2012). Later, the focus shifted to dyadic relations, considering more actors when looking at HR implementation (Bondarouk, Looise, & Lempsink, 2009; Bos-Nehles, van Riemsdijk, & Looise, 2013). Recently, there has been an emphasis on including more actors (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016) and, more specifically, there have been some studies considering various actors when looking at HR implementation (Najeeb, 2013; Stanton, Young, Bartram, & Leggat, 2010).

Within multi-actor perspective, it is interesting to note that the multiple actors participating in the HR implementation process are interdependent (Thompson, 1967). Interdependencies include power relations among actors, i.e. when one actor depends on the other, the other actor has power over the dependent actor (Emerson, 1962). In addition, considering implementation of a new HR practice as a change in organizations, it is prone to resistance and political implications, where again power emerges (Hardy, 1996). Therefore, power dynamics among the actors who are involved in HR implementation indeed affect the implementation of HR practices and its effectiveness. In order to address this concern, the second study considers all the actors who are involved in HR implementation process and empirically analyzes their interactions in terms of power dynamics, by looking at *how these actors, with their power relations, influence the HR implementation effectiveness*. In order to analyze power, the power dimensions used by Hardy (1996) and Sheehan, De Cieri, Cooper, and Brooks (2014) are applied, as these dimensions are used in the context of change management and HR implementation.

Different organizational actors have different dimensions and degrees of power when it comes to HR implementation, and CEOs seem to be among the most powerful ones.

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Being powerful makes them also a dominant force in HR implementation. This is consistent with upper echelons theory that sees organizational outcomes as the reflection of the values and cognitive bases of powerful actors in organizations (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). However, most studies have predominantly been concerned with line managers as the main actors who impact HR implementation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gilbert, Winne, & Sels, 2015; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Vermeeren, 2014). Despite the importance of line managers, the role of other actors, and especially CEOs, are largely neglected (Boada-Cuerva, Trullen, & Valverde, 2018; Steffensen, Ellen III, Wang, & Ferris, 2019). Consequently, the third study of this thesis delves into the role of CEOs in the HR implementation process deepening into *how CEOs influence the HR implementation process* and exploring its underlying mechanisms.

In order to provide an overview of the thesis, the overarching research objective, together with the subsequent research questions, are provided in Table 1. Figure 2 depicts the overall framework of the thesis.

Table 1 - Overarching research objective and respective studies

Overarching Research Objective	Study
How can HR practices be implemented effectively?	
• What factors contribute to the effective implementation of HR practices?	1
• How do involved actors impact HR implementation and its effectiveness?	
o What are the power dynamics among the involved actors in HR implementation and how do these power dynamics influence HR implementation effectiveness?	2
o How do CEOs influence the HR implementation process?	3

This thesis contributes to the HR implementation literature in various ways. First, it presents a model for HR implementation and its effectiveness, differentiating HR implementation process from HR implementation outcome, clarifying what is meant by effective HR implementation. Second, by means of a literature review, it highlights and classifies factors that may jointly contribute to more effective implementation. Understanding the introduction of a new practice as a change process, it classifies factors into content, context and process antecedents. Third, focusing on the process-based view and the actors who are the source of variability in HR implementation, this thesis explains the power dynamics among these actors by providing the power dimensions of each in the implementation of various HR practices. Fourth, this thesis uncovers the role of CEOs in the HR implementation process and sheds light on this specific actor, who has been missing in the HR implementation literature. Finally, this thesis shows the importance of having a process-based view and multi-actor perspective by depicting the role of multiple

actors who are involved in HR implementation and how they influence the process and fate of HR implementation in organizations.
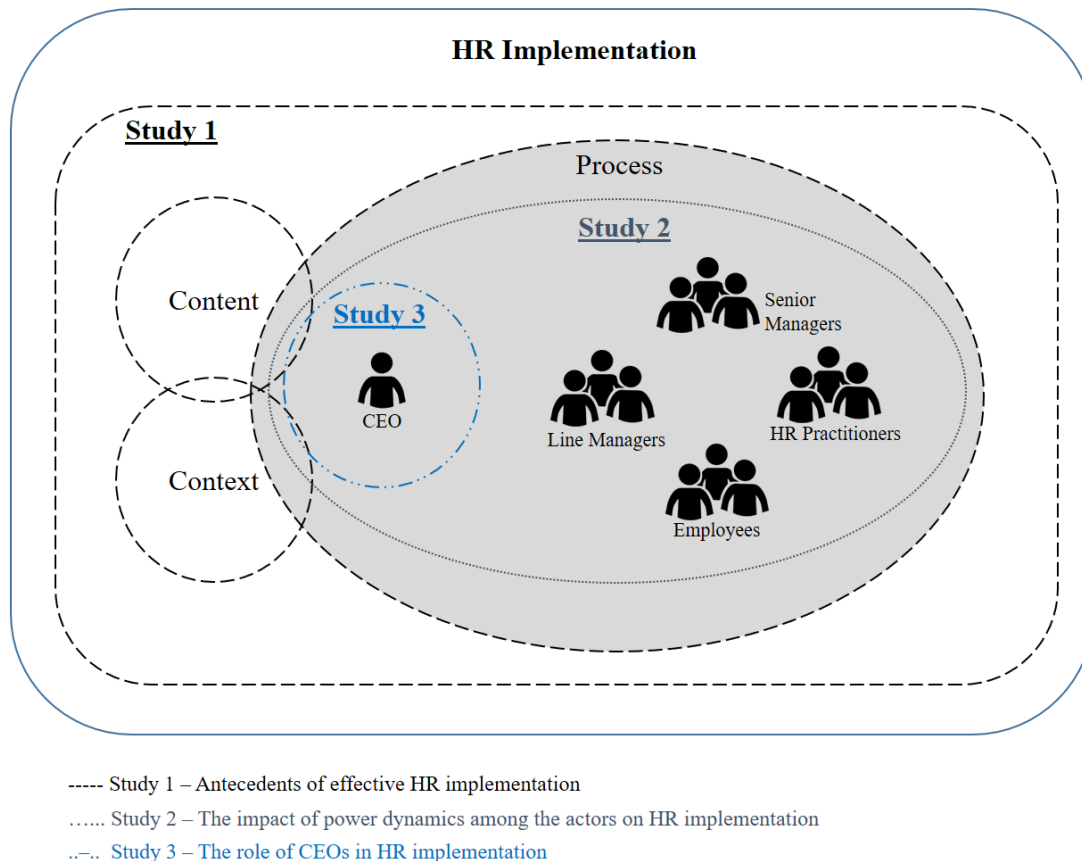
Figure 2 - The overall framework of the thesis

1.3   Structure of the thesis

This thesis is a compendium of three essays, where each is presented as its own chapter (2, 3, and 4). It is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 addresses the first research question and provides a literature review on the antecedents influencing effective HR implementation. Using Pettigrew's (1985, 1987) framework from the change management literature, this chapter presents a model in which the identified antecedents are grouped into *content*, *context*, and *process* antecedents. Moreover, this review emphasizes that HR implementation is a legitimate field of research. It also provides a roadmap for future research in HR implementation. This chapter is titled as "Easier said than done: A review of antecedents influencing effective HR implementation" and is published in the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (IF: 2.425, Q2 in Management) with Dr. Jordi Trullen and Dr. Mireia Valverde in 2018.

Chapter 3, entitled "Power dimensions and implementation of HR practices", focuses on the second research question and looks at the role of the various actors involved in the implementation process of HR practices. Having a multi-actor perspective and using a multiple comparative case study approach, this study looks at the power dimensions of each of the actors involved in the implementation process of different HR practices and how these power dimensions impact the effectiveness of HR implementation.

Chapter 4 addresses the second research question by using upper echelons theory and the process-based approach. This chapter, by taking advantage of a natural shock (i.e. a CEO moving from one subsidiary of a holding group to another) and also using a multiple comparative case study approach, looks at the role of CEOs and how they impact the different stages of the HR implementation process. This study, which is entitled "My way or the highway: The role of CEOs in HR implementation", is intended to be submitted to *Human Resource Management* (IF: 2.474, Q2 in Management, FT50). The data for chapters 3 and 4 are collected from two subsidiaries of a holding group by conducting 50 interviews. Different questions are asked in the interviews for each of the two studies as these studies look at different issues.

Chapter 5 presents a general conclusion of this thesis and provides the theoretical contribution, managerial implications, limitations, and avenues for future research based on the studies presented in this thesis. Finally, the references used in all chapters are presented together at the end.

A list of the chapters, studies, and the status of their publication, as well as the conferences in which they have been presented is provided in Table 2. An earlier version of the thesis was also presented at the EURAM Doctoral Colloquium (June 18th & 19th 2018, Reykjavik, Iceland). The current status of this thesis and its component chapters represents the result of incorporating the feedback and comments received in these conferences and research seminar sessions in different universities where the chapters have been presented.

Table 2 - Summary of the status of the chapters and conferences attended

Chapter	Title	Publication Status	Conferences Presented
2	Easier said than done: A review of antecedents influencing effective HR implementation	Published in *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(22), 3001-3025, 2018	X International Workshop on Human Resource Management, Oct. 27th & 28th 2016, Cadiz, Spain
3	Power dimensions and implementation of HR practices	Under preparation for submission	15th International Human Resource Management Conference, June 13th – 15th 2018, Madrid, Spain 15th Workshop on Research Advances in Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management, May 29th & 30th 2018, Paris, France
4	My way or the highway: The role of CEOs in HR implementation	Intended to be submitted to *Human Resource Management*	EURAM, June 26th – 28th 2019, Lisbon, Portugal XI International Workshop on Human Resource Management, Oct. 25th & 26th 2018, Seville, Spain

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Easier Said Than Done:
A Review of Antecedents Influencing
Effective HR Implementation[1]

Despite the importance of effective implementation of HR policies and practices for the achievement of HR outcomes, this remains an area of research to which HR scholars have paid limited attention, without a clear conceptualization of constructs and a lack of consolidation of research findings. Moreover, the field does not avail of an organized corpus of knowledge to guide how to accomplish the successful implementation of HR practices. As a response to this situation, the present study provides a review of empirically grounded evidences about antecedents that can influence effective HR implementation. With

In this chapter, the number of figure is changed from Figure 1 to Figure 3 to be consistent with the numbering of other figures in the thesis.

the results of the review, we generate a model that organizes the elements identified according to content, context and process, and that proposes relationships among them. The study also delineates much-needed avenues for further research on this topic, and constitutes a first step to claim attention for the phenomenon of HR implementation among HR scholars.

2.1 Introduction

The topic of HR implementation has increasingly attracted the attention of HR scholars for over a decade. Indeed, research has shifted from a predominant focus on the content of HR policies and practices and its relationship with performance (Becker & Huselid, 1998; Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005; Huselid, 1995) towards more fine-grained explanations of how such relationship comes about, namely, towards efforts to understand HR processes (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). While this is not the only approach that has been taken to better understand the so-called HRM black box, it is arguably a significant one, which focuses on the effectiveness of HR practices and their implementation (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). A process oriented perspective acknowledges the multi-level and multi-gap nature of HRM, as practices designed at corporate level may be different from those implemented across the organization, which in turn may be different from those experienced by employees (Makhecha, Srinivasan, Prabhu, & Mukherji, 2018). It follows that it is not enough to study the content of HR policies if we want to understand their relationship with outcomes (Marescaux, De Winne, & Sels, 2013).

Indeed, there is some empirical evidence showing that effective HR implementation mediates the relationship between HR practices and outcomes such as employee satisfaction or firm performance (Chow, 2012; Khilji & Wang, 2006). In addition, there is also evidence that failures in the implementation processes may result in counterproductive results, even when practices are well designed (Woodrow & Guest, 2014). More importantly, a recent simulation study (Lee & Puranam, 2016) showed that even when strategies are imperfect, their effective implementation could have a positive impact on the organization by means of feedback-related learning. Thus, we know that effective implementation is conducive to positive results for employees and the company. Yet, there is not a corpus of knowledge in the field

that tells us how to go about achieving a successful implementation of such practices.

Despite the increasing relevance of the HR implementation field, there are, as noted in the call for papers to this special issue (Bondarouk et al., 2016), several signs pointing at the unripe nature of this field. First, there is still a great deal of confusion around what HR implementation means. Some refer to it as a process (Bondarouk, Looise, et al., 2009), while others as an end result (Khilji & Wang, 2006); some focus on line managers as implementers (Sikora & Ferris, 2014) while others acknowledge a variety of organizational members (Bondarouk, Looise, et al., 2009); some consider behaviors as proxies for implementation (Björkman & Lervik, 2007) while others include employees' experiences and attitudes (Khilji & Wang, 2006); finally, some see it as an emergent and circular process (Raja, Green, & Leiringer, 2010), while others define it as having a set of beginning and end stages (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). More importantly, most of the studies addressing HR implementation issues rarely provide an explicit definition of the phenomenon, whose meaning is often taken for granted, despite the fact that implicit meanings may and often do vary.

Second, and connected with the above, there is a lack of consolidation and integration in research on HR implementation. Extant HRM research addressing implementation often subordinates its discussion to that of other more central function-based topics. This can be observed in a variety of studies where, despite the relevance that implementation or process issues hold in the analysis, the articles' contributions remain in content related HRM literatures such as reduced-load work arrangements (Friede, Kossek, Lee, & Macdermid, 2008), workplace learning (Clarke, 2006), performance appraisals (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013), self-managing teams (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009), pay for performance (Haga, Richman, & Leavitt, 2010), HRM information systems (Kossek, Young, Gash, & Nichol, 1994; McCullough & Sims, 2012), age diversity policies (Riach, 2009), etc. As a result, there are only a few studies that consistently attempt to build on the HR implementation literature (Bos-Nehles, Bondarouk, & Labrenz, 2017; Makhecha et al., 2018; Trullen, Stirpe, Bonache, & Valverde, 2016; Woodrow & Guest, 2014).

The lack of a clear definition of HR implementation and the subordinate role that it often takes in current studies make it difficult for researchers to build on each other's work and contribute to create a very fragmented field. This applies both to the more conceptual aspects of the topic as well as to the dynamics of

its good practices. This is unfortunate given the relevance that this topic holds for organizations and for HRM research, which has been acknowledged for a long time (Gratton & Truss, 2003; Purcell, 1999; Truss, 2001). It is against this background that the present research needs positioning. While it is beyond the scope of our study to contribute with a definition of HR implementation, we do need to anchor our study on a specific conceptualization of this phenomenon. In this regard, we align with Klein and Sorra's (1996) processual definition for implementation of organizational innovations. These authors understand implementation as "the transition period during which targeted organizational members ideally become increasingly skillful, consistent, and committed in their use of an innovation" (p. 1057), which in the context of our research refers to a new HR policy or practice.

On the basis of this conceptualization, we review extant work on HR implementation in order to address a particularly relevant research question, which is of interest both to practitioners and researchers in the field. Specifically we ask: *What factors contribute to the effective implementation of HR policies and practices?* Thus, the objective of this paper is to explore the antecedents that influence the success of implementation processes.

The rationale for this question is that, while we know about the positive consequences of effective implementation for organizational outcomes (Chow, 2012) and the negative consequences that inadequate implementation may trigger (Woodrow & Guest, 2014), very little is known about the properties that such process needs to have for it to be developed effectively, that is with the involved members using the policy appropriately, committedly, and consistently.

In connection with responding to this research question, this paper also aims, on one hand, to highlight the area of HR implementation as a legitimate field of research and a relevant sub discipline within HRM, and on the other, to provide a clear roadmap for those interested in carrying out new and relevant HR implementation research.

2.2 Methodology

Given the incipient state of HR implementation as a field of study, with scattered and non-integrated contributions as stated above, we decided to carry out a scoping review in order to address our research question. While a scoping review needs to be as well documented, transparent, and thus entirely

reproducible as any type of systematic review (Booth, Sutton, & Papaioannou, 2016), it differs from the more narrowly defined systematic literature reviews in several aspects (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016; Wilson, Petticrew, Calnan, & Nazareth, 2010). First, research questions in a systematic review tend to be highly specific, focusing on a narrower range of quality assessed studies, while a scoping review is more likely to address a broader research question without placing so much emphasis in a comparative analysis of the studies' methodologies. Second, the latter usually focuses on a well-defined question where appropriate study designs may be identified in advance, whereas the former addresses broader topics that allow for a variety of study designs (e.g. quantitative, qualitative, experimental, conceptual, etc.) (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). While scoping reviews are sometimes used as a previous step towards a systematic review, they can also be considered stand-alone projects, especially in areas that are complex and have not been previously reviewed, as in this case. The purposes of stand-alone scoping reviews are to explore how much literature exists and to examine its characteristics (Booth et al., 2016), to summarize and disseminate research findings, as well as to identify current gaps in the literature, which are precisely the goals of the present study. In carrying out a scoping review, there are several steps to be followed, namely, identifying the research question, identifying relevant studies, study selection, and data analysis, which should be accomplished before reporting the results. These are now explained in the remaining methodology subsections.

2.2.1 Identifying relevant studies

As stated in the introduction, our research question enquires about the factors that contribute to the effective implementation of HR policies and practices. We defined our search of relevant studies on the basis of this question. In order to be as thorough as possible, the search strategy used was to include all ranked journals published in English that might include papers related to our topic of interest. Hence, following the Journal Citations Report database, we included all twenty-five journals in the "Industrial Relations & Labor" category, eight HRM-related journals in "Applied Psychology", and ten HRM-related journals from the "Management" category. In addition, we also selected the first ten general management journals in the field of "Management" with the highest 5-year impact factors (although we discarded "MIS Quarterly" and "Journal of Operations Management" given their explicit focus on information systems and operations). Given that some journals appeared in more than one category, after excluding overlaps, our final list consisted of 42 journals.

Our next step was to use a variety of search terms that could account for the diversity of studies addressing HR implementation issues. We used the following keywords in the Business Source Premier database: "human resource management implementation", "human resource implementation", "HR implementation", "HR" AND "implementation", "HRM implementation", "HRM" AND "implementation", "HR" AND "line manager", "HR" AND "supervisor", "HR" AND "actual", "HR" AND "intended", and "HR" AND "rhetoric". In the advanced search option, we used "Boolean/Phrase" as the search mode and we used the Boolean combination mentioned in the previous step without adding any restrictions such as "title or abstract only". We also set the publication mode to "Academic Journal". Then we added another restriction, the "Publication" section, where we marked the 42 journals from which we wanted to have our sample of papers. This Boolean combination search resulted in a total of 259 papers ranging from years 1983 to 2016.

