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# The Role of HR and Line Managers in Policy Implementation: A Collaborative Approach to Efficiency and Effectiveness

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## Abstract

This study examines the cooperative responsibilities of Human Resource (HR) departments and line managers in executing organizational policies. The objective is to clarify the interconnections between HR's strategic planning and line managers' tactical execution in order to attain organizational efficiency and effectiveness. The study utilizes a literature-based review, incorporating various scholarly works and theories, such as Armstrong's Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice and Mintzberg's organizational configurations theory. The review highlights the importance of the interconnectedness between HR and line managers in the execution of policies. This statement highlights that successful policy implementation is not a one-sided effort, but rather requires both parties to take on mutual obligations and have a collective comprehension of strategic goals. The proliferation of decentralization trends has amplified the responsibilities and independence of line managers, thereby rendering the collaborative approach more indispensable than ever. In addition, the ever-changing characteristics of contemporary work environments, including elements like diversity and remote work, heighten the necessity for flexibility and ongoing communication between HR and line managers. The study determines that the effectiveness of policy implementation within an organization is directly correlated with the degree of collaboration between the Human Resources department and line managers. Both parties must actively participate in transparent communication and adjust their approaches according to specific obstacles and organizational circumstances. Additionally, it is emphasized that having a multi-frame perspective is crucial for comprehending and handling the complexities within an organization. In general, the collaborative approach is a fundamental element for achieving success within an organization.

**Keywords:** *Role of HR, Line Managers, Policy Implementation, Collaborative Approach, Efficiency and Effectiveness*

## 1.0 Introduction

The role of Human Resource (HR) departments and line managers in policy implementation is a subject that has drawn significant attention in both scholarly and professional circles (Chimakati, 2023). Armstrong's Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice outlines the various tasks HR professionals undertake, emphasizing their responsibility in policy formulation and implementation (Armstrong, 2014). Line managers, on the other hand, are the individuals who are directly responsible for the workforce that performs the tasks essential for a company's operations. Their role in implementing policies is often seen as the practical extension of the HR department's strategic decisions. Moreover, as per Mintzberg's (1979) organizational configurations theory, these structural dimensions' dictate how an organization functions and interacts with its environment, managing organizational complexity, ensuring clear command chains, and facilitating coordination and control. Yet, the formation of these dimensions isn't merely a linear process; it's more akin to a multi-dimensional puzzle requiring careful consideration of numerous variables (Donaldson, 2001) as cited by Chimakati and Odiyo (2023).

However, it is the collaborative approach between HR and line managers that brings about true efficiency and effectiveness in an organization. According to Boxall and Purcell, a strong strategic approach in human resource management necessitates active involvement from both parties (Boxall & Purcell, 2015). HR can design the most efficient policies, but without the line managers' practical input and on-the-ground execution, these policies may remain unimplemented or inefficiently applied. Moreover, the evolution of management thought, as traced by Wren, has shown that management practices have become increasingly decentralized and line managers are endowed with more autonomy and thus play a more significant role in policy implementation. They are the linchpins in translating HR policies into day-to-day operations and ensuring that these policies meet the practical needs of the organization.

Management theory also emphasizes the importance of adaptability and context-awareness in leadership roles. Bolman and Deal's work on reframing organizations posits that effective leadership comes from understanding organizational complexities and approaching them with a multi-frame perspective (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Therefore, line managers and HR need to adapt their strategies based on the specific challenges and contexts they face, which again suggests a need for close collaboration. In academia, the principles of organizational management and governance are equally applicable. Hendrickson and Lane discuss how leaders in higher education must engage in strategic policy implementation (Hendrickson et al., 2013). The collaboration between administrative departments, similar to corporate HR departments, and faculty, who can be likened to line managers, is vital for the successful running of educational institutions.

