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University of Southampton

Faculty of Business, Law & Art Management

**The influence of the HR Shared Service centre model on first line
managers' implementation of HR Practices**

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Abstract

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The influence of the HR shared service centre model on first line managers' implementation of HR practices

Eilis Collins

The implementation of HR practices has received increasing attention in recent years with researchers examining the many factors which influence effective implementation, yet the importance of the HR delivery model in supporting effective implementation of HR practices has not been considered in the literature to date. HR shared service centres are ubiquitous in many countries and have been established in many cases with efficiency and cost saving in mind. First line managers are the key communicators of HR practices in many organisations today, translating key messages for their team members. The implementation literature has overlooked the effect which the HR shared service centre model of supporting these managers may be having on how they subsequently implement HR practices with their teams.

This thesis sets out to explore the impact of the HR shared service model on managers attitudes and behaviours when implementing HR practices. The study examined data collected from two case study organisations, chosen from different industry sectors, each with different HR delivery structures in place -one with a HR shared service team based offshore and the other with a HR services team based onshore. A mixed method research approach was used to firstly understand whether there were significant differences between the two organisations and then to explore these differences using interviews with both managers and HR professionals in both organisations. The findings highlighted the effects which the HR delivery model can have on the complexity of communication between the HR department and the first line manager, the need for additional skills both for the first line manager and HR department, and the effect which deficits in HR support have on others around the first line manager, such as their peers, their teams, and their own manager.

This study makes a theoretical contribution to the implementation literature by highlighting the importance of the HR delivery model in supporting effective implementation and its effect on the wellbeing of managers and by proposing an empirically based model which researchers can use in understanding the effects of the HR delivery structure on implementation. The study also provides a practical contribution by underlining key factors which are affected by the establishment of a HR shared service centre model and offers recommendations for ways in which practitioners can support managers to allow HR practices to be more effectively applied throughout organisations and ultimately lead to more effective organisational performance.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Eilis Collins

Title of thesis: The influence of the HR Shared Service centre model on first line managers' implementation of HR Practices

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University.
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated.
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work.
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself.
7. With the oversight of my main supervisor, editorial advice has been sought. No changes of intellectual content were made as a result of this advice
8. The following conference papers have been submitted and have used content from this thesis before submission

Collins, E., Ashleigh, M., Clarke, N. & Higgs, M; *The effects of the HR shared service centre delivery model on HR implementation*

European Academy of Management 2022

Collins, E., Ashleigh, M., Clarke, N. & Higgs, M; *Supporting managers via HR shared service centres-toward a more 'human centric' approach*

British Academy of Management 2022

Signature:

Date:

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 HR's transformation and its influence on implementation

Since its introduction over thirty years ago as a way for organisations to reduce costs and become more efficient, the HR shared service centre (HR SSC), part of a model proposed by Ulrich (1997), has been a ubiquitous element of the HR delivery framework for many larger organisations across the globe. A recent study by the Deloitte consultancy company suggests that over time, instead of moving away from the use of HR shared service centre operations, the world's leading companies have continued to develop them with high impact business outcomes, allowing businesses to adapt to geopolitical conditions and to provide a better customer experience (Deloitte, 2021). For many first-line managers implementing HR practices, the HR SSC structure offers the key mechanism to access information and gain clarification about the HR policies which they are required to implement.

Given the proliferation of HR shared services in larger companies, and the number of organisations which have chosen to centralise HR support in HR shared service centres (Farndale *et al.*, 2009), it is interesting to note the fragmentation of the HR SSC academic literature (Richter and Bruhl, 2017) and the very limited number of articles which have considered the effect of the HR shared service support model on managers' implementation of HR policies (see appendix B for details of the HR SSC studies reviewed as part of this study). The literature surrounding the HR shared services area has been largely practitioner-based rather than academic, with a focus on how to establish HR shared services rather than the effect of HR shared services on the behaviour of organisational actors. The academic SSC literature has not tested configurational factors which may influence performance (including non-financial performance outcomes), nor has it considered the importance of the strength of connection between the SSC and its customers e.g., by exploring the relationship between the SSC and the users of its service to gain a deeper understanding of the SSC-customer interactions (Richter and Bruhl, 2017).