2.2.2 Study selection

Given the broad search that was performed, as expected, many of the articles that were retrieved did not in fact relate to our research question. Following a common practice in scoping reviews, we devised post hoc (rather than ex ante) inclusion/exclusion criteria based on our research question and our increased familiarity with the literature. In particular, we excluded 1) studies that dealt with implementation processes that were not related to HR policies or practices (for example, papers on implementation of IT projects or large scale corporate change programs, etc.), 2) studies that referred to the implementation of HR practices but used the word "implementation" merely as a synonym for "adoption" (for example, Bonavia and Marin-Garcia (2011) refer to the implementation of HR practices in lean production systems, but their study focuses on the relationship between the adoption of a set of high commitment HR practices and organizational performance) and 3) studies whose focus was exclusively on devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers with no connection with implementation processes per se. We added this third exclusion criterion because our Boolean combination, which included the terms "HR" AND "line managers", had picked up many papers discussing devolution of HR practices. Excluded studies from this criterion treated topics such as the different rationales for devolving HR responsibilities to the line, what practices were devolved and which ones remained centralized, the effects of devolution on the strategic character of the HR function, etc., but did not refer to implementation.

After deciding on the exclusion criteria, the three authors used these criteria to review 50 random abstracts. In case of disagreements among the three authors, the reasoning of each author was checked based on the criteria again and finally consensus was reached. This iteration process helped us develop a shared perception on what articles to exclude. Hence, the rest of abstracts were reviewed exclusively by the first author, who consulted the other authors in some particularly difficult cases. In the end, our final sample included 62 papers meeting the criteria, ranging from years 1993 to 2017. It is critical to highlight that, among these 62 papers, only 13 were centrally devoted to HR implementation and intended to make their main contribution in terms of examining conditions and ways of successfully implementing HR practices. This explains some of the difficulties encountered in the process of making the final selection of papers and, more importantly, it also corroborates our initial assessment of the subordinate role that the topic of HR implementation occupies in the literature, as indicated in the introduction.

2.2.3 Data analysis

In scoping reviews, the analysis of the different studies involves applying a common analytical framework that allows comparing findings from studies with different designs and research questions. In the case of the present study, we started out with a basic conceptual framework extracted from the organizational change literature (Pettigrew, 1985, 1987; Walsham, 1992). We decided to choose this framework for two main reasons. First, it was broad enough to be useful in analyzing such a heterogeneous literature, and flexible enough to allow for its inductive refinement on the basis of our findings. Second, implementation processes are arguably a crucial aspect in the organizational change literature and hence frameworks used in this literature can be easily translated to the context of our research.

The framework is based on the classic work of Andrew Pettigrew on strategic change (Pettigrew, 1985, 1987), which emphasizes the relevance of the interplay between context and process in understanding change. Pettigrew (1987) criticized previous research on change as mostly ahistorical, aprocessual, and acontextual. His ideas on change were partly motivated by his own background in anthropology and sociology, and developed through his in-depth longitudinal study of strategic change at the chemical company ICI (Pettigrew, 1985). He distinguished three main aspects of change (Pettigrew, 1987, p. 657), namely, content (i.e. the "particular areas of transformation"), process (i.e. "actions, reactions, and interactions of […] interested parties"), and context (i.e.

"social, economic, political, and competitive"), and argued that these were interrelated. Pettigrew (1987) further argued for the need to study context at different levels of analysis (e.g. external and internal to the firm), and emphasized the need to look at the interplay of both cultural and political factors in explaining change. In his own words, "the 'what' of change is encapsulated under the label content, much of the 'why' of change is derived from an analysis of inner and outer context, and the 'how' of change can be understood from an analysis of process" (Pettigrew, 1987, p. 658). From this vantage point, change is not a linear process but rather an iterative and muddled one where "power, chance and opportunism are as influential in shaping outcomes as are design, negotiated agreements and masterplans" (Walsham, 1992, p. 2). Translating this preliminary conceptual model within the specific domain of HR implementation, it follows that the extent to which an HR practice is effectively implemented will depend on the type and characteristics of the practice being introduced (content), the pre-introduction conditions that will be encountered when adopting the new practice (context), and the actions that different organizational actors may adopt during its implementation (process).

In terms of data analysis, it is also important to mention that most of the papers analyzed (with some exceptions, such as Bos-Nehles, van Riemsdijk, and Looise, 2013) did not directly assess implementation effectiveness. Most of the studies included in this review describe different aspects of the implementation process, and connect these with different elements of HR implementation effectiveness, overall HR effectiveness or generally positive HR outcomes, rather than implementation effectiveness per se as defined in the introduction, or its operationalization. Hence, implementation effectiveness as such is often an implicit idea. As a result, when analyzing the different studies, we looked for implementation-related factors that were associated with any of the overall measures of HR effectiveness (such as satisfaction with HR practices, employee engagement, or performance) rather than with specifically operationalized implementation effectiveness itself, in line with our research question.

We began by individually open coding the different antecedents in ten studies, and initially linking them to our preliminary framework. We then met to compare our coding schemes and combine them in a list of more specific themes or factors. We then proceeded with the next ten and met again to further refine it. Then we coded the rest of studies individually, using the same thematic codes. Inter-rater reliability was .77 (Klenke (2008) considers .80 to be a high level of reliability). Finally, we reviewed all cases where there were

disagreements, which, in most cases, were in fact omissions rather than disagreements of a factor into a code, i.e. a study may have proposed various factors that affect the success of the implementation process, and one researcher may have overlooked one of those.

2.3 Results: Antecedents of effective implementation

As discussed in the methodology section, we explain our findings on antecedents of effective HR implementation by distinguishing factors related to the content of HR practices, the context in which they are being introduced, and the process carried out to implement them. When necessary, we further refine this initial classification.

2.3.1 Content antecedents

Although it has been recently suggested that the process of implementation of new practices may be even more important than their actual content (Lee & Puranam, 2016), in this section we address what the literature has noted as characteristics that HR practices should have in order to be implemented more effectively. Several authors point at HR practices' user-friendliness as a clear facilitator of implementation (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Kim & O'Connor, 2009; Morris, 1996; Ng & Maki, 1993; Parry & Tyson, 2011), although what is meant by "user-friendliness" is not always clear (Khilji & Wang, 2006). In a large survey on HR practices used in manufacturing Canadian firms, Ng and Maki (1993) found that respondents stated their preferences for simple (or easy-to-understand) HRM techniques. For instance, they preferred to use simple performance appraisal methods based on productivity or absenteeism data (i.e. direct indices) rather than other more sophisticated systems. We find other examples of failed implementation attempts that are due to the excessive complexity of HR initiatives. For example, Haga et al. (2010) described the failed introduction of a pay for performance system in the American Defense Department and concluded that employees were dissatisfied "with the new system, which was viewed with suspicion as being overly complex by design, obscure and subject to manipulation" (p. 221).

It is worth noting, however, that whether or not a new HR system is user-friendly is not necessarily the most important aspect to take into account when designing new policies. First, different actors (e.g. line managers and employees) may disagree on whether a system is more or less easy to use, and secondly, even if actors agree on its ease of use, this may not necessarily be

related to its overall HR effectiveness (Bondarouk, Ruël, & van der Heijden, 2009). Moreover, some HR practices may be highly complex by nature or necessity. However, especially in the e-HRM literature (Kim & O'Connor, 2009; Marler, Fisher, & Ke, 2009; Parry & Tyson, 2011; Ruta, 2005), there is agreement on user-friendliness and ease-of-use being predictors of e-HRM use or intention to use, especially in the early stages of the implementation process (Marler et al., 2009).

In addition to user-friendliness, there is little emphasis in the literature on HR design, and this is so despite the fact that the quality of HR practices to be implemented is arguably an important aspect of any implementation process (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Maybe the only other notable exception is in the context of work on diversity, which has shown that diversity initiatives in the workplace are more successfully implemented when designed in ways that are inclusive rather than exclusive (Riach, 2009; Ryan & Kossek, 2008). As noted by these authors, particularistic policies aimed only at specific groups may end up increasing negative stereotyping, serving as barriers to those that are being excluded. This, in turn, may create higher resistance during implementation.

2.3.2   Context antecedents
In this subsection, we review how the characteristics of the context where an implementation process takes place may affect its subsequent success. We thus refer to factors that already exist in the organization when the implementation process is due to start. We were able to identify three main types of contextual antecedents and to arrange them according to the level at which they were operating: macro, including factors related to the structural characteristics of the organization as a whole; mezzo, related to organization-wide dynamics and characteristics; and micro, referring to factors that depend on specific individuals.

2.3.2.1   Macro context
The process of implementing a new HR policy varies largely depending on the type of organizational setting. For example, achieving success in an HR implementation process in an SME entails very different challenges from those faced in a multi-national corporation. It has been argued that because of the more informal and flexible environment found in SMEs (as opposed to large firms), HR practices may be taken less seriously and find more resistance (Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). At the other extreme, implementing certain HR practices in large multinational corporations will bring about altogether

different difficulties: since they are dealing with different nations and consequently different cultures, cross-cultural and cross-national issues will pose a number of other challenges (Hannon, Jelf, & Brandes, 1996). Therefore, taking these cultural and national differences into consideration might help implementing HR practices more effectively.

The type of industry in which the firm operates may also affect the implementation of HR policies. For example, Parry and Tyson (2011) found that e-HRM was implemented successfully in IT-based organizations, where employees were familiar with technology. In a different example, Gilliland and Schepers (2003) argued that several aspects of how layoffs were carried out, such as the amount of information that was shared with the employee or the method of communication, were influenced by the type of industry, although their hypothesis was only partially supported.

2.3.2.2 Mezzo context
In this level we include aspects such as organizational culture and climate (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009; Friede et al., 2008; Stirpe, Bonache, & Trullen, 2015) and pre-existing organizational policies (Currie & Procter, 2003; Gilliland & Schepers, 2003; Khilji & Wang, 2006; Morris, 1996). We find that organizational cultures that are supportive of HRM (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Parkes, Scully, West, & Dawson, 2007; Sikora & Ferris, 2014) lead to more effective implementation of practices. For example, Dewettinck and Vroonen (2016) showed a positive association between a performance oriented culture and front line managers' enactment of performance appraisal activities. In another study, Woodrow and Guest (2014) showed how poor implementation of anti-bullying policies in NHS hospitals were partly the result of subunit cultures that remained unsupportive and pointed at other priorities such as the treatment of patients.

Organizational climate and shared perceptions at the firm level (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) also influence HR practices implementation. Sikora and Ferris (2014) proposed that an implementation-focused organizational climate that emphasized goals and rewards of HR practice implementation was associated with higher managers' involvement in the implementation process. Stirpe et al. (2015) found in turn that a stronger organizational innovation climate resulted in greater acceptance of new HR practices by employees. Finally, Farndale and Kelliher (2013) showed, in the context of implementation of performance appraisal, that a positive unit climate strengthened the relationship between

employees' perceptions of fair treatment and affective commitment.

Another crucial aspect of this mezzo level consists in the pre-existing policies that the organization has in place when a new HR practice is introduced, and the extent to which these are consistent or inconsistent with the new practice (Currie & Procter, 2003; Khilji & Wang, 2006; Kossek, Ollier-Malaterre, Lee, Pichler, & Hall, 2016; Morris, 1996; Riach, 2009) or even with another policy that is simultaneously being introduced (Raja et al., 2010). For example, Kossek et al. (2016) found that line managers were more inclined to offer reduced workload arrangements to their employees when this did not involve a reduction in the budget assigned to them for supervising employees in their units. In another study on the introduction of team working in the UK public administration, Currie and Procter (2003) showed that pre-existing HR policies, such as the way in which front line managers were selected and trained, had a crucial impact in the overall success of teamwork initiatives.

2.3.2.3 Micro context
While organizational and group level aspects such as culture and climate, or macro aspects such as industry, certainly affect implementation processes, individual characteristics (e.g. personality traits, motivations, skills, etc.) also play a role at the more micro level. We can distinguish among four main actors, namely, front line managers, top managers, employees, and HR professionals.

Line managers' HR skills (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013) and motivation for HR work (McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1997; Nehles, van Riemsdijk, Kok, & Looise, 2006; Trullen et al., 2016) have been shown to influence line managers' HR implementation effectiveness. Line managers' beliefs and attitudes towards the practice being introduced, and especially the practice's perceived instrumentality (McGovern et al., 1997), are crucial because they partially determine line managers' implementation behaviors (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Harris, 2001; Kossek et al., 2016). These perceptions and attitudes may in turn depend on other more general beliefs that these managers have about their jobs or organizations, as well as on their previous experiences (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017). They may also depend on the extent to which they usually feel supported by the organization in carrying out their HR work (McGovern et al., 1997).

But it is not only line managers' characteristics that count, as *top management* beliefs and values, as well as their HR knowledge, also play a role (Arthur,

Herdman, & Yang, 2016; Klaas, Semadeni, Klimchak, & Ward, 2012; Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). For example, Arthur et al. (2016), following upper echelons theory, recently showed that CEOs' HR cause-effect beliefs (that is, beliefs concerning the financial pay-offs of investments in HR) influenced the intensity with which high performance work practices were adopted (as perceived by managers), which in turn influenced HR implementation as perceived by employees. In addition, they also showed that top management's employee-centered value beliefs (defined as the extent to which managers believed that they should take employee welfare into account in making business decisions and to seek out employee input) positively moderated these relationships. In a different study, Klaas et al. (2012) found that the strength of a leader's HR background (understood as the extent to which the leader's experiences allowed him/her to understand the relevance of HR programs and policies and the complexities associated with their use and implementation) positively moderated the impact of high performance work systems on perceived HR effectiveness in a sample of 294 small and medium sized organizations.

In addition to managers, *employees'* characteristics may also influence HR implementation. For example, Friede et al. (2008) found that employees' characteristics, and in particular, their ability to regulate their work habits to meet their goals, was a crucial aspect of successful implementation of reduced work load arrangements, according to the HR professionals they interviewed. In another study, Piening, Baluch, and Ridder (2014) found that employees' previous experiences with HRM within their organizations shaped their expectations about HR practices, which in turn also affected the way they made sense of HR implementation processes. This is important because employees' sensemaking of HR practices has been shown to mediate the effect of HR practices on relevant outcomes such as affective commitment and in-role performance (Sanders & Yang, 2016; Tremblay, Cloutier, Simard, Chênevert, & Vandenberghe, 2010). Finally, Meijerink, Bondarouk, and Lepak (2016) recently showed how employees' experiences of HRM (in particular of HRM shared service centers) were dependent on their pre-existing HRM competencies, which influenced the way in which they "consumed" and "co-produced" these services. Such competences were in turn acquired through previous experience with shared service centers. Both the Piening et al. (2014) and the Meijerink et al. (2016) studies point at the importance of employees' previous experiences with HRM, which affect implementation outcomes by

shaping both employees' expectations and abilities.

Finally, *HR professionals'* characteristics may also play a role in achieving a successful implementation process, especially when they are directly responsible for implementing practices. HR professionals' demographics (e.g. academic background, years of experience), personality characteristics and beliefs may affect the types of information sources they pay attention to when making HRM decisions about the introduction of HR policies (Terpstra, Mohamed, & Rozell, 1996). There is also empirical evidence showing that HR professionals' previous experiences with the introduction of HR policies shape their attitudes towards them, and hence their implementation. For example, Harrington, Rayner, and Warren (2012) showed how HR professionals' previous negative experiences with bullying cases, as well as the existence of strong ties with line managers, predisposed them against acting on employees' bullying claims, hence avoiding the effective implementation of this important policy. In addition to individual differences linked to personality, attitudes, or beliefs, there is also evidence that certain aspects associated to HR professionals' position within the social context of their organizations may also influence implementation effectiveness. For example, Najeeb (2013) showed that HR professionals' social capital within the organization helped them to mobilize both senior and front line managers' support for their initiatives. In another study, Stirpe, Trullen, and Bonache (2013) found that differences in the perceived credibility of the HR department affected the extent to which employees were satisfied with the introduction of new HR practices. Finally, Wolfe (1995) argued, based on qualitative data, that HR practices were more likely to be implemented successfully when the "champion" of the new practice held more power within the organization.

2.3.3 *Process antecedents*
In addition to the content of the practices and the existing pre-introduction conditions that will be encountered when introducing a new practice (context), another crucial aspect of any implementation process has to do with the actions taken by different organizational actors as the implementation unfolds, as such actions may facilitate or impede the successful completion of the implementation process. Thus, in this section we deal with such processes.

Although a variety of actions can be identified in the literature such as communication, training, resourcing, etc., we classify them in two main blocks: sensegiving and support. Different organizational members -such as HR

professionals, senior management, and supervisors- may try to shape each other's interpretations as well as those of employees with regards to the adoption of a new HR policy or practice. In addition, these different actors may carry out actions to remove obstacles and incentivize the use of such practices. In this way, organizational members will attempt to shape the cultural and political context surrounding the introduction of the HR practice (Pettigrew, 1987; Walsham, 1992).

2.3.3.1 Sensegiving

As in any change process, the introduction of new HR practices is fertile ground for sensemaking and sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), as different organizational actors attempt to make sense and shape each other's interpretations of the new practice, such as why it needs to be introduced and what implications it holds for them and for others.

Stavrou and Ierodiakonou (2016) showed that the mutual alignment of expectations between line managers and employees regarding the use of a particular HR policy mattered more for HR effectiveness than the presence of the actual practice itself, and concluded that line managers needed to act as "expectation handlers", maintaining a good level of communication with employees. HR practitioners may also positively impact the implementation process by keeping a positive relationship and high quality communication with HR stakeholders, especially managers (Klaas et al., 2012; Ryan & Kossek, 2008; Stone & Lukaszewski, 2009). This can increase line managers' awareness of the HR practice and foster a shared interpretation of the practice's purpose by both HR practitioners and line managers (Bondarouk, Looise, et al., 2009; Morris, 1996; Prottas, Thompson, Kopelman, & Jahn, 2007), which in turn may increase line managers' motivation to use it. For example, in a recent study, Trullen and Valverde (2017) showed that involving line managers in the development of HR practices increased the chances of successful implementation, as this allowed these managers to "own" the process and make better sense of it. They also showed that looking for credible figures within the organization that could publicly endorse and support the new practice significantly increased the chances of successful implementation, as this increased the legitimacy of the new practice in front of employees.