## 1.1 Discussion

The role of HR in strategic planning and policy formulation is complementary to the role of line managers responsible for tactical implementation. This mutual relationship sets the groundwork for effective and efficient operations within an organization. The literature strongly supports the view that this collaborative approach is not merely beneficial but vital for organizational success (Chimakati and Odiyo, 2023). According to Armstrong, one of the core responsibilities of HR is to engage in strategic planning and policy formulation that set the direction for the organization's activities (Armstrong, 2014). This involves an array of tasks, such as talent management, setting performance metrics, and developing frameworks for employee engagement and workplace

culture (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). Here, HR operates with a macroscopic view, considering broad organizational goals and how human resources can contribute to achieving them. They draft policies to guide these organizational objectives and set the stage for the role of line managers.

The evolution of management thought has shown a marked trend toward decentralization (Wren, 2009). This development has significant implications for organizational structure and governance. In early management theories, centralized command and control were often the norm. However, with the increasing complexity of organizations and the dynamic nature of markets, decentralization has become more prominent. This shift has resulted in empowering line managers with more responsibilities, particularly in the realm of policy implementation. According to Alonso-Garbayo et al. (2017), decentralization allows line managers more room to maneuver and more significant responsibilities. They are no longer just executors of top-down policies but also contribute to policy formulation. The importance of this role expansion is supported by Armstrong, who discusses the changing nature of HR as increasingly strategic and integrated with line management (Armstrong, 2014). This expansion makes the collaboration between HR and line managers not just helpful but necessary for effectively implementing policies.

One of the most salient aspects of decentralization is the increased autonomy it affords to line managers (Common et al., 2016). Autonomy here does not mean a lack of accountability or oversight but refers to the freedom to make decisions that are aligned with the organization's broader objectives. Boxall and Purcell emphasize the need for this autonomy to be leveraged strategically, requiring a well-synchronized effort between HR and line management (Boxall & Purcell, 2015). The decentralization trend has made collaborative decision-making more prevalent. In a decentralized organization, line managers are often involved in setting departmental goals, budgets, and even in shaping corporate policies. This is consistent with Bolman and Deal's idea of reframing organizations to adapt to the current landscape (Bolman & Deal, 2013). HR and line managers have to collaborate more closely than ever to ensure that both strategic goals and operational realities are taken into account.

Bolman and Deal posit that organizations are complex and multifaceted and thus require a multi-frame perspective for effective management (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This perspective is particularly relevant when we consider the collaboration between HR and line managers in policy implementation. HR typically deals with the structural frame, focusing on rules, roles, goals, and policies, while line managers often operate in the human resource frame, dealing directly with people and their individual needs and resistances. By adopting a multi-frame perspective, both can better appreciate and navigate the complexities that the other faces. Organizational culture is one area where the need for a multi-frame perspective is glaringly apparent and demands a collaborative approach from HR and line managers (Monterosa, 2017). HR might draft policies that are in line with the organization's mission and values, but line managers are the ones who actually have to embed these policies within the day-to-day work culture (Cohen, 2017). They face firsthand the potential resistance or enthusiasm that comes from the workforce, and HR can learn from their insights to shape and refine policies. This dynamic is supported by Armstrong, who discusses the role of HR in shaping organizational culture through strategic initiatives (Armstrong, 2014). Understanding culture from multiple frames allows for policies that are both theoretically sound and practically implementable.

Line managers often face the brunt of employee resistance when it comes to policy implementation. They are the frontline soldiers who have to ensure that the workforce is compliant with new rules and regulations. A multi-frame perspective allows HR and line managers to understand that resistance isn't just about non-compliance but could stem from various factors such as fears of job security, concerns about added responsibilities, or even a lack of understanding of the new policy. Wren's work on the evolution of management thought corroborates the idea that understanding employee behavior is crucial in management and can help HR and line managers tailor their approach to policy implementation (Wren, 2009). Adopting a multi-frame perspective also ensures that strategic and tactical considerations are not at odds with each other but are in fact synergistic. Boxall and Purcell note that for any strategy to be effective, it must be implementable at the tactical level (Boxall & Purcell, 2015). Hence, HR and line managers can use the multi-frame perspective to ensure that they are not just aligned in terms of goals but also in the methods used to achieve those goals.

