WHO SHOULD TAKE UP HR ROLES? HR-LINE PERCEPTIONS OF HRM DEVOLUTION IN TOURIST RESORTS IN THE MALDIVES

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ABSTRACT
Applying human resource management (HRM) devolution literature, this paper explores the perception of managers and employees on the extent to which HRM roles are devolved to line managers in tourist resorts in the Maldives by examining the interactions between HR and line managers. The study also identifies the factors that shape these perceptions and the decisions concerning the allocation of HR responsibilities to line managers. Data for this study were collected through 57 semi-structured interviews conducted with senior, HR and line managers, and employees in seven tourist resorts in the Maldives; field observations; and a range of secondary sources. The findings show that there are confusions, contradiction about the roles of HR and line managers resulting in tensions and conflicts between them. The study highlights the reasons for these tensions and how they are addressed through building and maintaining shared understanding and partnership between HR and line managers.

INTRODUCTION
‘HR devolution’ – assignment of HR roles traditionally carried out by the specialist HR department to line managers (Op de Beeck et al., 2015) has been a popular topic of research for the last 20 years (Hall and Torrington, 1998; McConville and Holden, 1999; Whittaker and Machington, 2003; Renwick, 2003; Lasen and Brewster, 2003). Although the extant research favours the devolution of HR roles to line managers for favourable employee outcomes (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007), the extent to which HRM roles should be given to line managers is still an ongoing debate among the academics and practitioners. Despite organisations have been increasingly attempting to devolve HRM roles to line managers, the actual progress in HRM devolution remains limited (Guest and Bos-Nehles, 2013).
Existing literature has identified arguments for and against devolving HR roles to line managers (Brewster et al., 2015). Consequently it is expected HR and line managers to have differing views on the extent to which HR should be devolved to line managers. There could be perceptual discrepancies of expectations and experiences of HR and line managers (Op de Beeck et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to study the perceptions of the line and HR managers on the extent to which HR roles should be devolved. Understanding the managerial perceptions of HR devolution to line managers may help to gain insight into the factors that shape these perceptions and those enabling and inhibiting HR-line responsibilities in the effective implementation of HRM practices.

Within the HRM devolution literature some scholars argue for a moderate level of HRM devolution (Hall and Torrington, 1998; Renwick, 2003; Marchington and Wilkinson, 2012). These scholars suggest that HR roles are a shared responsibility of HR and line managers which requires a partnership in delivering HR services to the employees (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2012; Opde Beeck et al., 2015). Although such a partnership is expected to be plagued by conflicts and tensions (McGuire et al., 2011), empirical evidence suggests that effective management of HR-line partnership could create synergies, enhance social capital and improve organisational performance (Chen et al., 2011). However, little is known about how such a partnership is reached, and what it takes the partnership to be effective. Hence, there is a pressing need to gain insight into how HR-line partnership works through an in-depth analysis of HR-line partnership (Currie and Procter, 2011).

Studies on HRM devolution and HR-line partnership have largely conducted in the context of developed economies. Due to institutional and cultural dissimilarities, HRM in developed countries is very different from that in developing countries in general, and hospitality industry in particular. Managing employees in the hospitality industry continues to be challenging in the small developing economies (Baum, 2012). Hence, there has been
increasing calls for an exploration of HRM within the context of emerging or small developing economies (Brewster and Mayrhofer, 2012). Hospitality industry has been regarded as an industry with adversarial HRM practices where there is enormous room for HRM to progress. As HRM devolution to line managers is a distinct feature of SHRM, HRM responsibilities are presumably less likely to devolve to line managers in the hospitality industry.

The aims of this paper are: (1) to examine the managerial and employee perceptions of the extent to which HR should be devolved and to what extent it has been devolved to line managers in practice; (2) to identify the factors that shape these perceptions and examines the factors that might influence the decision to assign HRM roles to line managers; and (3) to gain insight into how HR-line partnership works. Tourist resorts in the Maldives are selected as the research setting in order to understand HR devolution in a relatively unexplored new setting.