Last but not least, top management also holds a crucial role in sensegiving. As they do with other types of change, they may provide a vision for the introduction of new policies (Cooke, 2006; McCullough & Sims, 2012). For

example, Stanton, Young, Bartram, and Leggat (2010) observed that CEO's commitment to HR helped create links between organizational strategy and HR strategy, allowing employees to better understand the links between HRM and its outcomes. In another study, Parkes et al. (2007) showed how HR initiatives aimed at increasing employee involvement in NHS hospitals and trusts worked better when there was a clear commitment from senior management, who developed a culture of partnership with trade unions and staff.

2.3.3.2 *Offering support*

While sensegiving is crucial to persuade organizational members to use new practices, sometimes a variety of obstacles such as lack of skills, competing commitments, lack of time, or inconsistent policies may prevent organizational members from implementing HR practices (McGovern et al., 1997). Hence, support is needed to remove such obstacles and create a strong implementation climate. Support may involve a variety of actions aimed at increasing targets' abilities (e.g. training), motivation (e.g. incentives), and opportunities (e.g. clear accountability) to implement new practices.

Line managers in general and supervisors in particular have a crucial role in that respect because of their proximity with employees, which may significantly shape employees' experiences of HR practices (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Vermeeren, 2014). Indeed, employees' experiences of HR systems are crucially shaped by whether they feel that their supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). Line managers may also support the implementation of a new practice more directly by encouraging employees to incorporate it in their daily work or creating internal norms that support their use (Ryan & Kossek, 2008; Stirpe et al., 2013).

In addition to line managers, HR professionals may also take a variety of initiatives to support line managers' and employees' efforts in using HR practices (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Trullen et al., 2016). For example, they may initiate different types of training (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Clarke, 2006; Cunningham & Hyman, 1995). They may also provide support by being accessible to line managers and employees, answering their queries when necessary (Evans, 2017; McCullough & Sims, 2012; Najeeb, 2013; Trullen et al., 2016), clarifying responsibilities during implementation (Evans, 2017; Makhecha et al., 2018; McGovern et al., 1997), and providing a clear plan or route map (Gilliland & Schepers, 2003; Haga et al., 2010; McCullough & Sims, 2012). It is being argued, though, that any detailed planning should also be

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flexible enough to allow line managers some leeway in adapting it to their local contexts (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Currie & Procter, 2001; Morris, 1996; Ryan & Kossek, 2008), while allowing HR practitioners to monitor the process (Friede et al., 2008; Makhecha et al., 2018). Finally, HR practitioners may also offer support and increase line managers' motivation by providing incentives (Harris, 2001; Hoch & Dulebohn, 2013; McGovern et al., 1997) and more generally by recognizing line managers' efforts towards implementing HR practices (Trullen et al., 2016).

Last but not least, senior management also plays a key role in supporting the introduction of new practices. Several studies show a relationship between line managers' involvement in HR implementation and top management support (Kim & O'Connor, 2009; Kossek et al., 1994; Najeeb, 2013; Parkes et al., 2007; Woodrow & Guest, 2014), and there is some evidence pointing at a positive interaction of these two types of support on employees' responses to HRM (Stanton et al., 2010; Stirpe et al., 2013). McCullough and Sims (2012) described the crucial role played by top management in supporting the implementation of a new HR information management system in a civil service agency in the US. In that particular case, the civil agency Board facilitated effective implementation by offering timely responses to project management critical questions on resource investment and potential risks. Top management can also significantly impact HR implementation effectiveness by securing and investing the needed resources, hence showing their support to line managers and HR professionals on the ground. Several authors have noted the importance of properly funding HR initiatives so that line managers have the necessary resources to carry them out (Kim & O'Connor, 2009; Marler et al., 2009; McCullough & Sims, 2012) and the literature offers several examples of failed implementation attempts that were partly due to line managers' lack of proper resources (McGovern et al., 1997; Quintanilla, Susaeta, & Sánchez-Mangas, 2008; Trullen et al., 2016).

Finally, it is worth noting that not all the literature focuses exclusively on support as a way to overcome resistance to HR implementation. For example, Marler et al. (2009) showed that managerial pressure (exerted from the top) increased intentions to use employee self-service technology. However, pressure will not always help, especially when exerted by other organizational actors with less power within the organization, such as HR professionals (Trullen & Valverde, 2017).

2.4 Discussion

In this final section we reflect on the conclusions that can be drawn from this study: First, we synthesize the results by proposing a model of factors influencing effective HR implementation as identified by the literature to date. We then describe the limitations of the study, develop an agenda for further research and conclude with our contributions and implications for practice.

2.4.1 Model

Figure 3 depicts a model that presents, organizes and relates the factors that contribute to effective HR implementation. Following our original conceptual framework, we argue that content, context and process aspects may affect the effective implementation of HR practices. The ellipsis dots within each box indicate that the model is not exhaustive, and that new factors should be added as the literature on HR implementation develops. This is clearly the case of factors linked to the content of the HR practice. Content elements are underdeveloped vis-à-vis context and process elements, given the lack of attention paid to this particular category. Beyond the user-friendliness of the practice, it is possible to think of other relevant content elements affecting the implementation process, such as the type of practice being adopted and its inherent quality (e.g. whether the practice is designed according to best practice standards), its degree of complexity or even the functional HR area to which it belongs (for example, a performance appraisal policy may be more difficult to implement effectively than a salary information system). But we do not include these factors in our model because they have not yet been addressed in the literature concerning their relationship with implementation effectiveness.

Next to the content of the practices, at the center of the model, appear the different actions that HR actors may undertake to contribute to their effective implementation (process). As shown, different actors such as HR professionals, line managers, and top management mutually influence each other and employees by engaging in sensegiving as well as supporting implementation in a variety of ways (e.g. offering training and incentives, clarifying roles and responsibilities, providing needed resources, etc.). As noted in our analysis, the actions taken by different organizational members do not occur in a vacuum, and macro, mezzo, and micro contextual elements create more or less favorable soils for the implementation of HR practices. At the macro level, we found evidence for the importance of features such as industry and national culture. At the mezzo level, aspects such as the extent to which the organizational culture

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is supportive of HRM, and whether or not there is a favorable organizational or unit climate for implementation also play a role. Finally, the likelihood of resistance increases when new policies clash or are inconsistent with existing ones. At the micro level, the individual characteristics of all actors involved or affected by the implementation of a new policy may also play a relevant role. In particular, two characteristics seem especially relevant, namely, the HR abilities of the different actors, and their previous beliefs and attitudes towards HRM. Finally, actors' relative power vis-à-vis other actors also affect their influence in the implementation process (e.g. HR professionals' social capital and credibility increases the chances that their initiatives are accepted by employees (Najeeb, 2013; Stirpe et al., 2013)).
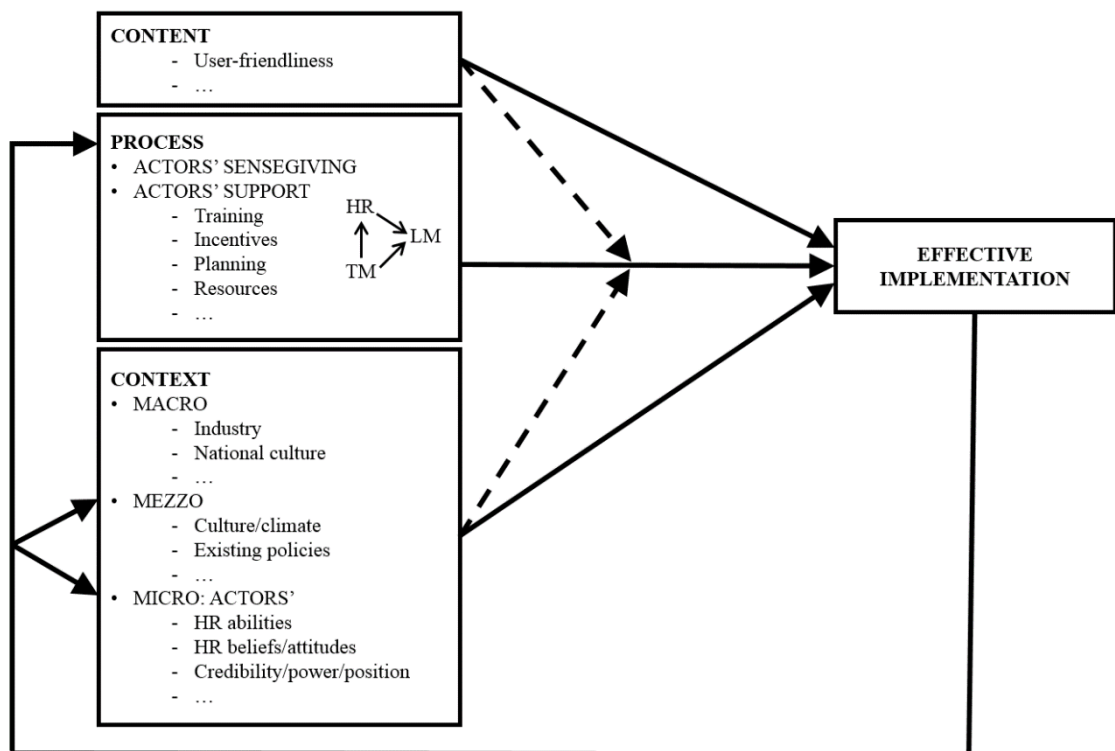
Figure 3 - A model of factors affecting effective HR implementation

It is also worth noting that the model in Figure 3 is dynamic, in the sense that initial contextual conditions (more so at the micro level, but also with time at mezzo level of analysis) are not completely stable and can be affected by the outcomes of subsequent HR implementation processes. Several of the reviewed studies acknowledge that top management' (Klaas et al., 2012), HR professionals' (Terpstra et al., 1996), line managers' (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017), and employees' (Meijerink et al., 2016; Piening et al., 2014) previous

experiences with the introduction of HR policies influence their current beliefs and attitudes, and hence their positive or negative attitudes in the implementation process. Less immediately, other organizational level variables such as organizational culture and climate may also be affected by the more or less successful implementation of previous policies, and particularly by the actions of top management (Stanton et al., 2010). In this sense, some of the antecedents that we have identified as conducing to more effective implementation of HR practices, may in turn be modified by successful implementation processes. The same reasoning applies to process aspects of implementation, although we could not find evidence to support this claim. Hence, whether or not the introduction of new HR practices is successful may also in turn affect the actions and strategies taken by different HR actors in future implementation processes. This dynamic view of context (structure) and process (agency) is also consistent with Pettigrew's (1987) view of change, whose underpinnings are very much based on structuration theory (Giddens, 1979; Ranson, Hinings, & Greenwood, 1980).

While the present study focused on antecedents of effective implementation, a better understanding of implementation processes would require a more refined treatment of the relationships among the different antecedents. We believe that in order to do so, it would be worth starting out thinking about the possible ways in which content, context, and process may interact. The importance of interactions between these different elements has previously been acknowledged both in the organizational change and innovation literatures (Walsham, 1992; Wolfe, 1995). A common argument in these literatures is that context and process elements may have substitutive effects, so that actions taken by HR actors to foster effective implementation may be less needed in contexts that already support or favor HR implementation, and vice versa (Wolfe, 1995). Additionally, process elements may also have greater or lesser significance for implementation effectiveness depending on the content of the practice that is being implemented. One could argue that more complex HR practices (those that, for example, require the coordination of a larger number of actors) would need more communication, training, etc. initiatives than simpler ones to be effectively implemented.

2.4.2 Limitations
Our study is not without limitations. As stated in the methodology section, HR implementation is by and large an underdeveloped field, and this means that it is not yet possible to conduct highly systematic reviews of clearly

operationalized cause-consequence relationships or meta-analysis of results. Also, no matter how thorough we tried to be in choosing the articles, there might be papers that are not included due to our chosen Boolean combination. In addition, the way we have categorized the different predictors of effective implementation can be complemented by other ways of classification. We might have also incurred in a threat to generalizability in some cases, as some papers have studied specific practices and we have generalized those antecedents to all HR policies. Moreover, these different predictors are measured, tested, or hypothesized in different contexts, with different measures and samples (including single case studies) and in different relations for answering different research questions.

2.4.3 Future research

An inspection of Figure 3 and the results of our analysis may be used to identify relevant areas for future research. It is worth noting, for example, the dearth of factors associated to the content of HR practices, mainly due to the lack of available evidence. Hence, a pending question remains whether different content features of HR practices, such as their inherent quality (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013), or other factors, such as their novelty or scope (Wolfe, 1995), may affect implementation outcomes.

Our review also makes evident that the bulk of research on HR implementation has concentrated on two main actors, namely, line managers and HR professionals. While some attention has been paid to the role played by senior management, which is arguably an important one (Guest, 2011), there is still much to explore in this area. In addition, other actors such as consultants, trade unions, or outsourcing vendors, who may also play a role, are for the most part completely ignored in the literature. Last but not least, most research so far has not examined HR implementation as a multi-actor process, focusing instead on single agents or in dyadic relationships (mostly, those of HR professionals and line managers, or line managers with employees). Given the complexity inherent in any implementation process, further research should also address the extent to which multiple actors influence each other simultaneously in the introduction of new policies.

A key line of enquiry for developing knowledge on the factors contributing to successful HR implementation could focus on completing, enlarging and generally enriching Figure 3. This can be done through a number of avenues that could yield results in different areas. One such area is the expansion of the

breadth of the model by incorporating new factors. This could be done with an inductive approach. In this sense, multiple case studies of successful and unsuccessful HR implementations (Stanton et al., 2010; Trullen et al., 2016) taking this model as a baseline could be a useful design. Case studies are also useful for capturing the multilevel and dynamic nature of implementation processes. Another possibly useful inductive approach to complete the breadth of factors in Figure 3 could be to carry out focus groups with practitioners and other stakeholders in the implementation process in order to ask them to fill up current gaps in the list of factors identified to date, thus expanding the model from the perspective of informants who experience the phenomenon. Another area of development of the model would have a more explanatory objective, in which researchers should examine how the factors interact, thus searching for the types of relationships between variables and establish the specific roles that each set of variables may be enacting, such as direct effects, mediation or moderation. Different methodological approaches would be needed for this purpose, mainly quantitative, through survey or even experimental designs.

One of the main challenges faced in carrying out the present study was the fact that, as stated in the introduction, there were few studies that addressed HR implementation directly, and many that did so only indirectly, without providing an explicit definition of what implementation meant or even without specifically attempting to contribute to the HR implementation literature. Different authors often had different interpretations and emphasized different aspects of the implementation process. Hence, an important task for future research is to develop an inclusive conceptual definition of implementation that can be used in further research and help consolidating the field. In the same vein, we call for a much needed definition and, more importantly, operationalization of implementation effectiveness. As stated in our limitations, to compile any sizeable empirical evidence of factors leading to effective implementation, we have had to include articles with various proxies, but a more exact measurement system for the phenomenon would rapidly improve the rigor of future contributions.

Finally, and given that the adoption and implementation of HR practices often involves change at different levels within the organization, we call for more research that builds on organizational change theory (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011) to study HR implementation (see Ruta (2005) as an example). Such research could also build on the wide array of theoretical traditions (e.g. cognitive, culturalist, institutionalist, political,

discursive, etc.) that underpin the change literature (Demers, 2007), and would allow to open new avenues for research on HR implementation.

2.4.4 Contributions and implications

Overall, the present study contributes to the current literature in three main ways. First, it provides a systematic view of empirically grounded evidences about factors that may contribute to effective HR implementation. Second, it clearly delineates avenues for further research on this topic. Third, the study constitutes a first step to reclaim attention for the phenomenon of implementation among HR scholars. While discussions about the relevance of this topic are not new (Gratton & Truss, 2003), and the difference between actual practices and HRM rhetoric has been signified for a long time (Legge, 1995a), there seems to be a lack of conceptual and empirical attention to this phenomenon, which is often perceived as a secondary (and for the most part, non-academic or exclusively practitioner based) aspect of HRM. While this has also occurred in other disciplines such as strategic management (Noble, 1999), significant voices in that field are reclaiming once more a central scholarly role for the study of implementation (Hitt et al., 2017). In the field of HRM, much of the last decade's discussion of the processes (as opposed to HR practice contents) that may explain overall HR effectiveness has been spearheaded by the concept of HRM system strength (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016). While this approach has been pivotal and brought about important insights to the topic, we think, in light of the present review, that other avenues of exploration such as the study of the dynamics of implementation processes per se are not only possible but also much needed.

The present review also has practical implications for HR managers. The factors identified, summarized in the model in Figure 3, can be used as a preliminary checklist that tells those interested in introducing a new HR policy how foreseeably difficult it may be to implement it. Depending on the type and characteristics of the new practice (content), as well as of the pre-introduction conditions (context), practitioners may be directed to take a different set of actions (process). We acknowledge, nonetheless, that at this stage our model is still weak insofar it is not yet fully comprehensive or parsimonious, while the different interactions that it proposes have not been contrasted with large samples. As the elements of aforementioned future research develop, an ultimate goal for the model would be to become a diagnostic tool, able to provide clear indications on how to act in particular contexts given new specific HR policies and practices.

3

Power Dimensions and Implementation of HR Practices

Implementation of HR practices is a challenging process with multiple interdependent actors. These interdependencies, together with political implications that emerge from the process of change, result in power dynamics among the involved actors. Regarding the power dimensions, only those of HR departments have been studied. This is while there are other involved actors (CEO, senior managers, line managers, employees, etc.) whose use of power may shape the implementation of HR practices. This multiple comparative case study focuses on actors' different dimensions of power -systemic, resource, process, and symbolic- in implementation of different HR practices and shows that actors have different dimensions of power and different power dimensions emerge for different HR practices. Moreover, HR departments that have higher systemic power seem to be more successful in HR implementation.