The implementation of HR practices has been shown to be key to organisational competitive advantage (Becker and Huselid, 1998; Gratton and Truss, 2003; Becker and Huselid, 2006). Previous HR studies have shown that whilst HR policies and practices are developed by Human Resource teams, it is the managers working with their team members who are tasked with implementing policies (see e.g., studies from Whittaker and Marchington, 2003; Perry and Kulik, 2008). First Line Managers (FLMs) are responsible for the language used with employees when discussing HR issues and for how HR information is presented to employees. We also know from recent research that the support FLMs receive from the HR department is likely to influence their behaviour when implementing HR practices with their teams (see e.g., the recent study by Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2020). Understanding how managers implement HR policies and the effect of the

support provided by the HR department is therefore critical if we are to ensure that HR policies achieve the desired organisational outcomes (Yang and Arthur, 2019). Kurdi-Nakra et al., 2022 reviewed the evidence gathered in the devolution literature and concluded that the debate has moved from discussions around whether HR tasks should be devolved to managers to debate about how FLM involvement in the implementation of HRM can best be leveraged.

Research into HR implementation has started to receive increased focus only in the past decade. Research has highlighted the need to investigate the gap between intended HR practices and the practices actually experienced by employees (e.g., Jiang *et al.*, 2012; Wright and Nishii, 2013; Piening *et al.*, 2014; Woodrow and Guest, 2014). Academic studies looking at HR implementation have focused largely on developing our understanding of the different factors which may have an influence on effective implementation (see e.g., studies by Runhaar and Runhaar, 2012; Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2013; Den Hartog *et al.*, 2013; Kuvaas *et al.*, 2014; Sikora and Ferris, 2014; Knies *et al.*, 2014; Piening *et al.*, 2014; Trullen *et al.*, 2016; Makhecha *et al.*, 2018; Pak, 2018; Williams, 2019; Chacko and Conway, 2019; Tyskbo, 2020; Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2020).

This is a positive evolution, as to be able to help shape the creation of an environment conducive to achieving the desired organisational and employee outcomes, it is key for HR departments to understand the factors which influence effective implementation (Sikora and Ferris, 2014). However, there are still gaps in our understanding regarding implementation of HR practices and the factors which influence effective implementation.

This study answers calls from authors such as Steffensen *et al.*, (2019) to examine the gaps in our knowledge of the HR implementation process. Furthermore, the recent review of the devolution literature by Kurdi-Nakra et al, (2022) has suggested that that there has been little debate about the reasons why managers adopt multiple implementation behaviours. The gaps addressed by this study include the limited research into the impact of the current HR SSC delivery model and its effects on implementation by FLMs and how they then implement HR practices. Authors such as Farndale *et al.*, (2009) have highlighted the need for more in-depth case studies to build our knowledge about the effects of SSCs. There are also gaps in our understanding regarding the competencies needed by FLMs to effectively implement HR practices and the resulting role stress when FLMs do not possess these competencies. The prevalence of the HR SSC model has e.g., led to the need for FLM competencies in finding HR information.

Furthermore, the impact of the 'connectedness' between FLMs and the HR department, as well as FLMs' expectations of HR support, is an area that the literature to date has not explored in any depth. There has been limited research specifically into the effect of the HR SSC on communication and the salience of HR messaging to FLMs, and a lack of research into what the FLM expects and needs from the HR SSC delivery model to be able to implement HR practices as intended. The researcher considers that the scope of the study in comparing the delivery

structures of the two organisations, one with a central offshore service and one with a central onshore service, adds originality to the research. The service delivery structures offered by the Organisation Offshore and the Organisation Onshore reflect the types of service delivery structures in place in many organisations across the UK and so offer a suitable way to understand the impact that the different HR SSC delivery structures may be having on FLMs in UK organisations.

The study examines the effects of the provision of remote support that HR teams provide to FLMs and their teams and delves into the experiences of FLMs who are implementing HR policies in two case study organisations. The FLMs have their own needs and expectations from the HR department as employees. By discussing FLMs' daily experiences with HR, the study explores what they expect and need from the HR department in order to be able to implement HR practices and policies effectively with their team members. The study also considers the impact of deficiencies in HR support for FLMs on others, such as their own line managers and peers, in each of the organisations. The study offers an insight into the aspects of HR support which managers consider important when implementing HR practices. The study also proposes a model which practitioners and academics alike can adopt that reflects the role of the HR SSC in HR implementation and suggests a set of factors which influence the effectiveness of the HR SSC as a delivery mechanism. By addressing each of these factors in turn, practitioners can work to improve managers' perceptions of the service they receive from the HR SSC and in this way can support managers in effective implementation.