Organizations undergo internal changes too, such as mergers, acquisitions, or restructuring. HR and line managers need to be in sync to handle such transitions smoothly. Here, Bolman and Deal's concept of reframing organizations becomes relevant, as it allows HR and line managers to look at structural changes from multiple angles and adapt strategies accordingly (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Adaptability and context-awareness are not only crucial between HR and line managers but also across different functional areas of an organization. Hendrickson and Lane discuss the academic leadership and governance aspect, emphasizing that an adaptive strategy often requires cross-functional collaboration for effective implementation (Hendrickson & Lane, 2012). Thus, HR and line managers should collaborate not only with each other but also with other functional leaders to ensure that adaptability is ingrained in the organizational fabric. An adaptive approach is closely tied to a model of continuous improvement. The feedback loops between HR and line managers become particularly essential in this regard. As HR sets policies and line managers implement them, the feedback from the ground can be used for continuous refinement of these policies. This is in line with Armstrong's stress on iterative learning and continuous improvement in HR practices (Armstrong, 2014).

Cappelli (2008) asserts in the Harvard Business Review that the prominence of the war for talent has escalated in the context of the knowledge economy. In this context, the Human Resources department not only participates in the process of acquiring new employees, but also actively involves itself in the implementation of ongoing educational and professional development initiatives. The significance of line managers in the implementation of these programs is of utmost importance. It is the responsibility of line managers to identify any deficiencies in the skills of employees and collaborate with the human resources department to develop suitable training programs. The proficiency of HR in formulating comprehensive talent management strategies and the competence of line managers in efficiently executing them are imperative for the sustained success of an organization. Line managers play a dual role in organizations, serving not only as implementers of policies but also as carriers of organizational culture. Trice and Beyer (1993) conducted a study which posited that organizational culture is frequently manifested through the enactment of rituals, narratives, and routine practices. According to Ramlall and Melton (2019) the primary responsibility of line managers is to ensure the alignment of the organizational culture with the human resources policies. They serve as intermediaries between the theoretical framework established by the human resources department and the practical day-to-day experiences of

employees (Shipton et al., 2016). Therefore, line managers play a crucial role in the dissemination of the organizational culture that is intended to be established or maintained by the human resources department.

The idea of creating an iterative feedback loop between HR and line managers is increasingly emphasized in contemporary literature. According to an article by Anseel et al. (2015) in the Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, feedback loops can provide immediate insights into the effectiveness of new policies or reforms. Line managers can offer on-the-ground data, while HR can adjust strategies based on this immediate feedback. This results in a dynamic, responsive policy design that adapts to real-world challenges quickly. Role of Technology in HR and Line Management Collaboration: In the age of data analytics and machine learning, the role of technology in enhancing HR and line management collaboration cannot be ignored. Davenport et al. (2010) emphasize the rise of people analytics in HR management. By analyzing performance metrics and other KPIs, both HR and line managers can make more informed decisions. These analytical tools provide a common ground for HR and line managers to discuss, evaluate, and modify policies and strategies.

While it's critical to acknowledge the synergies between HR and line managers, it's equally important to recognize the potential hurdles. Conflicting objectives and departmental silos can impede effective collaboration. Budhwar and Debrah (2019) in their book 'Human Resource Management in Developing Countries' discuss how organizational hierarchies and poorly defined roles can act as barriers. The solution often lies in open communication channels and clearly defined responsibilities, mitigated through regular reviews and perhaps, redefined through internal organizational change management programs (Haas, 2018). The assessment of HR and line manager collaboration's efficacy can be accomplished by evaluating employee satisfaction and retention rates. Huselid (1995) posits in the Academy of Management Journal that a robust association exists between human resource practices and both turnover and productivity as cited by Chimakati (2023). There exists a positive correlation between the level of collaboration between Human Resources (HR) and line managers, and the likelihood of employees experiencing satisfaction, engagement, and exhibiting a willingness to remain employed within the organization. Line managers, through their direct engagement with employees, possess the ability to furnish human resources (HR) with valuable perspectives on employee morale. Conversely, HR possesses the capacity to provide a structural framework for addressing concerns and enhancing employee satisfaction.