The contributions of the study are threefold. First, as the majority of HRM devolution research has been conducted in developed countries, this paper contributes to the literature by drawing data from resorts in the Maldives, thereby shedding light on a new context. Second, the empirical data generated by this research and the findings help distinguish HRM devolution in high-end tourist resorts from other sectors within the hospitality industry as there is a lack of empirical work addressing understanding of issues around devolution of HR roles to line managers in the hospitality industry. Third, the paper provides a valuable insight into issues and tensions surrounding successful implementation of HR practices through partnership between HR and line managers. By taking views and perceptions of managers with different hierarchies and functional roles and employees the paper provides a more in-depth analysis of the topic.
The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. The next section presents an overview of the literature on the HRM devolution. This is followed by the research methods. Findings are presented in the third section. Finally, main findings as well as implications for practices and directions for future research are discussed.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**The arguments for and against allocating HR roles to line managers**

The extent to which HR implementation roles can be relinquished to line managers is an ongoing debate among academics and managers (Brewster et al., 2015). This debate has risen from the very fundamental question of who are line managers and why should they be given a role in HRM (Brewster et al., 2015). Line managers in strict terms are defined as managers “who are directly responsible for production or services, that is, managers who are not responsible for service functions such as marketing, finance or HRM” (Brewster et al., 2015, p.578). However, line managers are often defined in HRM literature as “all other managers outside the HRM function”, covering all managers who directly dealing with employees carrying out their functions (Brewster et al., 2015, p.578). For the purpose of this study the latter definition of line managers is adopted.

Although a widely accepted fact is that as line managers are responsible for getting things done through employees on a daily basis by allocating tasks and monitoring their performances, they need to be given HR roles (Papalexandris and Panayotopolou, 2005; McGuire et al., 2006), it is unclear what HR roles need to be given to line managers and what role should be retained for the HR department in order to successfully implement HRM practices. Brewster et al., 2015, p.579) argue that “giving line managers responsibility for HRM enables them to link the people more closely with other aspects of
day-to-day management: they have frequent, direct contact with employees and, therefore, an opportunity to understand and respond quickly to employee concerns that the HRM function cannot match”. From a SHRM perspective, to establish itself as a credible and valuable strategic partner, the HR department has to devolve operational and people-oriented HR responsibilities to line managers (Francis and Keegan, 2006; Harris, 2007), which gives it more time to focus on strategic human resource management (SHRM) activities (Ulrich, 1998; Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). These scholars suggest that the HR department should have some indirect responsibilities towards employees and play roles such as advising and training line managers as line managers have the responsibility of running their departments through cost or profit centres (Brewster and Larsen, 2000).

There are also business reasons for the devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers: to reduce HR department costs, to speed up the decision-making process; and to reduce the scope for HR outsourcing (Brewster and Larsen, 2000). Nevertheless, given the importance of the HR department’s people-oriented role, it should be cautious in the devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers (Francis and Keegan, 2006). By focusing only on strategic issues, the HR department may be disconnected from employees, whom they do not directly contact. This may place them in a vulnerable position, as the HR department may no longer be able to voice employee concerns with top management (Gilbert et al., 2011). This may also weaken the HR department’s position in the organisation over time. From a business perspective, if line managers are given autonomy, a uniform approach to HRM would be difficult to follow (Hall and Torrington, 1998).

The HRM role of line managers is believed to be an important factor in implementing organisational strategies. From the effective implementation of HRM strategies and practices perspective, while top managers, with the help of HR managers, design appropriate HR strategies and practices, line managers are increasingly given the role of executing these
strategies and practices (Larsen and Brewster, 2003) upon advice or guidance from HR. Their roles are particularly critical in controlling workflow by directing and guiding the work of others (CIPD, 2012). HRM roles of line managers have leadership and management components (Mintzberg, 1971; Purcell and Kinnie, 2007). The management component involves the implementation of specific and formal HR practices such as recruitment and selection; performance appraisal, and training and development; work scheduling; and discipline and grievance handling. Research suggests that line managers make significant differences to HR practices such as performance appraisal, training, coaching and guidance, employee engagement, openness, work-life balance, engagement and communication (CIPD, 2012). The leadership component involves directing employees to achieve the desired objectives and influencing their attitude and behaviour (Gilbert et al., 2011).