Keywords: HR implementation; power dimensions; HR practices

3.1   Introduction

HR implementation is a challenging process and it is crucial to take its quality and effectiveness into consideration (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013), as not only it affects firm performance, but also influences the well-being of employees (Harrington et al., 2012; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). There are various factors influencing HR implementation. In addition to the *content* of the HR practice to be implemented and the *context* in which it is adopted, Mirfakhar, Trullen, and Valverde (2018) show that effective implementation of HR practices also depends on the *process* through which different involved *actors* give sense or provide support to the implementation. When interacting with one another, these actors influence each other's perceptions, hence each other's attitudes (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008) and behaviors (Rucci, Kirn, & Quinn, 1998), all of which ultimately affect the overall implementation of HR practices. This makes implementation a multi-actor process.

When there are multiple actors involved in a process, these actors will be more or less dependent on one another (Thompson, 1967) and dependence creates a situation in which power emerges (Emerson, 1962). Since HR implementation is a multi-actor process, power dynamics exist among the involved actors. In addition, power is specifically important in the implementation of HR practices, as implementation of a new practice is a change in the organization that requires alignment of the involved actors, and such alignment can be prone to political implications (Hardy, 1996). While there is an extensive literature on power and political influence (e.g. Ferris et al., 1995; French & Raven, 1959; Lukes, 1974; Pfeffer, 1992), in this study, the focus is on power and its dynamics among the actors in HR implementation.

In this regard, Sheehan et al. (2014) have explored the power dimensions of the HR function that are believed to be the reasons for successful or failed HR initiatives. Using a multi-actor perspective and building on Hardy's (1996) and Sheehan et al.'s (2014) work, this study looks at the power dimensions of each of the actors who are involved in the implementation of HR practices (CEOs, senior managers, line managers, employees, HR managers, and HR employees) and more specifically aims to answer the following questions: *What are the power dynamics among the involved actors in HR implementation and how do these power dynamics influence HR implementation effectiveness?*

Following Klein and Sorra (1996), effective HR implementation is considered as the *skillful*, *consistent* and *committed* use of the HR practice being implemented. Moreover, since a multi-actor perspective is used, actors/stakeholders' satisfaction with the HR practice, i.e. HR effectiveness (Guest & Peccei, 1994; Tsui, 1987), is also considered in this study. This is to differentiate between the situation where a practice is implemented effectively and actors are satisfied with it, and the situation where actors are not necessarily satisfied with the effectively implemented practice.

Using a comparative case study approach and dimensions of power introduced by Hardy (1996), this study shows how different actors, using their power, influence the implementation of HR practices and its effectiveness. This study, contributes to the field of HR implementation in multiple ways. First, by providing insights on the power dynamics among the multiple actors who are involved in implementation of HR practices. Second, by showing that power dynamics can be different based on the nature of the HR practice. Third, by showing how these power dynamics impact the effectiveness of HR implementation. Finally, this study provides managerial implications on HR implementation effectiveness as well as limitations of the study and possible future research.

3.2   A multi-actor perspective on HR implementation

The importance of multi-actor perspective has been emphasized for HRM in general (Beer, Boselie, & Brewster, 2015; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016) and it is especially relevant in the context of HR implementation as it tends to be a multi –actor process (Mirfakhar et al., 2018; Najeeb, 2013). In the multi-actor perspective, each actor has roles to play. For example, the HR department is responsible for the training of line managers (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Clarke, 2006) as well as for developing a common language among all actors involved by communicating effectively with them (Ryan & Kossek, 2008; Stone & Lukaszewski, 2009). In turn, line managers' perceptions (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Harris, 2001), commitment (McGovern et al., 1997), ability (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013), and experience (Kossek et al., 2016) influence the way they implement HR practices. As regards to senior managers, their support (Kossek et al., 1994), commitment (Kim & O'Connor, 2009), and alignment between them and line managers (Stanton et al., 2010) are among the factors that influence implementation of HR practices positively. Finally, employees'

involvement (McCullough & Sims, 2012) and their engagement (Morris, 1996) also have positive impacts on implementation of HR practices.

In addition to the roles each actor plays, in the sense of agency, it is important to highlight the influence each actor exerts on the others. Thus, the interplay between actors should be also considered when looking at HR implementation. While there have been studies looking at pairs of actors (e.g. HR professionals and line managers, or line managers and employees) and the way their interactions affect HR implementation (e.g. Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Farndale & Kelliher, 2013; Shipton, Sanders, Atkinson, & Frenkel, 2016; Sikora & Ferris, 2014), only very few studies have addressed interactions among more than two actors (e.g. Harris, 2001; Najeeb, 2013; Stanton et al., 2010). Yet, HR implementation is indeed an HRM process where the interaction of multiple actors affects the enactment of HR practices (Najeeb, 2013). This is clearly demonstrated by the work of Harrington, Rayner, and Warren (2012), where the relationship between HR practitioners and line managers had a negative impact on employees. In their study of implementation of an anti-bullying policy, HR practitioners, by trying to maintain their relationship with line managers in helping them with HR implementation, did not label situations as bullying and this built distrust among employees and resulted in HR policy failure. Moreover, the need for a multi-actor view of HRM is emphasized by numerous studies (Beer et al., 2015; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016) and is especially relevant if strategic HRM is not only considered as the responsibility of HR department, but rather as a strategic issue for which all organizational actors are responsible, and which requires alignment with the rest of core processes of the firm.

3.3   Power dimensions
When it comes to power, there are numerous studies that have looked into bases or sources of power in different contexts and as a result there are various classifications for dimensions of power (e.g. Bass, 1960; French & Raven, 1959; Hardy, 1996; Hersey, Blanchard, & Natemeyer, 1979; Landells & Albrecht, 2013; Lukes, 1974). In this study, the power dimensions introduced by Hardy (1996) are used. First, because they are identified in the context of organizational change and HR implementation can be paralleled with a process of implementing change. Second, Hardy's (1996) work is already used by Sheehan et al. (2014) in the context of HRM. Third, the introduced dimensions better fit the context of HR implementation as this context deals with structures

and processes and they must be distinguished by disentangling systemic power from process power.

In this regard, four dimensions of power are identified: systemic power, resource power, process power (Astley & Zajac, 1991; Hardy, 1996), and power of meaning (Hardy, 1996; Sheehan et al., 2014). *Systemic power* is similar to positional power –the power that comes from the position in the organizational structure (Bass, 1960)- and whether this position has higher or lower importance for the organization comes from how tasks are performed and how important these tasks are in division of labor (Astley & Zajac, 1991), which could have historical, cultural (Hardy, 1996), or outcome-related (Astley & Zajac, 1991) bases. As a result, change in the structure of an organization might lead to change in the systemic power of different actors. *Resource power* is related to deployment of key resources on which other actors depend (Hardy, 1996). In the context of HRM, employees' skills can be considered as the resource power of HR departments (Sheehan et al., 2014). Expertise, access to information, relations, and networks can be considered as resources that different actors and departments may possess and which would provide them with a source of power. The third dimension, *process power*, "refers to the procedures and political routines, both through formal and informal decision-making processes, that are invoked by dominant groups to influence outcomes" (Sheehan et al., 2014, p.195). Where in the organizational hierarchy decisions are made is related to the structure of organization, in other words, systemic power would influence process power. On the other hand, the exercise of process power might result in changes in the structure of the organization and hence the location of decision-making within the organization (Astley & Zajac, 1991), which means process power can impact systemic power as well. Last but not least is the *power of meaning*, also known as *symbolic power*, which "refers to the capacity to legitimize interests through the management of meaning, using symbols, rituals and language to make initiative appear legitimate desirable, rational and inevitable" (Sheehan et al., 2014, p.196). Symbolic power is one of the important power dimensions for HR departments since they tend to have reduced power over resources due to outsourcing their responsibilities (Sheehan et al., 2014) and, depending on the industry, they may have low systemic power due to their position in the organizational structure (Farndale & Hope-Hailey, 2009), and eventually this may result in their low process power.

Sheehan et al. (2014) have focused on the power dimensions of the HR function and whether or not these dimensions influence the impact of HR functions on

the organizational outcomes. Believing that systemic power cannot be manipulated, they only consider the other three power dimensions. This study, while focusing on all involved actors rather than just the HR function, also looks at the systemic power of the HR functions and addresses how the power dynamics among the actors influence the effective HR implementation.

3.4 Methodology

The focus of this study is on the power dynamics among the actors who are involved in the implementation of HR practices. Since the focus is on the examination of how meanings about HR implementation are created and produced by these actors, these can be appropriately captured by conducting a qualitative study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). It is especially important, in this case, to conduct a qualitative study as the purpose is to understand the complex process issues related to the interaction of the actors in implementation of HR practices, and to capture their lived experiences and interpretations regarding the implementation of HR practices. These are, according to Graebner, Martin, and Roundy (2012), some of the rationales for using qualitative data.

3.4.1 Research design

In this inductive study, a multiple comparative case study approach is used. For this purpose, an Iranian holding group with multiple subsidiaries is studied. A holding group setting is especially chosen since it provides comparative cases and allows to control for alternative explanations such as organizational culture, industry and variations in practices. Furthermore, previous research shows that organizational structure, which involves working processes, communication mechanisms, and power arrangements, influences organizational performance (Aryee, Sun, Chen, & Debrah, 2008; Xi, Zhao, & Xu, 2017). Therefore, two of the subsidiaries, with same number of employees, are specifically chosen because of their difference in the structure of their HR departments: Company A with an HR department where the HR manager is considered a senior manager (with a higher structural position), and Company B with an HR unit located in the finance and administration department, where the HR manager is considered a middle manager (with a lower structural position). Another reason why this specific setting is chosen is to be able to observe the effects of the systemic power of HR departments in a natural setting. Precisely, one of the reasons for Sheehan et al. (2014) not looking at this dimension of power is its difficulty to be manipulated.

In order to compare the implementation of HR practices, three HR practices are selected: *recruitment and selection*, *performance management*, and *training*. In the sample organizational setting, what is common among these three HR practices is that they are applied to all employees, unlike e.g. talent management which might only be applied to those considered talents in the organization. But these HR practices are different in their natures (content and purpose-wise) and have different ranges of complexities in implementation. As such, there are six cases: each of the three HR practices in each of the two subsidiaries, with a range of actors involved in each and with different levels of complexity in terms of implementation.

3.4.2 Data collection

In this multiple comparative case study, the main data collection method was the in-depth, semi-structured interview, conducted with multiple actors involved in the implementation of HR practices: senior managers, line managers, employees, HR managers, and HR employees. The results of this paper are based on 50 interviews (23 interviews from Company A and 27 interviews from Company B – details are shown in Table 3). Moreover, a cascading interview procedure was applied, meaning that these semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior managers, their line managers and the line managers' subordinates further down the hierarchy, as well as the responsible HR employee. Interviewees were asked to describe the three HR practices and more questions were asked about the purpose of the HR practice and how it was implemented. Furthermore, interviewees were asked to give a score from zero to 100 to the skillfulness, commitment, and consistency of use by the actors for each of the HR practices.

Table 3 - Interviewees per each company

Actors	Company A	Company B
Senior Manager	5	7
Line Manager	7	9
Employee	4	7
Member of HR Department	7	4
	23	27

Prior to the interviews, the interviewees were given consent letters to be signed and participation was voluntary. The interviews were conducted in Farsi (Persian) and range from 35 minutes to two hours with the average of one hour.

Except for three interviews where the interviewees did not grant permission for recording, the rest of interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewees. During the three interviews which were not recorded, it was made sure that the information provided was written carefully and as thoroughly as possible.

3.4.3 Data analysis

For data analysis, after transcribing the interviews verbatim in the language they were conducted, Ritchie and Spencer's (1994) process was used. First, the data was coded based on *a priori* issues, those related to the aim of research. In other words, the purpose was to look for illustrations of dimensions of power in the actions of different actors. For example, when mentioned that "with CEO's support we were able to make senior and line managers to implement performance management" this shows that CEO's support legitimized performance management and provided the HR department with symbolic power. In addition, at this stage, *emergent* issues which were raised by the interviewees were also coded. Then by categorizing the issues, the *analytical* themes were created. Using this thematic framework, the *indexing* process was done meaning that all the interviews were coded. Atlas.ti was used for indexing since this program is compatible with right to left languages. Then *charting* process was done by rearranging the coded data according to the thematic framework, co-occurrences, and positive and negative outcomes. Finally, in *mapping* process, the results were interpreted.

At the early stages of data analysis, it was realized that a more specific definition for process power must be adopted since there were cases where it was hard to disentangle process power from systemic power. In order to distinguish between these two dimensions of power, it was decided to consider process power as when actors have decision-making roles based on a written procedure or policy. For example, when according to the training procedure, the senior manager had to confirm the training courses chosen by employees and line managers, this gave process power to the senior manager. According to the data analysis, there were occasions where CEOs and senior managers were making decisions or having the final say while this was not a role which was assigned to them based on a procedure or policy. This decision-making was only due to their position in the hierarchical structure of the organization. Therefore, the occasions where person-based decisions were made, i.e. those related to position and not procedure, were considered as systemic power. Whereas the occasions where process-based decisions were made, were considered as process power.

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3.5 Findings

In this section, the findings are organized based on the three HR practices. For each HR practice, the power dimensions of each of the actors in Company A and Company B are discussed. Regarding the effectiveness of the implementation of HR practices in the two companies, findings show that the average of scores given to skillful, committed, and consistent use of the three HR practices were higher in Company A in comparison to Company B (although some of these scores were not applicable to Company B as these practices were halted or used differently). This is shown in Table 4.

Table 4 - Average scores for HR implementation effectiveness

Company	Company A			Company B		
HR Practice	Recruitment & Selection	Performance Management	Training	Recruitment & Selection	Performance Management	Training
Skillful Use	50%	50%	80%	NA	NA	60%
Committed Use	70%	50%	80%	NA	NA	70%
Consistent Use	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

In addition, the average scores given to how satisfied the interviewees were with the three HR practices in both companies are presented in Table 5. It is to be mentioned that the average scores in Table 4 are based on the data collected in the interviews and are an approximation, as some evaluations were fuzzy rather than being in explicit percentages. Regarding Table 5, except for the scores on recruitment and selection, the other two scores are taken from the reports in the companies on employee satisfaction.

Table 5 - Average scores for HR effectiveness

Company	Company A			Company B		
HR Practice	Recruitment & Selection	Performance Management	Training	Recruitment & Selection	Performance Management	Training
Actors' Satisfaction	80%	61%	51%	50%	NA	41%

3.5.1 Recruitment and selection

This HR practice had a written procedure in both companies, assigning roles to different actors. In Company A, HR department found the qualified candidates, introduced them to the department that had asked for an employee. After

receiving the department's green light, the candidate was sent to the recruitment committee consisting of senior managers. Finally, after committee's confirmation, the CEO had to sign the recruitment form for the employee to be hired in the company. As can be seen, various actors had process power, making decisions and confirming in various stages of this practice. The CEO's support -legitimizing the practice and providing symbolic power for HR department- and his emphasis on the procedure to be followed had helped the implementation of this practice in Company A.

> *'To be fair, we had the support of the CEO. These changes were gradually added to the [recruitment] procedure, it was revised multiple times and the CEO approved it continuously. And when going [CEO to different departments hearing from the VPs] that HR [department] is resisting [the recruitment of a specific person], [the VP would say:] "I [the VP] can tell who is suitable for the job I need", the CEO would reply "if it is according to the procedure, I support; if not, forget it"' (Member of HR department from Company A).*

In Company B, a similar procedure was in place, but since recruitment was halted due to lower firm growth, the only sources of having new employees were the internal displacement of employees within the holding company, and the recruitment of those who were introduced by the CEO or the senior managers. Sometimes, these new employees were introduced to the top management by influential external actors, e.g. the employers of the projects, forcing the senior managers or the CEO to recruit these imposed and sometimes unqualified employees. It seemed these recruitments were done to return favors to the external actors or to ask for favors from them afterwards.

> *'We also have the employers [of the projects], we have the consultants [of the projects], each of them, based on their situation, have several [unemployed forces or relatives]. Sometimes they [employers and consultants] impose them [the introduced unemployed ones] to us. We see that if we do not employ them, we cannot move forward in the project, see, this is what we are dealing with' (Senior manager from Company B).*

Since acquiring resources later on, either monetary or future projects or simply keeping the good relations with such external actors, seemed to be the reason for such recruitments, this can be considered as the resource power of external actors over the top management influencing recruitment and selection.

One of the reasons why such recruitments were increasing in Company B and also existed in Company A, was due to the overall economic slowdown of the industry as well as increase in number of university graduates looking for jobs, which had changed the labor market.

> *'Labor market has shrunk. There are many graduates who want to work, but there are not [enough] companies to recruit them. [...] those big in the companies, I mean those at higher organizational levels, introduce people [for recruitment]. This has resulted in incompetent people being recruited. Because they [HR unit] won't assess them [the introduced candidates] to see whether they really have the competencies and abilities or not' (Employee from Company B).*

Sometimes those hired by referral of external actors did not have the merits and required competencies.

> *'There are people who have sat in positions which are not related to their educational background. [...] there is an order [from the mother company] not to recruit, but a person with an unrelated educational background is recruited because he is the son of one of the board members of one of the companies' (Member of HR department from Company B).*

Having these incompetent forces who could not be removed from the organization has directly impacted the performance of other employees.

> *'Do you have the courage to do it [remove an incompetent force]? It's impossible. [Imagine] he is related [to someone], would I say I don't want this employee? I won't even think about it because I have done something similar before. I say this because I have seen it. It won't result in anything but stress and ruining my image. So I would say [to myself] let him stay and [let him] get his salary. What would happen next? This person is here and doesn't work, there are four other employees near him [...] this [the person not working] would have a negative impact on the others [the other four employees]. [...] this would impact their performances' (Senior manager from Company B).*

In other words, there were external actors who actually influenced recruitments using their resource power, and these recruitments reshaped the power dynamics of the internal actors. These newly hired employees had symbolic power due to the *support* they had from managers in higher organizational levels. It is considered as symbolic power and not resource power because these introduced employees did not have resources such as expertise or even ability of

networking, their power basically came from having the support of powerful internal or external actors. Because of this symbolic power, their supervisors could not question their performance, which had influenced the performance of the other employees working alongside them. This had ultimately influenced the implementation of performance management in such units.