Gaining a better understanding of how HR practices and policies are implemented on the 'shop floor' will help us to understand why HR practices and policies result in successful outcomes in some circumstances but not in others. A better understanding of the effect of the HR support received by FLMs will allow HR departments to consider their interactions with FLMs and to adapt these interactions so that they are more likely to lead to the desired organisational outcomes. Such an understanding of FLMs' needs will also allow HR departments to recognise the elements of HR support which result in stress or wasted effort by managers, freeing up both the HR department and FLMs to focus on key activities within the organisation, minimising miscommunication, and frustration. Furthermore, the literature to date has overlooked the effect of the HR delivery model and HR support on FLMs' motivation and wellbeing (Evans, 2015). Gathering insights directly from managers in organisations with different delivery models via narrative descriptions of their interactions with HR departments, allows us to start to look at the steps in the HR implementation process and to identify where specific issues may be occurring which are having a negative effect on managers' wellbeing. Exploring the influence of the HR delivery model allows us to add an additional 'piece' to the HR implementation puzzle. By considering the HR SSC element of the implementation 'puzzle' and improving the support

available to managers via HR SSCs, researchers and practitioners can together contribute to the achievement of desired organisational outcomes.

1.2 The motivation of the researcher

The researcher's career has been spent implementing HR IT systems and new HR service delivery models, as well as improving the efficiency of HR delivery teams. The researcher has worked as Global Head of HR Services and has led global HR transformation programmes for firms across multiple industry sectors. The researcher has spent over twenty years implementing new organisational structures in HR departments wishing to 'modernise' and deliver their services in a more efficient way to managers. The researcher has seen first-hand the many issues that impact managers when a new organisational structure for HR is put in place: either they do not understand what they need to do to access HR support or they find ways around the formal system and access support from colleagues. This study was prompted by a desire to bridge the gap between the intended and unintended consequences of how the HR department delivers its services. It also comes from the intent to understand the influence of the HR delivery model on FLM attitudes. FLMs have been chosen by the researcher as the subject of this study as the organisational models implemented by the researcher frequently appeared to overlook the needs of FLMs. Instead of collaborating with FLMs, organisations were instead communicating HR policies in a directive-driven way, implementing a 'top-down' organisational structure which was developed in isolation by the respective HR departments. The researcher was aware of the frustration of FLMs who either did not understand the intent of the policy or did not understand the policies themselves and were thus unable to access reliable and consistent advice through the new HR delivery model. The researcher wished to examine the changes in managerial behaviours which resulted when the HR department structure changed, in order to be able to help organisations to avoid these problems and provide more effective support to their FLMs, thereby achieving the organisational outcomes envisaged by the HR policies being implemented.

1.3 Background and scope of this study

The study responds to a research gap that exists, with no recent studies focusing on the features of the HR delivery structure – and specifically HR SSCs – when considering how managers implement HR practices. This research began with focus groups in two organisations, Organisation A and Organisation B, to test whether the research gaps resonated with FLMs in practice. The researcher developed, as a result of the focus group feedback, a survey instrument which was first tested with 137 FLMs across multiple sectors. The researcher then used this survey instrument to gather quantitative data from 262 FLMs in other UK-based organisations, Organisation Offshore and Organisation Onshore. Organisation Offshore had set up an offshore HR shared service centre to support FLMs, while Organisation Onshore had HR support for FLMs in a centralised team onshore at their headquarters. In the final phase of the study, 25 FLMs from Organisation Offshore and 21 FLMs from Organisation Onshore were interviewed to understand their

experience of working with the HR department to access the information and guidance they needed to be able to implement HR policies.

Organisation Offshore and Organisation Onshore were both based in England and considered as 'typical cases', since their HR delivery models were in line with the delivery models implemented by similar sized organisations in the UK. Organisation Offshore is an education company with approximately 15000 employees globally and approximately 5,000 based in the UK which had implemented an 'Ulrich style' HR Shared Services model in 2016. The delivery model included HR Shared Service teams based offshore, as well as an IT infrastructure which allowed for a more 'self-service' approach. Organisation Onshore is a data and information services company with approximately 5,000 employees based in the UK which also implemented an 'Ulrich-type' service delivery model, a HR Shared Services team based onshore at its headquarters, and a very recent IT system which allowed for a more 'self-service' approach that could also be used by first-line managers. The organisations are referred to throughout this thesis as Organisation Offshore or Organisation Onshore to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The differences in the location of the HR support in these HR delivery models (one team based onshore and one based offshore) are examined in this study to assess whether the location and approach to delivering HR support has had an influence on managers' perceptions and behaviours.