There is a plethora of literature concerning how HRM is managed by HR professionals and line managers. Line managers are renowned for criticising the contribution that HR specialists make to organisational performance. This broadly takes one or more of four forms. First, HR practitioners are regarded as out of touch with commercial realities and not really being aware of how the business operates or its customer needs, and instead promote principles – such as welfare or employee rights – that may run counter to business goals. They label HR as an overhead cost. Second, HR is often seen to constrain the autonomy of line managers to make decisions which they feel are in the best interests of business, labelling HR as trying to police the work that would contribute to the bottom-line. Third, HR managers are unresponsive and slow to act, always wanting to check options thoroughly rather than taking action immediately (bureaucratic). Finally, HR practitioners are criticised for promoting policies that may be fine in theory but hard to put into effect. Likewise, HR see line managers as mavericks unwilling to accept and follow appropriate HR policies (Wright et al., 20010). As a result, although there have been suggestions that HR should be
disbanded altogether, a more realistic option is for line managers and HR professionals to work together as partners (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2012; Ulrich, 1998). The importance of HR and line management involvement in implementing HRM suggests that the need for shared HR responsibilities or partnership between HR and line managers to develop responses and solutions to HR issues in partnership (CIPD, 2012). Because the relationship is ongoing, HR and line managers need to engage to develop better understanding and develop long-term strategies and solutions rather than HR being asked to manage issues as they arise. Such partnerships require increasing the trust in line managers and transferring HR accountability to them in many areas where previously HR has exercised control.

**Factors affecting the decisions on allocating HR roles to line managers**

Extant research has identified various external and internal factors that shape organisational decisions to allocate HR roles to line managers (Brewster et al., 2015; Gooderham et al., 2015; Op de Beeck, 2015). Some of these factors enable a high level of devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers while others constrain this process. External factors that may constrain HR roles include multiplicity of stakeholders, government policies and legislation and the legacy of HR’s traditional role (Procter and Currie, 1999). Factors internal to an organisation that may constrain HR’s role include cultural norms that underplay the significance of the HR function (Truss et al., 2002) or the ‘dominant logic’ or commonly held views about how to manage HR (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986). In the hospitality industry, with its heritage of ‘traditional’ administrative HR roles, shifting to a more strategic role may be particularly problematic (Baum, 2007).

Contextual factors, such as the financial situation of the organisation, may also constrain the HR role of actors where there is a huge pressure to reduce HR cost (Truss, 2009). Impediments to HR strategic roles – for example, lack of business acumen and HR skills and
concern over the calibre of HR actors (Harris 2002; Guest and King 2004) – may also arise out of HR functions themselves due to capability and capacity constraints (Truss, 2009). They arise largely from ongoing tensions from the multiple roles HR actors are required to play (Kamoche, 1994). Research also suggests that the strategic role can be established through credibility-building by the actors (Procter and Currie, 1999; Truss et al. 2002). They establish their HR roles by negotiating with each other (van Gestel and Nyberg, 2009). The strength of formal and informal ties among HR actors can serve as an enabler of strategic HR (Truss, 2009).

Closely associated with aforementioned factors, Op de Beeck et al., (2015) in their studies of HRM implementation by line managers identified factors that shape the managerial perceptions of HRM roles of HR and line managers and categorised them as organisational, individual and interpersonal factors. According to their categorisation, organisational factors include organisational support, personnel red tape, HR instruments and information. While organisational support includes providing guidance and advice about line managers’ HR roles and recognising their contributions, red tape involves specific bureaucracy that line managers need to follow stemming from the sources such as requirements to comply with labour laws. HR instruments and information include providing clear guidelines and instructions about how HRM activities to be carried out. Individual factors include line managers having HR competencies and their willingness to carryout HR functions. As per the categorisation a special attention was paid to interpersonal factors which is characterised by HR-line relationship and measured by HR support, mutual trust and dependence. The categorisation used by Op de Beeck et al., (2015) is a useful tool to gain insight into the factors that affect the decisions and the extent to which HRM responsibilities can be devolved to line managers.
RESEARCH METHODS