Another factor influencing recruitment was lobbying. Sometimes managers from other departments tried to bypass HR department by resolving their HRM issues talking directly to the CEO. This was especially the case when they wanted to introduce new recruitments, not necessarily ones introduced by the external actors.

> *'Sometimes there are political pressures on us, or there are requests made by them [senior managers] coming to us through the CEO, or other senior managers force HR department to consider a person they have introduced for recruitment. These make the [recruiting] process difficult' (Member of HR department from Company A).*

In such cases, lobbying could happen due to resource power, systemic power, or even symbolic power of such senior managers trying to convince or force the CEO to bypass the process.

3.5.2 *Performance management*

Similar to recruitment, both companies had procedures for performance management. In Company A, the CEO himself was interested in having the practice in place and supported the HR department to design and implement performance management. The CEO's and senior managers' interest, belief and support provided the HR department with symbolic power since these higher level managers legitimized the implementation of a new HR practice by supporting it. Because of the legitimization, line managers used the practice and found it useful. Furthermore, the CEO, some senior and line managers also acted as champions of this new practice helped facilitating its implementation.

> *'We had a champion team, champion team was consisted of some of our managers, senior managers and middle managers. […] they would comment on the practice as well as participating in different meetings sharing their experiences with other colleagues' (Member of HR department from Company A).*

On the other hand, the HR manager himself also had symbolic power. Company A's HR manager's membership in HRM related committees in prestigious

universities signaled the expertise of the manager. This helped further legitimizing the implementation of the performance management showing that the HR manager knew what he was doing. Moreover, HR manager's decisiveness, his reasoning about the why and how of the implementation of the HR practice, and the presence of consultants and external experts in the field helping justifying the reasons for adoption and implementation of the new practice were all part of the rational persuasion the HR department used to legitimize its actions which were all part of HR department's symbolic power.

> *'The HR manager is also very important, the fact that what his position is in the organization, how decisive he is, his position in the HR department and his relations with other senior managers and the CEO, all these really impact [implementation]' (Member of HR department from Company A).*

Regarding the HR department and HR manager in Company A, they owned resources that provided them with resource power. HR manager's expertise, tools and techniques provided by the consultants, HR manager's relation with the CEO and the senior managers all were resources that brought power to the HR department. These qualities were not observed nor mentioned in Company B.

> *'They [those in charge of HRM] are very distant from HRM knowledge, they have not studied management or industrial engineering to have such concepts in mind or they do not even feel the need to go after it now'. (Member of HR department from Company B)*

In Company B, despite the presence of a procedure for performance management, it was not practiced. Apart from the fact that HR issues were not prioritized nor believed by the CEO, which had resulted in performance management not being used in Company B, it was believed that not having such practices or processes had brought more power to HR department. Because in the absence of such practices, primarily other actors were not involved in the process hence they had no process power over HR department; additionally, due to lack of information on the performance of employees, HR department could make decisions subjectively based on their personal opinions of people.

> *'This is because of its [HR department's] manager, its manager likes it this way… that there exists no criterion, that everything be based on feelings, this feeling gives him power, because he is the only one that can manage that feeling, for example I cannot manage*

Although this seemed to be some sort of power for the HR manager in Company B –in this study this power is considered as resource power as it comes from lack of information-, this subjective/person-based approach was not helpful to him in the long run as this had affected his image in the organization and caused so much demotivation and dissatisfaction in Company B.

But this person-based approach is not unique to the CEO, senior managers, nor HR managers. There have been examples of line managers in Company B who had decided to implement performance management regardless of the fact that their senior manager did not believe in such practices. Overall, it seemed that symbolic power and resource power were quite evident in implementation of performance management and it was interesting to see how the systemic power of the CEO in Company B had put aside the process power of other actors in implementing performance management.

3.5.3 Training

Training is the HR practice that was followed according to the procedure in both companies. Therefore, most of the power dynamics among actors were based on process power, each actor having decision-making or confirmation role in various stages of the practice. Employees were the ones choosing the courses they needed, and line managers and senior managers were the ones with process power, confirming and if needed changing the requested training courses.

When it came to employees, their information was their resource power. In training, employees had to choose the courses they needed and at the end of the course they were the ones who had to evaluate the effectiveness of the course. Therefore, with the information they had, they knew which courses were the ones they needed for their work or which were the ones they wanted to attend for their personal reasons. Moreover, they were the ones who knew whether the course was effective or not. Therefore, in most parts, the effective implementation of training, reaching the purpose it was intended for, was in the hands of the employees. Employees were the ones managing the information and hence having resource power.

*'In my opinion, first [the most important thing] is the person
[employee], the framework exists, when they ask me what you need
[as a training course], the rest is on me to tell them correctly what*

I need. […] the second is that I exploit the opportunity: when the training is over, I use it [what I have learned from the course] in my job. These are dependent on the person [the employee]. For example my boss can never ask me whether I have applied what I learned in my work, because if I do not want to use it I can derail him, it is very easy to do that […] this depends on us [as employees]' (Line manager from Company A).

Another interesting example of power dynamics in training was among senior managers, HR unit and employees. Because of the lower power of HR unit in comparison to a specific senior manager in Company B, based on the decision of the senior manager the training courses were supposed to take place after working hours. Not being happy about this decision, many of the employees working in that department had decided not to participate in any of the training courses. This had negatively impacted the HRM indicators of HR unit's performance in training of the employees. Although employees seemed to have less power in comparison to other actors, they had influenced this specific HR practice. Overall, comparing the three practices, it seemed training is the one where employees could influence and participate in the power relations.

3.6 Discussion

Most previous research on implementation of HR practices has focused on line managers or HR practitioners as actors who carry out the implementation process. But there are multiple actors involved and they all interact with one another (Najeeb, 2013; Stanton et al., 2010), which produces complex dynamics among them. Therefore, it is crucial to move beyond previous assumptions and start incorporating more actors. Hence, one of the contributions of this study would be the multi-actor perspective used.

In addition, previous studies have tried to address the intended-implemented gap using a functional perspective, trying to come up with solutions. But according to a long tradition in HRM, any implementation process is inherently political (Ferris et al., 1995; Pfeffer, 1992). This adds more complexity to the implementation process as the implementation would become an issue over which some actors win and others lose. Therefore, power is indeed a crucial aspect which should not be ignored.

3.6.1 Actors and their dimensions of power

Different actors based on their position in the organization, the resources they have access to, the decision-making roles they have, and the legitimacy they

gain, are entitled to different dimensions of power (Hardy, 1996). When it comes to implementation of HR practices, HR departments have their own dimensions of power (Sheehan et al., 2014). Being the support function, HR departments may have low systemic power (Farndale & Hope-Hailey, 2009) but on the other hand, HRM functional expertise (Sheehan et al., 2014), the tools and techniques they use with the help of consultants, and their relations with other powerful actors in the organization, e.g. the CEO and senior managers, would provide HR departments with resource power. Moreover, the decision-making role they have on HR practices would provide the HR departments with process power. Last but not least, symbolic power is another power dimension that HR departments benefit from (Sheehan et al., 2014). Rational persuasion, presence of well-known consultants, and the support from the CEO or senior managers bring legitimacy (Stanton et al., 2010) and build symbolic power for HR departments. In addition, as mentioned previously, the process power of HR department can be overshadowed by the systemic power of CEO and senior managers in organizations. Therefore, some of HR department's power dimensions are dependent on other actors mainly those with high systemic power. Furthermore, according to Sheehan et al. (2014), HR departments have three of the four dimensions of power: process, resource, and symbolic powers. They do not consider systemic power as they believe it cannot be manipulated. But in this study, since the aim was to look at different actors and the power dynamics among them, it was essential to consider systemic power of the HR departments as the different involved actors had different systemic powers. Therefore, with the chosen research design, there were two HR departments that had different systemic powers based on their position in the organizational hierarchy and it is shown that the HR department with higher systemic power was more successful in HR implementation. Therefore, HR departments can also benefit or suffer from their presence or absence of systemic power.

When the HR department has the support from the CEO and the senior managers, and if there are HR procedures in place that are practiced, then HR department will have symbolic, process, and resource power over other actors, mainly line managers and employees. In the absence of such support, even if there are processes and procedures in place, there will be ways for senior managers and line managers to bypass HR department and there will be person-based decisions taking over process-based ones. The CEO can manage these dynamics because of his position in the organization and the fact that normally he has the final say in decision-making. Therefore, the CEO can influence

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implementation with his systemic power, which comes from his position in the organizational hierarchy. Giving importance to HR department and HR practices is the way a CEO can legitimize implementation of HR practices and provide HR department with symbolic power. But also the CEO is prone to dependencies. These dependencies could be on internal actors, mainly the support of senior managers, or it could be on external actors, mainly those who provide the company and the CEO with resources. These dependencies seem to provide room for lobbying and imposed recruitments in the organization affecting implementation of HR practices both directly and indirectly. Dowding (2006) argues that intended systematic influences can be autonomy reducing particularly if one is not aware of such intended influences. In the case where such influences are not consciously intended, they might still be autonomy reducing. This study's findings confirm this argument by showing how external actors, unconsciously impact the implementation and effectiveness of different HR practices.

When it comes to senior managers, with their systemic power, they can act as champions of implementation of HR practices encouraging line managers and employees in their departments to implement the practices, promoting shared vision (Najeeb, 2013), or they can become resistant forces avoiding such implementations. Not to mention that with their process power as well as their resource power they can further influence the quality of HR implementation. Similar to the CEO, senior managers are also in touch with external actors and again this resource dependency directly impacts HR implementation.

Regarding line managers and their power relations with other actors, mainly they have process power, having various responsibilities and decision-making roles in the actual implementation process. Although they might not be very powerful in terms of other dimensions of power in comparison to other actors, they are the ones who influence mostly the quality of HR implementation (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Employees are on the same page with line managers when it comes to power. They are not very powerful in comparison to other actors but similarly they can directly influence the quality and effectiveness of HR implementation (Khilji & Wang, 2006).

3.6.2 *HR practices and dimensions of power*
HR practices are different from one another in nature and therefore, they are different in terms of complexity when it comes to implementation. A practice such as training is more straight-forward, normally its implementation is not

faced with resistance, and its outcome is more tangible. Therefore, based on this study, in training, the power relations were mostly focused on process power, i.e. the roles each actor has based on the training procedure.

This is while a practice such as performance management is more complex, and is normally faced with more resistance. Hence, HR department's symbolic power seems to be more effective in implementation of performance management in comparison to other dimensions of power since this dimension of power brings legitimacy for performance management, either by the support from the CEO and senior managers, or by HR department's reasoning and rational persuasion. In performance management, the support from the CEO, senior managers and HR department is key for the implementation to happen, but for it to happen effectively and with quality, line managers' role is essential.

In recruitment and selection, based on the findings, it seems that process and systemic power of different actors are the most influential power dimensions. Decisions on whom to be hired can be process-based or person-based which both are affected by resource dependency and how the actors interact and how they use their power to reach the outcome they desire.

3.6.3 Managerial implications

Better understanding of how power plays into the relationships among actors will help HR practitioners understand these dynamics and try to place themselves in a more powerful situation. The more powerful they become the more influential they can be. Therefore, it is important for HR practitioners to understand their dimensions of power and how these dimensions can be affected by other actors. Knowing which actors normally have which dimensions of power would also help HR departments to anticipate challenges or opportunities and come up with ways to overcome or even prevent the challenges or make use of the opportunities. In addition, knowing that different HR practices are affected by different power dimensions, HR practitioners can anticipate the dynamics and manage the power relations actively.

Moreover, it seems that there are other actors outside of organizations, with different dimensions of power directly impacting HR practices. Knowing these actors and how their power dynamics work would help HR practitioners implement their HR practices better.

Finally, another contribution of this study would be for the CEOs and senior managers to know how their power influences HR practices and how they can empower their employees by empowering their HR departments.

3.6.4   Limitations and future research

This study is a comparative case study conducted in a holding company in Iran. Despite the fact that it is important not to limit the studies to American companies and western culture, the findings of this study could be specific to an Iranian context with an Iranian culture. Therefore, future research can explore the power dynamics among actors in the implementation of HR practices in other countries and other cultures.

In this study, external actors found to be influential in HR implementation. Although the role of unions, as external actors, has already been studied (Gill, 2009), no study has focused on the role of other external actors such as consultants, suppliers or customers. In this regard, future research can explore further the role of such external actors.

In addition, future research can explore how the power dynamics among the actors are in each of the stages of implementation process. Exploring such details would give a better understanding and refine the dynamics at each stage which might lead to different relations in the next stages in the implementation process.

4

My Way or the Highway:
The Role of CEOs in HR implementation

There are numerous studies showing that HR practices are not implemented as intended and negatively affect both well-being and performance of employees. Amongst various reasons for the intended-implemented gap, one is related to the actors who are involved, amongst whom the role of CEOs has been largely neglected. Taking advantage of a natural shock, using a multiple comparative case study approach, and drawing on the upper echelons theory, this study focuses on how CEOs influence the implementation of HR practices. Providing the underlying mechanisms through which CEOs impact HR implementation, it is shown that CEOs, with their HR beliefs, influence HR implementation directly by their actions or lack of actions in each of the stages of HR implementation process, and indirectly by influencing the strategic role of the HR function. This study contributes to the literature by showing the crucial roles CEOs have in different stages of HR implementation and how the current focus on line managers as the sole implementers has resulted in partial understanding of HR implementation.

4.1 Introduction

In HRM literature, there has been an increase interest in HRM processes in the recent years (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Gilbert et al., 2015) to address the linkage between HRM and firm performance (Boselie et al., 2005; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Purcell et al., 2003). This shift in focus of attention, from the *content* of HR policies and practices to the *process* through which HRM content is perceived (Sanders et al., 2014) and enacted (Steffensen et al., 2019), has resulted in more attention to HR implementation (Bondarouk, Trullen, & Valverde, 2018). Focus on HR implementation is important because of the intended-implemented gap, i.e. the difference between the HR practice that has been formulated by HR managers and top management and the HR practice that is actually operationalized by line managers and experienced by employees (Khilji & Wang, 2006). Although this gap could be the result of much needed adaptations of policies to local contexts (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017), a significant misalignment between intended and implemented practices can have negative effects on the well-being and performance of employees (Harrington et al., 2012; Woodrow & Guest, 2014).

In studying HR implementation, scholars attention has often been pointed towards the roles played in such process by different organizational actors such as line managers, employees, HR professionals, or senior leaders (Mirfakhar et al., 2018; Steffensen et al., 2019). In particular, line managers (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gilbert et al., 2015; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Vermeeren, 2014) have stood out as the ones who are mainly responsible for implementation of HR policies and practices and who most directly impact the quality of implementation (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Notwithstanding the relevance of line managers, scholars have also emphasized the importance of other actors in shaping implementation processes such as HR professionals (Trullen et al., 2016) or employees themselves (Budjanovcanin, 2018). However, one actor that has for the most part being absent in HR implementation debates, despite its arguably crucial relevance in the organization, has been the firm CEO. This is an interesting gap in our knowledge of HR implementation as CEOs may have a significant impact on HRM by deciding to adopt new HR practices and/ or abandoning others (Arthur et al., 2016) as well as influencing the HR climate in their organizations, and allocating resources to the HR function (Guest &

Conway, 2011). The lack of knowledge on the role played by CEOs in HR implementation is indeed a symptom of a larger problem connected with our lack of knowledge about how CEOs impact HRM (and not only its implementation) more generally (Boada-Cuerva et al., 2018; Steffensen et al., 2019).

This study starts addressing these gaps by investigating *how CEOs may influence HR implementation processes*. To address this question, this study takes advantage of a natural shock –the displacement of a CEO from one subsidiary to another within the same organization- which provides four comparative cases of CEO influence on HR implementation. Building on upper echelons theory, this study shows how CEOs' HR philosophy can shape organizations as well as how CEOs may impact the different stages –adoption, formulation, and execution- of HR implementation.

This study offers various contributions to the field of HR implementation. First, it provides insights on the roles CEOs play in HR implementation process at all stages –not just the adoption stage-, hence providing a more comprehensive view of CEO influence and its pervasiveness. Second, this study analyzes the actions of CEOs along with those of HR managers, showing how the interactions between the two shape the implementation process. Finally, and in connection to the previous two points, this study shows how CEOs can also indirectly influence HR implementation through the role they assign to the HR department. This study also provides practical implications for organizations on how to improve their HR implementation process as well as limitations and avenues for future research.

4.2 A multi-actor process-based view of HR implementation

From all the different ways in which HR implementation may be understood (Bondarouk et al., 2016) in this study, a process-based view is adopted, which assumes that HR implementation evolves through time and goes through different (interconnected) stages. A process-based view shows more clearly the roles played by the different actors at different points in time. In particular, three different stages are identified: adoption, formulation, and execution (see Guest and Bos-Nehles' (2013) for a similar perspective).

The first stage, *adoption*, is about the decision to introduce a new HR practice, and whether the HR practice is strategically needed for the organization. The HR department is considered as the main actor in charge of the adoption stage

(Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Murphy & Southey, 2003), while senior executives and CEOs are considered as actors who may also play a significant role at this stage (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Kane & Palmer, 1995). The second stage, *formulation*, deals with the design and content of HR practices and HR managers are seen as the sole responsible actors at the formulation stage (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013), although others actors such as senior management may review that design. The third stage deals with *execution* which is the actual implementation or in other words enactment and use of the practice on the ground. Often line managers are considered to be the main actors during the execution stage (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Hall & Torrington, 1998; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Sikora & Ferris, 2014; Steffensen et al., 2019; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). This is rooted in the devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers, as they are the ones who deal with employees directly (Guest, 1997; Storey, 1992) and shape employees perception on HRM (Townsend et al., 2012).

In order to have a more holistic view, one which is closer to what happens in practice, more actors are to be considered, and not only HR managers as the ones who design the new HR practices and line managers as the sole implementers. The importance of having a holistic view, taking into account the multiple actors involved in HRM (Beer et al., 2015; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016) and especially in HR implementation (Mirfakhar et al., 2018; Najeeb, 2013), is already emphasized in the literature. In that regard, other relevant actors such as employees (Budjanovcanin, 2018; Meijerink et al., 2016; Piening et al., 2014), trade unions (Gill, 2009), or facilitating role of consultants (Trullen et al., 2016) have also been shown to exert significant influence. For example, employees' previous experience with HRM shapes their expectations and abilities regarding HRM which impact HR implementation outcomes (Meijerink et al., 2016; Piening et al., 2014); trade unions impact effective HR implementation through their cooperative relationship with management (Gill, 2009); As regards to senior managers, their support (Kossek et al., 1994), commitment (Kim & O'Connor, 2009), and alignment between them and line managers (Stanton et al., 2010) are among the factors that influence HR implementation positively.