Ethics and corporate social responsibility have emerged as prominent areas of concern within contemporary organizations, with human resources (HR) often assuming the responsibility of establishing guidelines in this domain (Buckingham & Nilakant, 2016). However, it is the line managers who frequently encounter ethical quandaries in their daily operational activities. Crane and Matten (2016) argue that a comprehensive understanding of the ethical ramifications of human resources (HR) policies is crucial for line managers to successfully execute their implementation. Concurrently, human resources (HR) can utilize input from line managers to reassess and refine ethical guidelines, thereby ensuring their alignment with the pragmatic aspects of the organization. Emphasis on Soft Skills: While HR often sets criteria for technical skills and expertise, line managers are better positioned to evaluate and nurture soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence. According to Luthans and Doh's study in 2018, these soft

skills are essential for modern workplaces and are increasingly a part of HR metrics. Therefore, the relationship between HR and line managers extends to nurturing a more rounded skill set in the workforce, encompassing both hard and soft skills.

In any organization, conflicts are bound to arise, be they interpersonal, departmental, or even organizational. The role of HR and line managers in conflict resolution is complementary. According to Costantino and Merchant's work on conflict management (1996), HR often sets the guidelines for conflict resolution, but it's the line managers who usually first become aware of conflicts at the ground level. Effective conflict resolution, therefore, depends on how swiftly and efficiently line managers can communicate issues to HR and how effectively HR can guide line managers in implementing solutions. The process of onboarding new employees is another area where HR and line management collaboration is crucial. HR generally handles the initial stages, such as recruitment, documentation, and orientation. However, as Bauer et al. pointed out in their 2007 study, effective onboarding that ensures the new employee is culturally and operationally integrated into the team often falls to line managers. Therefore, seamless collaboration between the two is essential for maximizing new employee productivity and satisfaction.

Employee well-being has gained considerable attention in organizational research, especially in the context of remote work and increasing workplace stress. According to a study by Warr (1999), well-being is closely related to productivity and employee retention. While HR can set broad well-being programs and benefits, line managers are crucial in identifying specific stressors and challenges employees face. This makes it essential for HR and line managers to collaborate closely in identifying needs, shaping well-being programs, and assessing their effectiveness. As organizations adapt to rapidly changing markets and technological landscapes, innovation has become a critical factor for competitiveness. According to a study by Shipton et al. (2006), HR practices significantly influence an organization's innovation capacity. Line managers, however, are the ones who can foster a culture of innovation at the grassroots level by encouraging creative problem-solving and risk-taking. Therefore, it's crucial for HR policies related to innovation to be designed in close collaboration with line managers, ensuring they are practical, relevant, and effective.

## 2.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the complex and dynamic interplay between Human Resources (HR) and line managers is a fundamental factor in achieving organizational success within the current volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business landscape. This collaboration is of utmost importance in effectively addressing the multifaceted challenges and potential advantages presented by both internal and external environments. Human resources (HR) is commonly perceived as the strategic guiding force within an organization, playing a crucial role in establishing comprehensive policies, ethical principles, and optimal approaches. Additionally, it assumes a crucial function in the recruitment of skilled individuals, implementation of well-being initiatives, and execution of corporate social responsibility endeavors. However, the effectiveness of these overarching strategies and policies is contingent upon their proficient execution at the operational level, which is primarily the responsibility of line managers. Line managers play a crucial role in bridging the gap between the strategic vision of the human resources department and the operational aspects of employee management on a daily basis. They offer indispensable firsthand observations regarding external variables such as market dynamics, consumer

inclinations, and alterations in regulatory frameworks. Line managers play a crucial role in serving as the initial point of contact for employees, thereby providing human resources (HR) with a comprehensive understanding of employee morale, workplace difficulties, and the pragmatic implementation of HR policies. The interdependent association between human resources (HR) and line managers is strengthened by the progress of technology, specifically in the areas of data analytics and machine learning. These tools have revolutionized the extent and pace of decision-making, rendering it more reliant on data and adaptable to intricate real-world circumstances. However, it is crucial to note that technology in isolation is insufficient in bridging the gap. The significance of open and transparent communication channels cannot be overstated for the successful development of this partnership.

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