1.4 Research purpose and contribution

This study specifically addresses the following research questions:

Research Question I: *Which elements of HR support do FLMs value most when implementing HR practices?*

Research Question II: *To what extent does the location of the HR SSC influence FLMs' perceptions of the elements of HR support which they value most?*

Research Question III: *How does the HR support received by FLMs influence managers' behaviours when implementing HR practices?*

1.5 Thesis structure

This thesis comprises eight chapters. Chapter 1 includes the background to the study, the research purpose, and its contribution and scope. Chapter 2 describes the results of a systematic review of the HR implementation and HR delivery structure literature and outlines the research questions that were explored as part of the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. Chapter 3 outlines the pragmatic philosophical position of the researcher, the sequential explanatory mixed methods approach used to answer the research questions, and the mixed method design of the study. Chapter 3 outlines the research design, ethical considerations, and strategies for preparing the data. Chapter 4 presents the quantitative results. Chapter 5 sets out the approach taken to analyse the qualitative data. Chapter 6 offers the study findings and

analysis. Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the answers to the research questions posed and the theoretical and practical contributions of the research. Finally, Chapter 8 offers the conclusions and limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

HR implementation has been a subject of considerable debate over the past decade, with recent literature reviews suggesting that the role of the FLM in HR implementation has been oversimplified, and that there has been a failure to take into account the different influences on managers' implementation of Human Resource Management (HRM) (Kehoe and Han, 2020). This chapter outlines the theories and research approaches used by the studies to date to explore the implementation of HR practices in the workplace. The researcher outlines the steps followed to carry out a systematic literature review and considers the role of the FLM and the concept of effective HR implementation in the extant literature. The chapter summarises the evidence to date relating to the factors which influence FLMs when implementing HR practices and considers the impact of the HR shared service centre model as a mechanism to provide support to FLMs. The chapter takes each of the different roles which the FLM plays in an organisation and considers in each case how the support received from the HR department influences the FLMs' attitudes. The chapter contributes to the HR implementation knowledge by providing a perspective on the many ways in which the support provided to managers by the HR department influences HR policy implementation.

2.2 Systematic literature review methodology

A systematic literature search was carried out to explore the extant literature and understand the evidence to date regarding FLMs and the role of HR, and specifically the role of HR delivery structures on the implementation process. This literature review, however, aims to synthesise three specific strands of the literature:

- i) the literature regarding the role of the FLM in HR implementation
- ii) the literature regarding the role of the HR team in supporting the process of implementation and
- iii) the literature relating to the HR delivery structures and HR shared service centres

In line with the guidance from Cresswell (2014, p.31) and Seale (2018, p.76), the literature review was carried out using a documented protocol of what elements should be included in the review. The following protocol was developed and followed by the researcher. The initial search term used was 'HR Implement*', and the search included full text and related words in articles from 2000 to 2021 to allow the researcher to explore the most recent literature regarding the topics of interest. The search included peer-reviewed papers only and English language only, excluding conference papers and book reviews. The search was carried out in databases known to provide the greatest coverage and full access to articles: Web of Science, Scopus and PsycINFO.

The truncated version of the term 'HR implementation' was then used to ensure that different versions of HR implementation were included. The searches identified articles from the Scopus and PsycINFO databases.

1. This initial group of articles were skim-reviewed to determine whether they could contribute to the understanding of the literature.
2. A literature map was prepared for each topic showing how this study would contribute to the literature.
3. Summaries of the most relevant articles were drafted and specific books relevant to the topic were ordered and read by the researcher. Dissertations on relevant topics were also accessed and reviewed.
4. The literature review was then assembled systematically by theme and concept and a summary of the key gaps which the current study would address was put together.