In line with this multi-actor perspective (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016), this study focuses on the firm CEO, as one of the most conspicuous influencers of HR implementation, and yet one that has been largely neglected in the literature.

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4.3 The role of CEOs in (HRM) implementation

While, as noted, there is a dearth of work that looks at the role of CEOs in HR implementation, there is evidence in other literatures dealing with implementation, such as information systems or organizational change, suggesting that CEO's support is a crucial factor in the success of any implementation process (Kossek et al., 2016; Mir, Sair, & Malik, 2014; Sharma & Yetton, 2011; Stouten, Rousseau, & De Cremer, 2018; Thong, Yap, & Raman, 1996), not only directly but also indirectly by galvanizing the support of other organizational members. CEO's influence may pervade different stages of the implementation process. CEOs may be involved, for instance, in decision making at the adoption stage by considering macro level issues such as the organization's perspective towards the need for the new HR practice. Although the HRM literature has not looked into the roles of CEOs in formulation and execution stages, CEOs may arguably also be involved at the formulation stage, by taking into account both organization's and employees' needs as well as by bringing macro and micro level issues closer to each other, or at the execution stage by acting as role models for other managers and encouraging them to implement the practice more effectively.

The theoretical rationale for the influence that CEOs may exert on the implementation of HRM within the organization can be found in upper echelons theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). According to this theory, values, beliefs, and personalities of top executives crucially shape the organizational strategies and policies that are adopted or, in other words, organizations are reflections of their CEOs (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Ng & Sears, 2012). Translated into HRM, upper echelons theory suggests that CEOs' different views toward HRM may shape HR implementation in their organizations (Boada-Cuerva et al., 2018). While CEO's HR beliefs may be varied, two main HR philosophies - the way organizations value and treat their people (Schuler, 1992) - may be distinguished: one which enhances employee capabilities and has a developmental perspective towards human resources, and the other which focuses on maximizing employee productivity and efficiency (Monks et al., 2013). The former, which is also known as *soft HRM* or *developmental humanism* (Legge, 1995b), stresses on the developmental aspects of HRM (Beer et al., 2015; Ferris et al., 1995) and sees employees as sources that with their skills, commitment and performance can impact organizational performance and provide the organization with sustainable competitive advantage (Gill, 2017; Porter, Smith, & Fagg, 2007). The latter, also known as *hard HRM* or

utilitarian instrumentalism (Legge, 1995b), emphasizes on instrumental functions of HRM in helping the organization to achieve its objectives (Ferris et al., 1995), basically by focusing on short-term results and emphasizing on cost effective performances (Gill, 2017; Guest, 1987). Accordingly, different CEOs may hold different HR philosophies, which may impact the types of policies and practices that are implemented within their organizations.

Still in line with upper echelons theory, CEOs may also influence their organizations through their personality and characteristics. For example, in non-HRM fields, CEO's risk taking propensity (Mat Ludin, Mohamed, & Mohd-Saleh, 2017), charismatic leadership traits (Michaelis, Stegmaier, & Sonntag, 2009) and certain personality types based on MBTI (Yen, Krumwiede, & Sheu, 2002) are shown to have led to successful implementation. Regarding their roles in HRM and adoption of HR practices, CEOs' educational background is shown to have impacts on the adoption of certain HR practices (Frear, Cao, & Zhao, 2012) and those CEOs who have international experience are more likely to invest in HRM (Khavul, Benson, & Datta, 2010). Transformational CEOs in comparison to transactional CEOs would adopt more skill-based HR practices (Lopez-Cabrales, Bornay-Barrachina, & Diaz-Fernandez, 2017), human-capital-enhancing practices (Zhu, Chew, & Spangler, 2005), or practices related to diversity (Ng & Sears, 2012). CEOs also influence HR departments through their decisions by making HR departments participate more in strategic decision making and acquire strategic roles (Brandl & Pohler, 2010; Kelly & Gennard, 2007). CEOs can also have crucial roles in creating strong HRM system in organizations. They do so by providing HR legitimacy, leadership and resources which would help creating distinctive HR system (Stanton et al., 2010). As can be seen, previous studies have focused on the impact that CEOs' beliefs and characteristics can have on implementation in general, HRM in general or the adoption of HR practices but little emphasis has been placed on HR implementation process per se. When it comes to the role of CEOs in HR implementation, the studies are scarce, although there are some exceptions. Arthur et al. (2016) showed that CEO's HR cause-effect beliefs –CEO believing that investments in HR programs would lead to better organizational performance- had a positive association with high performance work systems (HPWS) implementation. In another study, Ng and Sears (2018) recently showed that CEO's positive beliefs about diversity had a positive association with implementation of diversity practices, and that CEO's pro-diversity behavior and HR manager's perception of CEO's commitment to diversity

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mediated this relationship. In any case, available evidence on the impact of CEOs in implementation remains scarce, and the field continues to lack a better understanding of *how* CEOs may shape HR implementation.

4.4 Methodology

The focus of this study is on how CEOs influence the implementation of HR practices. For this purpose, an inductive approach is used since not much is known about the roles of CEOs in HR implementation and the involved mechanisms need to be explored. Furthermore, this study aims to understand the complex issues related to the interaction of the CEO with the HR department and what is experienced regarding the implementation of HR practices in the organization, which are the objectives that can be well captured by conducting a qualitative study (Graebner et al., 2012).

4.4.1 Research setting

This study takes advantage of a natural shock (Dunning, 2008) which occurred in two subsidiaries of an Iranian holding group, Company A and Company B. Prior to the data collection for this paper, the two companies went through a structural change which was ordered by the mother company based on the holding group's strategies. In this change, the CEO of Company A, CEO_X, became the CEO of Company B, and a new CEO came to Company A. The displacement of CEO_X from Company A to Company B is considered as a natural shock. It is difficult to do field experiments on CEOs to see their impact on HRM related issues in organizations, but this setting –the natural shock- has provided a unique context which is similar to *quasi-experimental designs*, where the displacement of CEO_X can be seen as an intervention.

4.4.2 Research methodology

A multiple comparative case study approach is adopted (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) as the research methodology, since this unique setting –natural shock- has provided comparable cases where alternative explanations can be controlled for. The beliefs and behaviors of CEOs (CEO_X, CEO_Y and CEO_Z) in the two companies (A and B) before and after the natural shock (T1 and T2) differentiates the four cases. Therefore, the cases would be: 1) Company A before the displacement of CEO_X (with $CEO_{X@A-T1}$ being in charge), 2) Company B before the displacement of CEO_X (with $CEO_{Y@B-T1}$ being in charge), 3) Company A after the displacement of CEO_X (with $CEO_{Z@A-T2}$ being

in charge), and 4) Company B after the displacement of CEO_X (with $CEO_{X@B\text{-}T2}$ being in charge).

These cases are comparable since both Company A and Company B belong to the same holding group which means that the environmental factors related to the external context of the holding group, such as the economic and the social situation in the country, their competitors and their market are the same for both companies at all times. Moreover, internal factors such as organizational culture, HR practices, size of the companies –around 700 employees each- and the nature of the work are also similar across the holding group. Therefore, differences in HR implementation cannot be related to such factors. Additionally, having the same companies with different CEOs before and after the displacement of CEO_X and both companies experiencing the tenure of CEO_X help with the replication of cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). This would provide more confidence in assuming that the differences in the four cases are due to the difference in CEOs' beliefs and behaviors, in other words, it would result in more robust findings (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

In order to further compare the various scenarios, two specific HR practices are chosen: *recruitment and selection* and *performance management*. These two practices are chosen since both are applied to all employees but have different characteristics. Recruitment and selection is considered as one of the primary practices all HR departments in companies have and is considered as an essential responsibility of HR departments by all actors regardless of their HR beliefs. On the other hand, performance management is considered as one of the most central and complicated HR practices (Ferris, Munyon, Basik, & Buckley, 2008) which could be adopted for its developmental aspects. Moreover, performance management is specifically chosen as it has strategic importance affecting organizational performance, it can be linked to other HR practices, and the involvement of different actors in its implementation is evident. Having the two HR practices with similarities in inclusion of all employees and differences in nature might lead to more insights on how CEOs' behaviors would differ regarding these practices.

4.4.3 Data collection
In this multiple comparative case study, 24 in-depth, semi-structured interviews are conducted with multiple informants: three senior managers, three middle/line managers, two employees, one head of HR function and three HR employees/managers from each company. This paper is part of a larger study

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on the roles of different actors in HR implementation and different sets of questions are asked from the interviewees for the different studies to ensure no overlap in the studies. Prior to the interviews, the interviewees were given consent letters to be signed and participation was voluntary.

The interviews were conducted in Farsi (Persian) and they range from 35 minutes to two hours with the average of one hour, and were audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewees. First, interviewees were asked to describe one of the practices. Then they were asked to explain how the practice was adopted, formulated and executed in the organization. All interviewees mentioned the displacement of CEO_X and how it affected the practices without initially being prompted. From here additional questions on how things changed before, during and after CEO_X's tenure were asked.

4.4.4 Data analysis

Interviews were kept in the language in which they were conducted to prevent losing any information in the process of translation. Therefore, interviews were transcribed verbatim and Atlas.ti was used for coding since it is compatible with right to left languages.

Interviews were coded, using English codes, by looking for illustrations of CEOs' beliefs about HRM, their actions towards HRM, and their roles at the different stages of HR implementation process i.e. adoption, formulation, and execution. Following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), for the first cycle coding, descriptive codes such as "personal interest" and "view" were used for illustrations of CEOs' beliefs, and process codes such as "getting feedback" and "applying pressure" for the actions and roles of CEOs in each of the three stages and each of the two practices. Therefore, three codes of "adoption", "formulation", and "execution" as well as four codes of "recruitment - past", "recruitment - present", "performance management - past" and "performance management - present" were also assigned to the process codes.

For the second cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014), data was further analyzed by looking at the co-occurrences of codes related to CEOs' views and actions, implementation stages, and the state of HR implementation for each of the practices. At this stage, the coded data were rearranged to give structure to the data and to reach common themes, and finally the results were interpreted.

4.5 Findings

In this section, the findings based on the analysis made are presented in a narrative format using quotes from the interviews.

4.5.1 CEO's HR belief

From the data, it is evident that the CEOs, in the four cases, had different views towards HRM and as a result shaped different HR philosophies in their organizations. CEO_X sought after minimizing HR costs and as a result he was not pro new recruitments, he was in favor of removing any rewards and bonuses that would increase the costs.

> 'The current CEO [$CEO_{Z@A,T2}$] is very interested in HR topics but the previous CEO [$CEO_{X@A,T1}$] was not like that, he was mainly after projects and progress at any cost and any form [not being interested in HR issues]'. (Senior manager from Company A)

> 'The CEO [$CEO_{X@B,T2}$] is against the payment of rewards, […] and the reason why the CEO [$CEO_{X@B,T2}$] is against it is that from his perspective the employees' costs are high'. (Member of HR department from Company B)

Moreover, CEO_X was not really in favor of developing the capabilities of employees and introducing new HR practices that might have developmental aspects in a long run such as performance management. In other words, HR issues were not among the top priorities for CEO_X.

On the other hand, the former CEO of Company B –$CEO_{Y@B,T1}$, the one CEO_X replaces- and the current CEO of Company A –$CEO_{Z@A,T2}$, the one replacing CEO_X after the change- had totally different views towards HRM. They were in favor of developing their employees and both had personal interest in HR issues and especially complicated practices such as performance management.

> 'As far as I know him [$CEO_{Y@B,T1}$], he considered himself as the HR manager. He used to say that "I am the HR manager before being the company's CEO"'. (Member of HR department from Company B)

> 'It's really good… our CEO [$CEO_{Z@A,T2}$] believes in HR issues and their complexities'. (Member of HR department from Company A)

Therefore, comparing the cases, it is seen that these CEOs had views that differ significantly from those hold by CEO_X. Moreover, comparing the implementation of HR practices, it is evident that CEO_X's view towards HRM

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resulted in HR practices not being implemented nor used in both companies during his tenure, while both companies in the absence of CEO$_X$ and during the presence of the other two CEOs did implement and use HR practices.

> *'Sometimes it [implementation] is because of change in managers, for example a CEO comes who is interested in HRM issues and he reinforces the HR department. The [HR] department starts some new practices and they move forward, suddenly the CEO changes. With the change of the CEO, all the practices and programs are destroyed. It is even possible that the next CEO is not very interested or even does not believe in following these approaches or methods'. (Senior manager from Company A)*

4.5.2 CEO's shaping of HR implementation

Based on the data, evidence of direct ways in which CEOs impacted implementation processes were found. In particular, CEOs could influence implementation at any of the three different stages, including the decision to adopt HR policies, their design, and their actual use by line managers and employees. The way in which CEOs influenced implementation of HR practices depended both on CEOs' beliefs about people management, but also on the profile of HR managers. More specifically, at least three different scenarios were found in this respect. In the first scenario, which is called configuration 1, there was a CEO with a cost-oriented (hard HRM) mindset paired with an experienced and development-oriented (soft HRM) HR manager. This was the case of Company A before CEO$_X$ moved to Company B. Configuration 2 occurred when both the CEO and the HR manager were aligned around a soft HR philosophy. This was both the case of Company B before the change of CEO and Company A after the change. The last scenario that was observed involved alignment around a hard HR philosophy. This was the case of Company B after the change, when CEO$_X$ arrived and chose an HR manager without any expertise in HRM. In order to show how CEOs influence the different stages of the HR implementation process, each of the configurations will be discussed one by one.

4.5.2.1 Configuration 1 – Hard HRM oriented CEO paired with a soft HRM oriented HR manager

This is the case of Company A before the change, during the tenure of CEO$_{X@A,T1}$. Here the HR practices were not used based on the designed policies. There was an HR policy in place for recruitment and selection but basically those who were introduced by senior managers were recruited.

> *'In those years, the limitations on whether we have recruitment or not were set by the CEO [CEO$_{X@A,T1}$] and if senior managers had the permission [from CEO$_{X@A,T1}$ to recruit], with their permission from the CEO [CEO$_{X@A,T1}$] they would introduce the person whom had his [senior manager's] approval' (Member of HR department from Company A)*

Regarding performance management, despite HR manager's efforts to implement performance management, it was not used in the organization. The HR manager was the one who suggested the adoption of performance management and tried to convince CEO$_{X@A,T1}$ to adopt the practice but it was not the priority for CEO$_{X@A,T1}$. The HR manager and his team continued to design and formulate a policy for performance management and started the training of managers in Company A. At these stages, adoption and formulation, CEO$_{X@A,T1}$ was not involved at all. When it came to execution, CEO$_{X@A,T1}$ was invited by the HR manager to give a speech on performance management to VPs and senior managers to encourage them to use the new policy.

> *'[Before] we didn't have senior managers' support. I remember we had gathered site managers and we were talking about implementing this [performance management] in the sites, before that we had done training courses in the sites and had gained the site managers' support. Here I went to the CEO before the meeting and told him, for an hour, about what to say in the meeting, what we would be saying, and what might happen. The CEO came and delivered what I had said superficially and at the end he said that "I have already told him [the HR manager] that now it's not the time for us to do this [implementing performance management]". He ruined the whole thing! We stopped it [the implementation] because in such situation continuing it [the implementation] is not correct […]. With the systematic view of the new CEO [CEO$_{Z@A,T2}$], he himself suggested to start it [the implementation of performance management].' (Member of HR department from Company A)*

The HR manager's efforts were in vain since CEO$_{X@A,T1}$ refused to provide support in the execution stage.

4.5.2.2   Configuration 2 – Soft HRM oriented CEO paired with soft HRM oriented HR manager

This configuration was found in the case of Company B before the arrival of CEO$_X$, during the tenure of CEO$_{Y@B,T1}$, and Company A after his departure, during the tenure of CEO$_{Z@A,T2}$. In the first case, CEO$_{Y@B,T1}$ was open towards HR issues and had allowed the HR VP to adopt and formulate the new practice

of performance management with the help of consultants and by getting feedback from VPs and other managers. They were among the first companies in the holding group that had adopted performance management and were using it.

> *'Among the companies in the holding group, we were among the top ones in performance management. When nowhere had performance management, we had it. When we were asked [by the auditors] "what are your strengths?", we would say we have performance management and we have implemented it.' (Member of HR department from Company B)*

$CEO_{Y@B,T1}$ was more involved in the execution phase. In order to encourage the VPs and the other managers to implement this practice, $CEO_{Y@B,T1}$ linked the monthly bonuses of the VPs to the execution of performance management. He walked the talk by refusing to pay the bonuses to some VPs who did not use performance management in their departments.

> *'In our previous system, our CEO [$CEO_{Y@B,T1}$] was very dominant in these issues [HR issues] and was very interested and believed in them and he himself controlled performance management directly. Therefore, we had the CEO's power, he even had subjected the rewards to the implementation and use of performance management; if the performance management was not done in that round, he [$CEO_{Y@B,T1}$] wouldn't allow the bonuses to be paid to the VPs. [...] after he left and after the change of CEO [$CEO_{X@B,T2}$], who did not believe much in this system [performance management], the pressure was off [from the managers to implement performance management].' (Member of HR department from Company B)*

Moreover, $CEO_{Y@B,T1}$ helped the execution phase by allowing for the introduction of additional rewards to be paid to the best performers of each department based on the performance management results at the end of each year which was equivalent to one month salary. Also acknowledgment certificates were issued for best performers. Linking the bonuses of the VPs together with the additional rewards for best performers helped encouraging senior, middle and line managers as well as employees to be eager to use the practice.