This research is an exploratory study; thus, a qualitative approach was adopted (Eisehardt, 1989). It followed a multiple case study approach (Yin, 1994). This study used seven resorts: four locally owned and managed resorts and three resorts that belong to international hotel chains. Besides addressing the aims of this research, this approach facilitated an examination of whether there are differences between local resorts and international hotel chains in terms of the HR role of HR and line managers and the factors that shape these roles. As access to these cases was granted on the condition of anonymity, pseudonyms are used to describe the resorts. Participants of this research are also described using pseudonyms. In order to reduce a large quantity of data to manageable proportions, background and contextual information on the seven resorts is presented in tabular form, highlighting the critical factors in the text. Resorts have different profiles in terms of size and level of services, as presented in Table 1.
Table 1: The structural profile of the resorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Resorts</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Size</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of employees</td>
<td>380</td>
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<td>Number of rooms</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td><strong>Ownership</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Local resorts</td>
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<td>International hotel chain</td>
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<td><strong>Target market/level of service</strong></td>
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<td>High-end</td>
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<tr>
<td>High-end &amp; middle-level</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle-level</td>
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<td>Perceived star ranking*</td>
<td>5</td>
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* There is no official star ranking for resorts

A total of 21 interviews were held across all seven case studies, with top managers (general managers, resident managers, and owner representatives), HR managers, and line managers. Respondents were asked to describe their own career and position in the resort. In most cases interviewees started to talk freely about their role in the organisation in general, and specifically about HRM and their relationships and dealings with other managers and employees. Most interviews lasted between 30 and 75 minutes. Respondents were offered the option to conduct interviews in either English or Dhivehi (local language of the Maldivian people), and the interviewer adopted the language they preferred. Interviews
conducted in Dhivehi were translated to English before analysis. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Face-to-face interviews facilitated the factual details to be ascertained and allowed freedom for respondents to reflect upon their own experiences and to allow areas of confusion to be clarified by the interviewer.

Methodological triangulation was used, combining both secondary data (comprising company reports and strategy and policy documents), and primary data (comprising mainly face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and field observations). Interview transcripts were read several times and then coded. Individual case reports were written prior to cross-case analysis. The focus of the data analysis was on gaining insight into how HR and line managers interact with each other in enacting HRM practices.

**FINDINGS**

**HR and line expectations and experiences – confusions, contradictions and conflicts**

HR department and HR professionals within it are well regarded in tourist resorts. They maintain a very good relationship with employees and fellow managers. For instance, the previous HR manager of Resort B was so popular that the employees went on to strike to prevent the HR manager being dismissed by the owner due to a top-level conflict. Similarly, consistent with the existing research (Wright et al., 2011), line managers acknowledged the importance of the role of HR professionals and HRM activities to gain competitive advantage. The general managers have high expectations of the HR departments and the HR managers in most resorts (A, B, C, F and G) are given a strategic role in managing people. The general manager of Resort G described the role of the HR manager not only as an advisor to the management on how to manage people but also as someone with the broader role of guiding, supporting and moulding employees. These perceptions and expectations of
managers and employees show that the role and responsibilities of HR and line managers are shaped by role preferences of other actors (van Gestel and Nyberg, 2009).

However, from a devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers, the perception and expectation of line managers is the most critical. The findings show that some resorts put considerable efforts in the devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers. For instance, at the time of interviews, Resort A is undertaking a change management program to help allocate more HR responsibilities to line managers. However, analysis of interview data reveals several incidents of tensions. HR department of the resorts was carrying out several HR activities that are supposed to be implemented by line managers. The HR Director expected his line managers to do certain employee induction and orientation activities. While the HR director believes that these activities can be more effectively carried out by line managers, the latter does not show interest in carrying out the activities by themselves and does not believe it is a role for them. Rather they see it a role entirely for the HR professionals. As the existing literature suggests (Huchinson and Purcell, 2010; McGuire et al., 2011), the differences of opinion about the devolution is due to the lack of clarity and ambiguity on the role of HR and line managers, hindering effective delegation of HRM. As the Resort is undertaking a change management program for the devolution of HRM roles to line managers, there is no distinct and independent roles allocated for these actors, leading to frequent tensions and conflict between multiple management responsibilities. Line managers’ see they have more important operational issues to deal with than looking after their employees. Contrary to the existing literature (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003), despite there are few staff under each of these departments to be managed, line managers of resorts see not relinquishing any of their current role and taking up HR roles as a problem. Line managers’ reluctance in this case also shows that they are too focused on their area of expertise and operation.
Tension between HR and line managers is also observed in the recruitment and selection process. While the HR Director wanted to follow a rigorous recruitment and selection process through careful screening of a reasonable number of applicants for each vacant position and conducting 360 degree interviews for selection, line managers see this as a very slow process and demands employees to be recruited for positions as they receive CVs on the first comes first served basis. Line managers appear to be more comfortable with the way they have been doing things in resorts. They are under the impression that the existing practices are better than, or at minimum as good as, the practices proposed by the HR department. From a change-management perspective, this could also be because the proposed changes to the practices might be too ambitious, requiring line managers to change their role drastically. However, the findings also show that line managers having a cherry-picking approach towards the implementation of HR activities, taking control of HR activities of their choice and ignoring others, attributing them as HR activities for entirely for the HR department to carryout. Such actions of line managers could be considered as barriers to implement progressive HRM practices in resorts.

As existing HRM devolution literature suggests (McGovern et al., 1997; Renwick and MacNeil, 2002), the above findings also show the importance of line managers’ willingness and commitment to implement progressive HRM practice. Another fine example of this nature is a better compensation package the Spa Manager of Resort C was able to secure for his employees at a time the resort’s overall strategy was cost minimisation largely through cutting labour cost. However, securing such a deal also requires negotiation and bargain skills as well as a strategic position within the resort. In this case, the Spa Manager was able to convince the resort owner to constitute a better pay package for his employees on the basis that the Spa as a profit centre outperform (cash cow) other business units within the resort.
Line managers acting as a barrier to carry out effective implementation of HR activities is evident in the process of conducting training and development in some resorts. For instance, several HR managers and employee complained that line managers block employee attempts to undertake on the job training programs. While they made almost impossible for employees to attend external training, they also resist to allow employee participation in in-house training programs. This is a clear evidence of line managers not thinking along the same lines with their employees and HR managers.

While line managers take control of HR practices of their choice, HR professionals are also reluctant to allocate some HR responsibilities to line managers. It seems all HR actors including line managers prefer HR professionals to look after employment relations matters, particularly compliance to the employment law, implementing grievances, disciplinary and dismissal procedures. HR managers say that they take that stand to reduce the risk of litigation, improve uniformity or consistency of application of procedures and ensure fair and equal treatment of all employees. Employees and line managers see HR department responsible for dealing with complaints and grievances. Although line managers are supposed to be more closely working with employees (Brewster et al., 2015) than HR managers, the latter is seen as equally visible and known to be a partner of employees in trouble. Hence, employees are inclined to approach HR managers.

As a result of these expectation, some HR managers believe that their administrative and operational workload has increased, leaving less time for them to engage in strategic roles. Another factor contributed to the increased workload is the introduction of the Employment Act 2008. While HR professionals has been bringing changes to the existing HR procedures and employment contracts to ensure compliance with the law, number of complaints from employees have significantly risen since the law came into effect.
HR professionals are faced with tough challenges in effectively carrying out tasks concerning these HRM activities due to the belief and attitude of most line managers. While some managers have no clue about how step by step approach to be followed in cases such as disciplining and dismissal of employees (lack of HR expertise and skills), others especially those with higher education qualifications challenge HR professionals stating that they (line managers) can do it as competent as HR professionals or better as people management know-how and skills are common sense. Such challenges in HR managers’ views exist despite the provision of quality HR advice and consistent support available to the line managers from HR staff. One of the reasons why in some resorts line managers are not keen to go along with the HR managers’ advice is that line managers see HR managers as temporary guests in resorts due to frequent turnover of HR managers. The HR heads in Resorts B and C had been in post longer than those in other resorts, with the HR manager of Resort C longest of all. Resort C had had four different HR directors in 10 years. The situation is worse in some of the resorts that belong to international hotel chains. For example, in Resort A, most of the expatriate managers are appointed under a two-year contract as under the employee-transfer program to train local managers. The duration of employment per se seems to be problematic in their effort to transfer the parent company’s best practices.