> *Another pressure, not pressure, a facilitating tool [was that] we had suggested to choose best performers in each unit [...], in total there would be 40 employees [chosen as best performers], we used to give them an extra reward which was a significant amount [for*

individuals], approximately one salary. This was a very good tool and helped a lot [to implement performance management]. […] unfortunately after the change of the CEO, he [$CEO_{X@B,T2}$] said that he didn't want to have such a thing [extra rewards]. […] the total amount [which was spent for rewards] in a year was very insignificant [for the company].' (Member of HR department from Company B)

In the second case, $CEO_{Z@A,T2}$ believed that performance management was very relevant for the organization and together with the HR manager decided to adopt the policy. For the formulation phase, after having the HR department come up with a design proposal, $CEO_{Z@A,T2}$ set a meeting where the VPs, senior managers, some middle managers, some employees as well as himself were present to give feedback, to improve the formulated policy and to consider roles for himself as well. In the execution phase, $CEO_{Z@A,T2}$ himself was a champion leading the execution efforts by advocating performance management in various meetings and events. Moreover, he played his role formulated in the performance management policy by using it with his VPs, having coaching sessions with them, and providing them with feedback. Moreover, regarding selection and recruitments he prevented bypasses, asking the VPs and senior managers to follow the recruitment policies.

'To be fair, we had the support of the CEO [$CEO_{Z@A,T2}$]. These changes were gradually added to the [recruitment] procedure, it was revised multiple times and the CEO [$CEO_{Z@A,T2}$] approved it continuously. And when going [$CEO_{Z@A,T2}$ to different departments hearing from the VPs] that HR [department] is resisting [the recruitment of a specific person], [the VP would say:] "I [the VP] can tell who is suitable for the job I need", the CEO [$CEO_{Z@A,T2}$] would reply "if it is according to the procedure, I support; if not, forget it".' (Member of HR department from Company A)

'I feel that these changes made things better for Company A, because as far as I know their CEO [$CEO_{Z@A,T2}$] and their HR manager believe in HR issues and follow such issues. […] this has caused them to take such practices [HR practices] more seriously'. (Member of HR department from Company B)

4.5.2.3 Configuration 3 – Hard HRM oriented CEO paired with hard HRM oriented HR manager

This was the case of Company B after the arrival of CEO_X ($CEO_{X@B,T2}$). As mentioned earlier, CEO_X prioritized non-HR issues over HR issues and as a result, no new HR practices were adopted and there were no suggestions

provided by the new HR manager either. Having once been the leading company in the holding group in using performance management, Company B was no longer using the practice. With the presence of $CEO_{X@B,T2}$ in Company B, and with his cost-effective mindset, he removed the additional reward, he did not link the VPs' bonuses to the execution of performance management and he did not question whether the practice is being used or not. As such, the implementation of performance management failed and was not being practiced in Company B anymore.

> *'When the whole system of a company changes, [i.e.] the management (CEO) changes, how those management's beliefs are, would go down the hierarchy. When you see this view doesn't exist [at higher levels in organization], [i.e.] a view pro performance management doesn't exist, consequently this would influence the middle managers as well, and middle managers would influence the employees. Consequently nobody would follow up performance management although before, this [view pro performance management] existed and was especial.' (Member of HR department from Company B)*

This last quote clearly states how CEO's beliefs shape the HR philosophy in the organization and how that would influence HR implementation. With the help of the three configurations emerged based on the dyadic combinations of CEO's and HR manager's HR beliefs, it was shown how the CEOs impact HR implementation stages of adoption, formulation, and execution with their beliefs and behaviors. A summary of these is shown in Figure 4.

The first configuration is where there is a hard HRM oriented CEO and a soft HRM oriented HR manager. In this situation, CEO would be passive towards adoption of new HR policies especially those that are more focused on developmental aspects that are brought up by the HR manager. At the formulation phase, the CEO would not be involved as he was not interested in the adoption either and HR department would be fully in charge at this stage. At the execution phase, the CEO would not provide support. Since CEOs shape the perceptions of other actors involved in the execution phase, having no support from the CEO would result in other actors having cold feet in executing the practice and hence eventually implementation would fail.

In the second configuration, both CEO and HR manager have soft HRM mindsets. Here, having a CEO who is interested in HR issues and cares about the development of employees, adoption would be a mutual decision made by

the CEO and the HR manager. At the formulation stage, CEO would be active involving all actors in providing feedback and make changes to what is designed by the HR department. Moreover, roles would be assigned for the CEO as well in the procedure and in order to make sure execution would be successful, reinforcing mechanisms such as additional incentives would be included in the design of the HR policy. Regarding the execution phase, the CEO with developmental HR philosophy would be fully supportive and would be among the champions who advocate for the implementation of the new HR practice. He would be committed to his role as one of the implementers, would prevent bypasses by other actors, and with his resources would introduce additional reinforcement mechanisms such as punishments or rewards to prevent bypasses or encourage execution.

The third configuration is the case where both CEO and HR manager have hard HRM views. Similar to the situation in the first configuration, the CEO is not pro adoption of new HR practices, but unlike the first configuration, there would not be any proposal coming from the HR manager. There will be no formulation stage as there is no adoption. At the execution phase, since no adoption is occurred, there will be no execution. But in the case where there are HR practices in place that have developmental perspectives, this CEO would remove any existing monetary reinforcing mechanisms to reduce the costs, he himself would not follow the HR practices, and would allow bypasses to occur.

Unfortunately, the setting of this study did not provide the fourth configuration which could have been a soft HRM oriented CEO who works with a hard HRM oriented HR manager. But this configuration might rarely happen as a CEO with an interest in HR issues is unlikely to appoint a person with hard HRM views as an HR manager. On the other hand, this setting provided two cases for the second configuration with two different CEOs and two different professional HR managers and in both cases HR practices were implemented and used in the organizations. This, in a way, confirms that this configuration can result in HR implementation and the use of the HR practices. Moreover, these cases also provided the situation where the same HR manager (with soft HRM views) had worked with two different CEOs with different HR beliefs and this dyadic approach shows that despite his efforts during the tenures of the two CEOs, the HR manager's efforts were fruitful with the CEO with soft HRM view; and his efforts were fruitless with the CEO with hard HRM view. This shows that CEO's decision overrules HR manager's views and efforts.

4.5.3 CEO's influence on the HR department's strategic role

Apart from the direct effect that CEOs have on HR implementation stages, this data shows that there exists an indirect effect as well: the structure and expertise of the HR department together with how HR department communicates with the CEO depended on who the CEO of the organization was. During $CEO_{X@A,T1}$'s tenure, Company A had an HR unit structurally placed under the Finance and Administration Department (F&A department), meaning that the HR manager was reporting to the vice president (VP) of F&A department. Company B had instead an HR department with a VP directly working with $CEO_{Y@B,T1}$. After CEO_X's move to Company B, the HR departments' positions in the firms' hierarchy was reversed so that in Company A the HR unit became an HR department with a VP working directly with $CEO_{Z@A,T2}$, while in Company B the F&A department was created, and the HR department turned into an HR unit under F&A department. This shift illustrates CEO_X's HR belief (i.e. cost oriented and administrative) and how these beliefs impacted the structure, i.e. the HR function being lumped together with the finance unit having a VP of F&A managing both HR and finance units.

In addition to structural differences in the four cases, differences in HR managers' profiles and expertise are seen as well. Prior to the change –CEO_X's move- the HR manager in Company A had experience being an HR manager in other companies and was considered an HR professional. In Company B, there was also an HR manager with expertise in HRM. This is while after the change, the HR manager in Company A stayed the same person, while the one in Company B left the company and a new HR manager was appointed who had no expertise in HRM, had a degree in an unrelated field, and had done administration work in the HR unit in Company A prior to becoming an HR manager in Company B. This shows that for CEO_X it was not important to have an expert in HRM as the HR manager, even at the HR unit level.

> *'This feeling existed and exists in our management [$CEO_{Y@B,T1}$ and $CEO_{X@B,T2}$] to be careful about engineering and finance departments, and to appoint people who can manage these departments well. But in my opinion, when it comes to HRM, the importance of it is not felt from top down [hence proper people are not appointed during $CEO_{X@B,T2}$'s tenure]'. (Senior manager from Company B)*

> *'The managerial commitment [towards HRM issues] is low, those who are involved in HRM, do not consider HRM issues as real issues. You know? They work at administration level. […] They*

[CEO$_{X@B,T2}$, F&A VP and HR manager] haven't reached the understanding to feel the need for change, they haven't got the cognition to really consider the human capital as human capital [...] there is another thing, they are distant from HRM knowledge.' (Employee from Company B)

Moreover, prior to the change, HR employees in Company B had meetings with CEO$_{Y@B,T1}$ regarding the HR practices, while after the change, they did not have any meetings regarding HR practices nor were invited to any meetings where CEO$_{X@B,T2}$ was present. The lack of the possibility to have meetings with the CEO$_{X@B,T2}$, i.e. the lack of communication, shows that HR issues had low priority for the CEO$_X$. The reverse happened in Company A. After the change, HR employees had one to one meetings with CEO$_{Z@A,T2}$ discussing HR issues regarding different HR policies and practices.

'We had the CEO as our head after the HR VP, but after the changes, there is the Finance and Administration Department and we have not seen the CEO [CEO$_{X@B,T2}$] ever since. Before [the change], sometimes we as an [HR] employee would have correspondence directly with the CEO [CEO$_{Y@B,T1}$]. I myself used to ask detailed questions from him [CEO$_{Y@B,T1}$] or he would comment... but now we never see the CEO [CEO$_{X@B,T2}$], only [we see] the Finance and Administration VP. Anyway, you know better, when a specific perspective [pro development] is ruling, many things can be done, but when there isn't, there isn't'. (Member of HR department from Company B)

'I have never met the CEO [CEO$_{X@B,T2}$], in no meetings; unlike the previous CEO [CEO$_{Y@B,T1}$]'. (Member of HR department from Company B)

Overall, CEO$_X$'s HR belief resulted in him believing in a specific hierarchical structure for HR department that is situated under the F&A department. The fact that finance and HR departments were lumped together, shows that CEO$_X$'s view on HRM is closer to the ideas of being efficiency-focused rather than development-focused. Moreover, this view seems to have resulted in not caring about the expertise of the HR manager whom was given the responsibility of HRM in the organization. With this specific structure, the HR manager and HR employees were more distant from the CEO, which made direct interactions with him almost impossible. This again resulted from HR issues not being among the top priorities for the CEO$_X$. This resulted in demotivation of HR employees, their indifference and even them leaving the company. Overall, HR unit became a passive unit.

Soft HRM

HR manager's HR Belief

Hard HRM

Configuration 1

Adoption: CEO being passive towards the HR policies introduced by the HR manager

Formulation: CEO not being pro adoption, hence not involved in this stage

Execution:
    CEO not providing support at the execution stage
In case of previous implementation:
    Removing the reinforcing mechanisms
    Not following the procedure
    Allowing bypasses

Configuration 2
Adoption: CEO deciding on the adoption of new HR policies
Formulation:
    CEO encouraging all senior managers and other actors to be involved in the formulation stage and to provide feedback
    CEO playing roles in the HR process alongside other actors
    CEO designing reinforcing mechanisms for the implementation of the new HR policy
Execution:
    CEO supporting the execution of HR practice
    CEO advocating the implementation
    CEO playing his role in the execution of the practice
    CEO preventing bypasses
    CEO providing reinforcing mechanisms for the execution

Configuration 3

Adoption: CEO not being pro adoption of new HR policies

Formulation: No adoption occurs, hence formulation stage does not exist

Execution:
    No implementation in case of no adoption
In case of previous implementation:
    Removing the reinforcing mechanisms
    Not following the procedure
    Allowing bypasses

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Hard HRM   **CEO's HR Belief**   **Soft HRM**
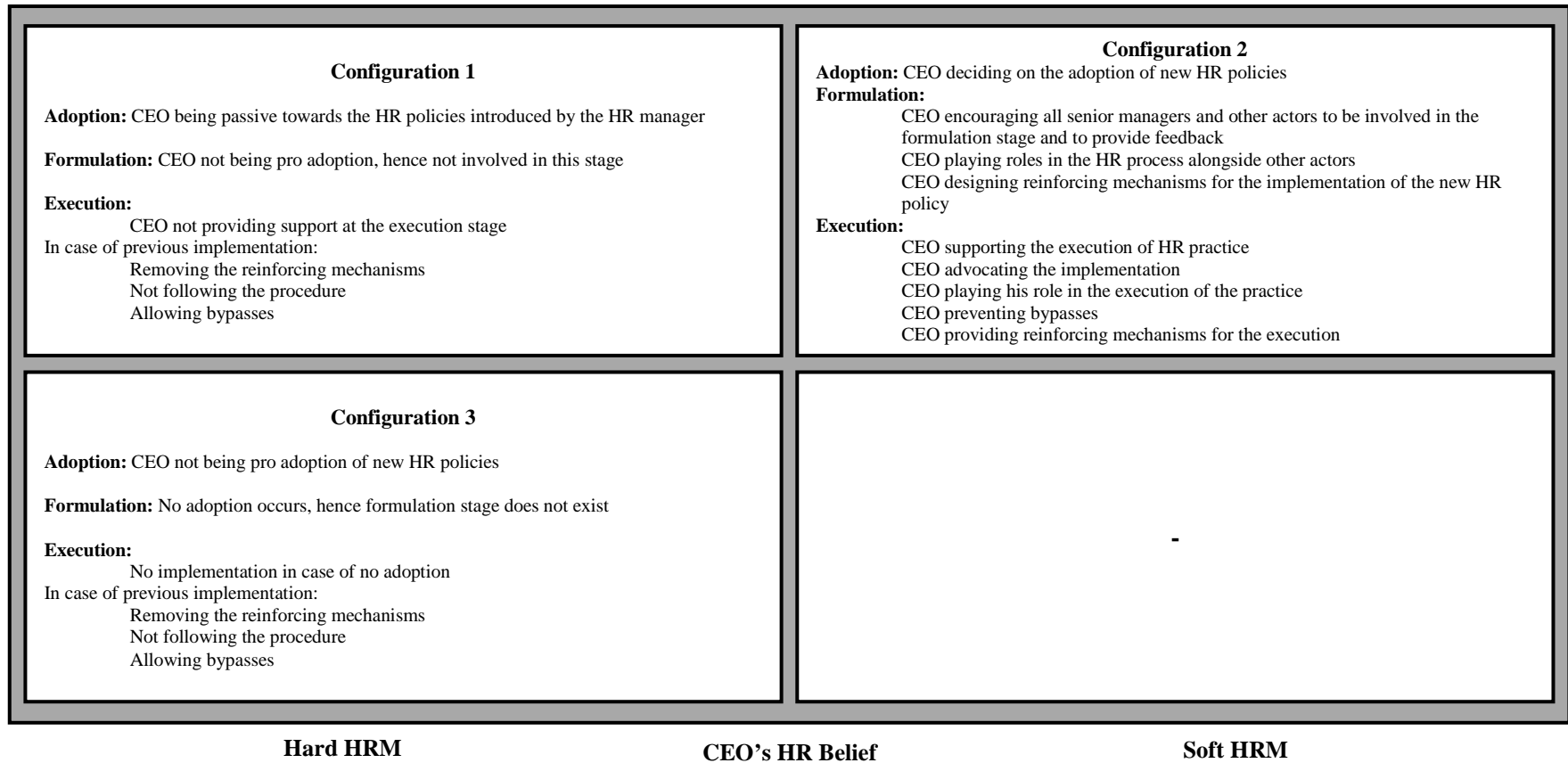
Figure 4 - Configurations based on CEO's and HR manager's HR beliefs

'Our previous HR manager [the VP before the shock] [...] was very young and he really liked to implement such systems [performance management] and he had also convinced the CEO. [...] after the changes, with the new HR manager, many HR employees left'. (Member of HR department from Company B)

'HR-wise, Company B has high inertia [has become indifferent]. [...] we have become passive and I did not come here with such intentions [to be passive]' (Member of HR department from Company B)

'I feel that employees have become indifferent, I mean they are a bit demotivated, [...] in my opinion, these changes have affected the employees and their views'. (Member of HR department from Company B)

Despite the efforts of the remaining HR employees for execution of performance management, managers did not use the practice as they believed the HR unit did not have the capability, expertise, nor willingness to implement the practice.

'Managerial commitment does not exist much. Those who are in charge of HR issues, they themselves do not consider such issues as issues, you know? They are managing everything at administration level. In other words, they have not reached the realization to feel the need for change or they have not reached the awareness of considering human capital as human capital. The HR manager has said few times in meetings that anybody who is not satisfied can leave [the company] even to us as HR employees. [...] with such perspective, you expect to have performance management or talent management?' (Member of HR department from Company B)

'Now such practices [performance management] are seen as a showcase/luxury [something useless which is only there to show off]. In spite of being among those who was involved in designing the forms for evaluations [performance management] and was accountable about it and was using it and encouraging others to use it, now I have turned into one of the strongest opponents'. (Line manager from Company B)

This resulted in the resistance of managers and further demotivation of HR employees making the HR employees to be reluctant about HR implementation which has eventually led to HR practices not being used.

'For getting an evaluation form, I really need to go and beg the managers, postpone the due dates, again they say we did not have enough time, we say alright whenever you have time [...]. But this does not work. You can go on up to a certain point, from there you cannot continue anymore'. (Member of HR department from Company B)

'We tried to keep it [performance management] with tooth and claw, but you know that you can only fight to a certain point when it comes to [organizational] resistance. [...] you reach a point where you think you need to change your method. We believe it [performance management] is too complicated [now]... When our previous CEO [$CEO_{Y@B,T1}$] was here, it was working with all its details, but now [with $CEO_{X@B,T2}$] it does not work anymore because the collaboration is not as much as it used to be, we have to become more dynamic and agile. I think the heaviness, the inertia has caused us not to be able to move it forward'. (Member of HR department from Company B)

The situation was different in Company A. HR department was active in implementing new HR practices and execution was done by involved actors in the organization.

'But HR manager also influences. The previous [F&A] VP was mainly after other issues, but the current [HR] VP is very interested in HRM issues like improving performance and things like that. [...] the previous VP was a finance and administration VP [...] that VP was mainly after giving rewards and promotion based on years of employment and experience [...] currently the new one has put into practice the developmental initiatives and experience is not the only criterion, the daily improvement of individuals is influential and there are other parameters as well.' (Senior Manager from Company A)

Based on the findings, CEOs with developmental HR philosophies (soft HRM) would give higher position to HR function in the organizational hierarchy, would equip the HR department with expert managers and employees, and would have interpersonal communications with HR employees. While CEOs with cost-effective (hard HRM) mindsets would structure HR function with lower position in the hierarchy, would not care about the expertise of the people who are placed in the HR department, and would not allow for communications with the HR employees. The latter situation in comparison to the former, due to poor communication, results in HR employees' demotivation, which ultimately leads to employees with less commitment to their organization.

Table 6 summarizes the findings regarding CEOs' HR beliefs, the way in which CEOs directly shaped HR implementation at different stages of the implementation process, and their effects on the role of the HR department in the organization.

4.6 Discussion

This study sought to understand how CEOs influence the implementation process of HR practices. In other words, this study does not have the intention to show whether or not the HR implementation is strategically right or wrong for the organizations nor which CEO HR beliefs lead to more or less effective HR implementation or firm performance. While these topics can be studied in future research, this study simply focuses on how CEOs influence different stages of HR implementation process. In doing so, this study took advantage of a natural shock, where a CEO moved from one subsidiary of a holding group (Company A) to another (Company B). Since many external and internal factors seem to be controlled for because of this specific setting, it can be concluded that the differences and changes in HR implementation in the cases are due to the CEOs, their beliefs, actions, and consequences of their beliefs and actions. In comparison to previous studies that have used the quantitative approach (e.g. Arthur et al., 2016), this study analyzes the role of CEOs in HR implementation qualitatively and with such a specific research design which provides support for the effect of CEO's HR belief on HR implementation, and provides more insights on the mechanisms through which CEOs influence HR implementation.

Building on the work of Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013), this study shows that not only CEOs influence the adoption stage by being responsible for decision-making, but also they have crucial roles in formulation and execution stages. It seems that the current focus on line managers as the sole implementers (Brewster & Söderström, 1994; Op De Beeck, Wynen, & Hondeghem, 2016; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007) has resulted in partial understanding of HR implementation and it is time to include CEOs as active members at all stages of HR implementation process.

In line with Ng and Sears (2018), who looked at the crucial role of HR managers' perceptions of their CEOs' commitment to HR policies, this qualitative study looks at the dyadic interaction of CEOs and HR managers and its effect on each of the implementation stages. Configurations where the CEO has hard HR beliefs, regardless of HR manager's view, result in HR practices

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not being used. In other words, it is CEO's opinion or belief that eventually is realized, hence it is his way or the highway.

Apart from the direct effect CEOs have at each of the stages of HR implementation, which is shown in the form of the dyadic configurations, CEOs have indirect effect through the strategic role of the HR departments. In particular, this study shows that the structure and position of the HR department in the organizational hierarchy, HR manager's background, and the extent to which employees within the HR department interact with the CEO, are all dependent on the CEO's HR philosophy, and end up shaping HR implementation process by weakening the power hold by the HR function (Sheehan et al., 2014).

Bowen and Ostroff (2004) believe that the success of HRM systems is dependent on the top management's HR belief and the strategic role of HR professionals. Additionally, there are studies that acknowledge that CEO's beliefs and attitudes are relevant for shaping the role of HR departments in organizations (Brandl & Pohler, 2010; Guest & King, 2004; Sheehan, Cooper, Holland, & De Cieri, 2007). This means that the strategic role of HR departments as one of the determinants of HRM systems' success is dependent on CEO's HR belief. Moreover, Brandl and Pohler (2010) suggest that CEO's decision on the role of HR department, whether to make it strategic or not, depends on his scope of action (the amount of responsibility he has over HRM based on labor legislation …), his willingness to delegate responsibility to HR department, and the ability of HR department. Building on these previous works, findings of this study suggest that the ability of HR department is actually influenced by the CEO himself by appointing and recruiting competent or incompetent personnel in the HR department. In other words, while this study is consistent with previous literature saying that HR implementation is influenced by CEO's HR belief and the strategic role of HR function (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), and the strategic role of HR function itself is affected by CEO's HR belief (Brandl & Pohler, 2010), it adds to it by showing the ability of HR department is also influenced by CEO's HR belief and by providing the mechanism through which CEOs shape the strategic role of the HR function.

Table 6 - Summary of findings in the four cases

		Before the Change (CEO$_X$ moving from A to B)		After the Change (CEO$_X$ moving from A to B)	
		Company A	Company B	Company A	Company B
CEO HR Belief		• CEO not prioritizing HR issues • CEO considering HR incentives and bonuses as costs	• CEO's personal interest in HR issues	• CEO's personal interest in HR issues	• CEO not prioritizing HR issues • CEO considering HR incentives and bonuses as costs
HR implementation Process (Direct Effect)	Adoption	• Decision for adoption is made by the HR manager	• CEO's order to adopt the HR practices	• CEO's order to adopt the HR practices	• CEO not allowing the adoption of new HR practices and keeping the role of decision making to himself and senior managers
	Formulation	• Nothing done by the CEO	• CEO introducing additional incentives for performance management	• CEO having execution roles in HR practices alongside other actors • CEO getting feedback on the HR practices to improve their design	• Nothing done by the CEO
	Execution	• CEO not supporting the execution of performance management	• CEO's support in the execution of HR practices • CEO using bonuses as a way to force senior managers to execute performance management	• CEO's support in the execution of HR practices • CEO preventing bypasses in certain HR practices • CEO playing his role in execution • CEO being present as a champion in HR implementation	• CEO removing the incentives and other tools used to encourage actors to execute HR practices • CEO not caring about following the procedures and policies • CEO allowing senior managers bypassing HR practices
HR Department Strategic Role (Indirect Effect)		• HR unit under F&A department structurally • No decision-making role for HR function • Not all HR employees being HR professionals • HR employees never having meetings with the CEO	• Existence of HR department with an HR VP • Decision-making role for HR function • HR manager with interest in HR issues • HR employees being HR professionals • HR employees having meetings with the CEO	• Existence of HR department with an HR VP • Decision-making role for HR function • HR manager with interest in HR issues • HR employees being HR professionals • HR employees having meetings with the CEO	• HR unit under F&A department structurally • No decision-making role for HR function • Not all HR employees being HR professionals • HR employees never having meetings with the CEO • Demotivation of HR employees • CEO allowing talented HR employees to leave

Therefore, CEOs indeed play crucial roles in shaping HR departments in organizations and the strategic role of the HR department acts as a mediator in the relationship between CEO's HR belief and HR implementation. Therefore, this study proposes that there is a relationship between CEO's HR belief and HR implementation mediated by strategic role of HR function (shown in Figure 5). CEOs may directly (at all stages) and indirectly (by means of their own influence on the HR department) influence HR implementation.
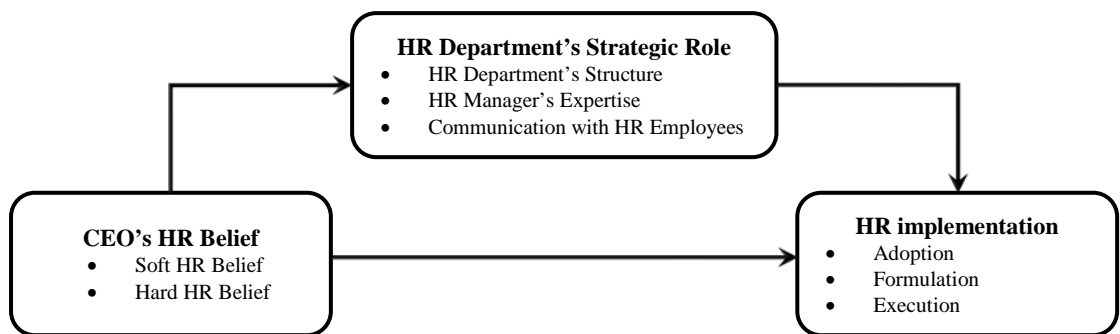
Figure 5 - A model on how CEOs influence HR implementation

According to upper echelons theory, organizational outcomes are reflection of their CEOs. Building on upper echelons theory, this study uncovers one of the ways CEOs impact organizational outcomes which is through HR implementation and under the mechanisms found in this study.

4.6.1 Managerial implications

It is important for HR practitioners to understand better how CEOs influence HR implementation. Knowing that CEO's HR belief plays a crucial role in shaping the strategic role of HR function, i.e. empowering or weakening the HR department, and in the implementation process, it is important to identify CEO's HR views. In the case of a developmental HR philosophy, HR practitioners can take advantage of the situation and try to empower HR department and involve the CEO in all of the stages of HR implementation (adoption, formulation and execution), this would also affect the organizational climate on the importance of HR implementation, also known as power of meaning (Sheehan et al., 2014), and could result in effective implementation of HR practices.

In the case of a CEO with cost-effective HR philosophy, it is important to inform the CEO on his crucial HR role, its impact on HR practices, and how he can help HR department with better implementation of such practices. In other

words, it is important for CEOs to understand the consequences of their views towards HRM and how they eventually impact employees. If they focus on long-term benefits instead of short-term gains, they would empower HR departments helping them implement HR practices more effectively and consequently improving organizational performance in the long run.

Knowing that often CEOs are chosen based on their competencies in the main business of the organizations and that other issues apart from HRM issues are more central in the selection of CEOs, the alignment of HRM views of the succeeding CEOs most often is not taken into consideration. Hence, practitioners are to consider alignment of succeeding CEOs in HRM issues if they want to sustain HR practices in their organizations.

4.6.2 Limitations and future research

One of the limitation of the study, apart from its generalizability, could be that CEOs are not interviewed for data collection. But this would not necessarily lead to lack of information as what is reported in this study is based on the consistency of the responses made by all the other actors and how they all have seen their CEOs. In addition, CEOs normally can give good speeches about how important HR issues are in organizations while they might not walk the talk.

Based on the findings, one of the ways CEOs can influence the implementation process of HR practices is by weakening/strengthening the HR function either by changing their position in the organizational hierarchy or by placing and recruiting professional/unprofessional people in key HR positions. When HR function is weak both hierarchically and professionally (in terms of expertise), first it cannot adopt, design nor execute proper HR policies and second cannot convince other actors to play their roles in the implementation process. While Sheehan et al. (2014) have already shown the different power dimensions of HR function and considered CEO's support crucial for one of the power dimensions, future research can look into how CEOs influence the power of HR departments in all dimensions and how the power dynamics of all actors impact the HR implementation.

Future research could also look into the role of CEOs in institutionalization of HR implementations. Since CEOs influence organizational climate (Kramar, 2014), previously adopted and implemented HR practices might end up not being used. This shows the importance of institutionalization of change (Stouten et al., 2018), i.e. transforming change into everyday activities (Beer, Eisenstat,

& Spector, 1990). Although succession of middle managers with similar views is important in institutionalization of change (Beer, 1980), it seems that due to the power of CEOs in organizations, they would have a more influential role in this regard and alignment in succession of top management is essential if the change is to be sustained regardless of who is in charge of management (Alänge & Steiber, 2009; Kotter, 2005). Therefore, future studies can focus on the roles CEOs would have when it comes to institutionalization of HRM related changes.

Other actors (i.e. managers and employees) not voicing out their concerns (Wood & Wall, 2007) about CEO's decision on not using the implemented HR practices, would accelerate the propagation of CEO's influence on organizational climate. In HR implementation, future studies could investigate how the interaction of various actors, the power dynamics among them together with minorities not voicing out their concerns would impact the fate of HR practices.

5

Conclusion

HR implementation is indeed an important and relevant topic (Gratton & Truss, 2003) that has not got the proper amount of attention it deserves (Mirfakhar et al., 2018). Although the shift from the content-based view to the process-based view in HRM (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Sanders et al., 2014) has brought HR implementation to the spotlight, the dynamic nature of this multi-actor and multi-stage process needs further exploration. In this regard, this thesis has attempted to contribute to this literature with insights about the nature of HR implementation, its effectiveness, its antecedents, and the dynamic relations of the involved actors.

In this final chapter, the overall contributions of the thesis are drawn. In that regard, the theoretical contribution as well as managerial implications are presented. Moreover, limitations and avenues for future research are provided.

5.1 Theoretical Contribution

This thesis contributes to the field of HR implementation and its effectiveness in multiple ways. First, given that there is no unified understanding of what HR implementation and its effectiveness are, the thesis builds on existing literature (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Guest & Peccei, 1994; Klein & Sorra, 1996; Tsui, 1987), to clarify the meanings of HR implementation and its effectiveness by disentangling implementation process from its outcomes.

Second, it provides a systematic view about the factors that influence effective HR implementation. Using a strategic management view on change (Pettigrew, 1985, 1987), this thesis arranges these factors by categorizing them into content, context, and process antecedents. By having this structured view, the importance of multiple actors who influence the effective implementation of HR practices through both processual antecedents and contextual antecedents at micro level, is more emphasized.

Third, this thesis highlights the importance of having a multi-actor perspective and a process-based view of HR implementation by exploring the dynamics among the actors. Most studies using multiple actors have looked at the perceptions of different actors, and those that have used multi-actor perspective have looked into the roles each of the actors plays in HRM or HR implementation (Najeeb, 2013; Stanton et al., 2010). In line with these studies and extending them by considering the involved actors as interdependent agents in the implementation process, this thesis explores the power dimensions of each of the actors in the implementation of different HR practices. It is shown that, based on the nature of the HR practice, the power dimensions change, and different actors can use different sources of power. Moreover, looking at power relations adds a new layer to multi-actor perspective in HR implementation as it might illustrate HR implementation as a game of powers, causing actors to acquire more sources of power. For example, actors might want to assign more decision-making roles in HR policies for their positions to have more process power.

Fourth, the multi-actor perspective of this thesis helps shift the focus from solely concentrating on line managers to incorporating more actors such as the CEOs and senior managers and how they differently influence the various HR practices. Moreover, the direct and indirect influence of external actors on HR implementation is explored in this thesis, which brings new dynamics in the power relations.

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Fifth, looking deeper into the roles of CEOs in HR implementation, as one of the powerful actors who has been absent from the HRM literature, the underlying mechanisms through which CEOs influence the different stages of HR implementation are explored.

Last but not least, the indirect influence of CEOs on HR implementation through impacting the strategic role of HR function in organizations is another contribution of this thesis. This builds on upper echelons theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) by providing one of the mechanisms, i.e. HR implementation, through which CEOs impact organizational outcomes.

5.2 Managerial implications

This thesis provides a deeper understanding on HR implementation and its effectiveness for HR practitioners. With the model provided in chapter 1, an overview of antecedents is presented, providing HR practitioners with factors they should take into consideration prior to the implementation process. Moreover, it highlights the dynamics through which effective HR implementation influences the processual and contextual factors at mezzo and micro levels. Having prior understanding of the antecedents and their dynamics can help HR practitioners to better plan the implementation processes they design or are involved with.

Moreover, based on the findings of the studies in this thesis, actors avail different dimensions and degrees of power and depending on whether or not they are on board with the HR practices to be implemented, they would use these dimensions of power to a greater or lesser extent. Moreover, depending on the complexity of the HR practice, different sources of power can be used by HR practitioners. For simpler practices, actors would have process power based on the roles assigned to them in the procedures. But for more complex practices, HR practitioners need more symbolic power, e.g. the support from more powerful actors. Overall, this thesis provides HR practitioners insights on how power works in HR implementation and with this understanding, they might be able to manage or anticipate the power dynamics in HR implementation.

Another issue which should be taken into consideration is the direct and indirect impact of external actors on HRM and HR implementation in organizations. HR practitioners must be aware of such influences and, together with CEOs and senior managers, have to deal with them actively rather than passively.

For CEOs, it is important to understand the impact their systemic power has on HR function, ranging from shaping the systemic power of HR departments, the support HR departments need for their symbolic power, and the roles CEOs play at each of the stages of the implementation process. It is important for CEOs to be informed about the long-term effect of their actions regarding HR implementation and how they would affect the motivation of employees in the long-run.

5.3 Limitations and future research

Due to the exploratory nature of this thesis, qualitative research designs and more specifically multiple comparative case study approach are used. This methodology is prone to limitations and generalizability is a major one. This issue of generalizability has different levels: first, the data comes from an Iranian context which has its own specific culture when it comes to relations and interactions; second, the data is collected from two subsidiaries and one holding group which might not be representative; and finally, interviews are not conducted with CEOs as the main actors who are being studied and therefore the studies lack the CEOs' perspectives.

Regarding future research, the dynamics of the model introduced in chapter 2 can be further explored. This can be done by expanding it and exploring the relationships among the factors. As such, a better understanding of how antecedents influence one another could be gained.

Regarding the multi-actor perspective, normally internal actors are taken into consideration when it comes to HR implementation (Stanton et al., 2010), which is the case of this thesis as well. But the role of external actors influencing HR implementation has not been sufficiently explored (for an exception, see Gill (2009) considering trade unions). Therefore, future research can look into the role of these external actors, how they gain their power dimensions and how organizations can benefit from them while avoiding their harmful influence on HR implementation. This is especially interesting for its novelty and it must be studied further to see whether or not the influence of such actors is context or cultural dependent.

In this thesis, the power dimensions of different actors are identified for implementation of different HR practices. But since HR implementation is considered as a process with three stages of adoption, formulation, and execution, it would be interesting to explore further how the power dynamics of the actors are at each of the stages of HR implementation. Exploring such details

would give a better understanding and refine the dynamics at each stage, which might lead to different relations in the next stages in the implementation process and affect the implementation effectiveness.

Future research can also explore further the mediated relationship introduced in chapter 4. First by building on it, introducing additional mechanisms through which the direct and indirect relations are made. Second, by testing the model quantitatively to explore its generalizability.

Since HR implementation is not a linear process and it has causal loops (as shown in chapter 2), and since there are multiple actors that can impact the HR implementation process through their power dimensions (as shown in chapter 3) and through their beliefs and their actions (as shown in chapter 4), future research can take advantage of *system dynamics* looking at HR implementation as a system rather than a process, modeling the power dynamics of the actors at each of the stages of the closed loop process. A system dynamics approach can help with testing various scenarios and could provide a better understanding of the HR implementation as a system of various actors, stages, and content, context and process antecedents. This shift from a process-based view to system-based view is also important as HR implementation in this thesis is shown to be influenced by external actors and environmental factors, making it an open system which is prone to more dynamics as was assumed previously.

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Note: The list of 62 papers used in the literature review analysis in the second chapter is marked with an asterisk in the references.

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