Managing partnership through shared responsibilities

Consistent with the call for a shared understanding between various actors, and between HR and line managers in particular in the effective implementation of HRM practices (Maxwell and Watson, 2006), resorts such as (A and C) use their corporate culture to promote shared responsibility and a collaborative work environment, mitigating the tension and conflicts between HR and line managers presented above. The HR director in Resort A undertakes a strong consultative process (consulting with the general manager, senior management and
the host committee) before any HR-related decision is implemented, to avoid conflicts. As she recognises the implementation of desired HR practices as a change-management issue, she emphasizes the importance of the relationship and of sustaining intensive communication among/between key actors, and involves key line managers in the HR decision-making process. She believed that involving actors who are tasked with implementing HR practices in the design/development stage of those practices could reduce the sorts of tensions described above. In the case of Resort A, beyond the corporate culture, working in harmony with all HR actors appears to be the HR director’s preferred role. Most resort managers adopt an ‘open-door policy’ to discuss and resolve issues with other managers and employees. Other strategies used by resorts that facilitate shared understanding and responsibility between HR and line managers include informal appraisals such as ‘peer and beer appraisal in Resort A and managerial job rotation exercises.

The self-contained nature of resorts (the resort setting) helps to build and maintain a culture of shared responsibility. Formal and informal communication between HR actors can easily take place in resorts, as all managers are physically located in the same building or within a few meters from each other, and often meet during meal times. As all employees and managers work and live in the same island, several formal and informal social interactions take place every day, facilitating them to build trust and enhance their relationships and clearing out confusions regarding their roles and responsibilities. Despite the complementary setting for shared understandings, as one of the HR Director states, “working together with line managers effectively in the implementation of HR practices depends on individual HR professional’s preferences, willingness and commitment, motivation and his/her capacity to so”.

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DISCUSSION

This paper offers an analysis of the perception of employees and managers about HRM roles and responsibilities of HR and line managers in the implementation of HRM practices in tourist resorts in the Maldives. The study used resorts – strategic business units (sub-units) of their respective organisations – as the central unit of analysis.

The analysis shows that devolution of HRM roles and responsibilities to line managers in resorts is characterised by confusions and contradictions, leading to tensions and conflicts between HR and line managers in the implementation of HRM practices. Discrepancies have been observed between the expectations and experiences of line and HR managers about their roles and responsibilities. In general, as found by Op de Beeck et al., (2015) and Maxwell and Watson (2006), HR managers’ perceptions and expectations of line managers’ involvement in carrying out HR functions are greater than the level of responsibilities assumed by line managers.

The study also revealed key HR practices those implementation is characterised by role conflicts and contestation between line and HR managers. They included recruitment and selection, induction/orientation, training and employment relations. While HR managers prefer to have their grip on employment relations for strategic reasons through which they establish themselves as better positioned to manage HR in resorts, line managers adopt a cherry-picking approach towards their engagement in HRM practices.

In general, the analysis shows that line managers play a limited role in the implementation of HRM practices in resorts. Their performance seems to be substantially weak in terms of both management and leadership components attributed to the HRM role of line managers (Purcell and Kinnie, 2007). However, the result also suggests that line managers play an active role if they want to. This raises the importance of HR actors’ capacity and personal
interest in, and commitment to, the effective implementation of HRM. The analysis points out various factors that contribute to the line managers’ limited HR role or lack of effective HR devolution: line managers’ lack of HR/people skills and the operational pressure on them (Renwick, 2000); pressure to focus on the short-term priorities; the ‘dominant logic’ or commonly held view about their roles (Prehalad and Bettis, 1986); high demand on line managers to change their roles; and a high turnover rate of HR managers. These factors not only limit the HRM roles of line managers but also create tensions between HR and line managers, and constrain the role of HR managers in executing HRM practices. A notable factor that contributes to the conflicts and tensions between HR and line managers is the lack of role clarity and not having a distinct roles assigned to HR and line managers (Maxwell & Watson, 2006; Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010).

However, the findings show that by establishing a strong relationship with line managers and having a shared understanding managers can reduce the tensions and increasingly take line managers on board in the implementation of progressive HRM. This is consistent with the finding that HR functions can play a more strategic role where their social and relational capital – which is based on relationship and trust – is stronger (Truss, 2009). Strong relationships between HR and line managers are essential to provide support to the line managers in implementing HR effectively (Brewter and Larsen, 2000). The self-contained nature of the resorts facilitates formal and informal communication and sharing between the HR and line managers. When managers are embedded in key organisational decision-making groups and are physically located in proximity, they may be able to create stronger individual social capital (Truss, 2009). HR managers use various strategies to strengthen and maintain these relationships: involvement of line managers in HR decision-making; having informal performance reviews; job rotations among managers having an open-door policy; treating implementation of desired HR practices as a change-management issue;
using corporate culture and language; and providing much-needed support and advice to line managers (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003; Yukl, 2002). These strategies largely manifest relational and cognitive dimensions of social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998).

To sum up, the study highlights the intricacies involved in the delegation of HR responsibilities to line managers in the implementation of HRM practices. It identifies which HR activities are delegated to line managers and to what extent they are being delegated. The study also highlights how some of the challenges encountered in the devolution of HRM responsibilities and implementation of HRM responsibilities are mitigated by HR-line partnership through shared understanding and collaborative corporate culture.

Implications, limitations and directions for future research

The findings of this research need to be interpreted within the context of the organisations it examined. This study reveals the difficulties associated with devolving HR responsibilities to line managers, highlighting the need to understand the nature of HR-line interface and conditions necessary for the effective implementation of HRM practices. It challenges the notion that devolving HR responsibilities to line managers ensures the effective implementation of HRM. Rather it points to the need of a functioning partnership with shared understanding in the effective devolution and implementation of HRM (Op de Beeck et al., 2015; Gilbert et al., 2011). This study identified various strategies used by HR managers to seek cooperation from line managers in the implementation of HR practices. They are likely to be useful for managers in most organisational settings. Besides these strategies, it may also be useful to equip line managers with HRM/HRD and leadership skills and competencies in order to improve their key HR abilities, if they substantially lack the leadership, management and relationship-oriented skills (Nehles et al., 2006). Their communication skills and understanding of potential tensions surrounding HR-line tensions
and partnerships also need to be improved. In addition they also need to be motivated to actively engage in the effective implementation of HR practices. Strategies that could be useful to achieve this include providing institutional incentives and offering professional support and advice in difficult situations (Gilbert et al., 2011).

Line managers need to be developed to actively involve themselves in the execution of HR practices for two reasons. First, although the resort context and HR managers’ strong relationships with employees and line managers may help HR managers quickly detect line managers’ people-management problems, and to act as a substitute for these managers to avoid poor execution of HR practices or inadequate relationship-oriented behaviour, this might not be possible in some organisational contexts (Gilbert et al., 2011). International hotel chains need to pay special attention to developing line managers as the chains increasingly adopt a hub concept to manage HR in their properties, which leaves a broader HR role for line managers. Second, line managers need to have the ability to take a strategic approach to HR to avoid the unintended consequences of poor implementation of HR practices (e.g. employee turnover) and potential inadequacies in their own leadership style.

Based on the findings of this study, unstable HR leadership in resorts may be an obstacle to developing line managers through close and trusting working relationships, as such relations can only be developed over time (Truss, 2009). Therefore, top managers need to develop effective strategies to retain HR managers. International hotel chains should revisit their managerial-employee transfer policy if they intend to achieve these programs' desired objectives, such as effectively disseminating of the parent company’s best practices and training local managers.

The findings of this study have limitations. This research is a qualitative study based on interviews, field observations and other documentary sources. Data used in this study are
clustered at the sub-unit level (resorts). The study is also limited to a single sector/industry. This presents limitations in generalising the findings. A more extensive survey is necessary, and should include organisational-level data from other sectors within the hospitality industry and beyond so that different configurations of relationships between HR actors can be explored. The HR-line partnership could be better explored using a longitudinal study. Therefore, future research can explore how such partnerships grow and change over time. It may also be useful to extend the focus to include how such partnerships affect employee behaviour (e.g. turnover). This research identifies some of the actions of HR managers that enhance the HR-line partnership and how they overcome the constraints they face. Further research can extend to include other HR actors.

REFERENCES