After the initial inspection of papers, the researcher then proceeded to categorise the relevant ones using the Thorpe 'ABC' classification (2005) structure. Articles were categorised as A if they were definitely relevant, i.e., if the article referred to HR implementation empirical studies, conceptual, or theoretical papers, or papers relating to the role of the FLM or HR in implementation. Articles were categorised as B, or partially relevant, if they were HR-related but without specific reference to HR implementation in the title, abstract, or general body of the text, or did not relate to HR implementation by FLMs (e.g., centring on the impact of middle or top management on implementation), or focused on only one specific HR practice, for example bullying or PA and not on the role of HR or FLMs. The final category, C, included articles which were not relevant, e.g., those which were not specifically HR implementation related, or were completely unrelated to HR (Thorpe *et al.*, 2005). This exclusion and categorisation protocol resulted in 126 papers remaining in category A, relevant to this study.

Further searches focused on HR implementation and the role of the FLM. Searches were carried out again using the truncated search term 'HR implement*' AND 'manager', 'HR implementation' AND 'manager' across a broad range of databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, and PsycINFO. This resulted in no new articles. Further searches included 'HR implementation' and 'manager', with any references in the full text field. This search revealed 56 relevant articles that were a subset of the 126 papers which had been identified as relevant (category A) to the general HR implementation search outlined in this section. The subsequent searches related to the HR delivery structure, and specifically to the HR shared service centres, using the keywords 'HR Implementation' AND 'HR delivery structure'. However, the results were disappointing, with only 15 articles, none of which were truly relevant to the topic of interest. This initial search showed that there were very few papers that considered the HR SSC delivery

structure, and so the search was broadened, using the search terms ‘HR implementation’ AND ‘HR shared services’ and including references to HR implementation and the HR shared services within the text and related terms. For the review of the HR shared services (HR SSC) literature, the search was expanded to non-peer-reviewed journals to ensure that the review included as many relevant articles as possible. Much of the HR SSC literature is practitioner-focused and the researcher wanted to include relevant information provided by practitioners as well as relevant academic studies. Once the exclusion and categorisation protocol had been followed for the review of these papers, 55 relevant studies and 15 conceptual papers remained that were categorised as A (relevant to this study). **Figure 1** shows the three literature strands which were considered and **Figure 2** shows the literature review steps taken by the researcher.

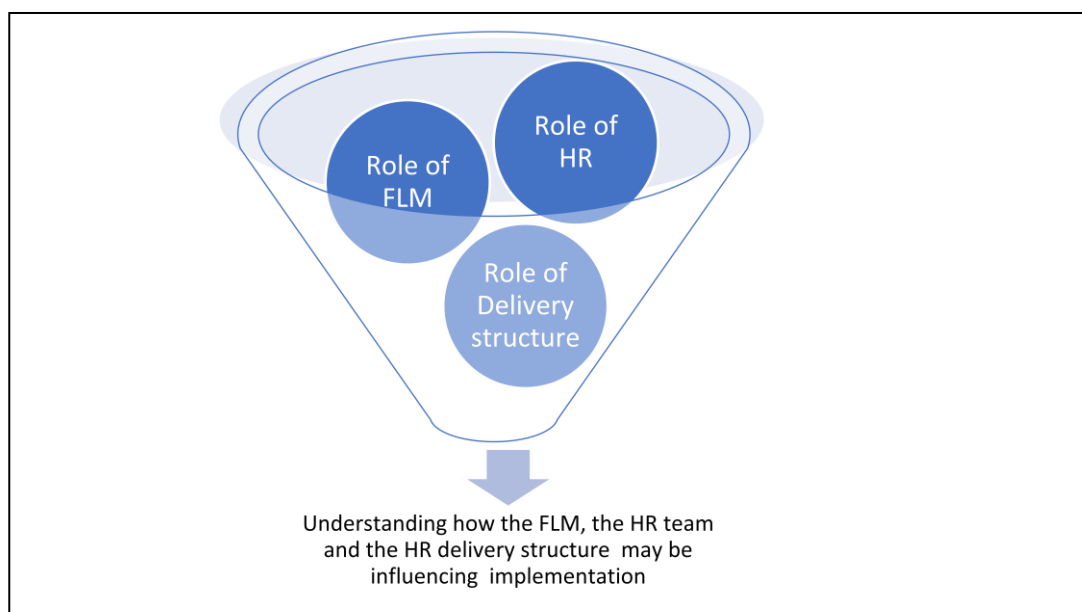


Figure 1 Integrating three literature strands: HR implementation, role of FLM and HR in implementation and the HR delivery structure

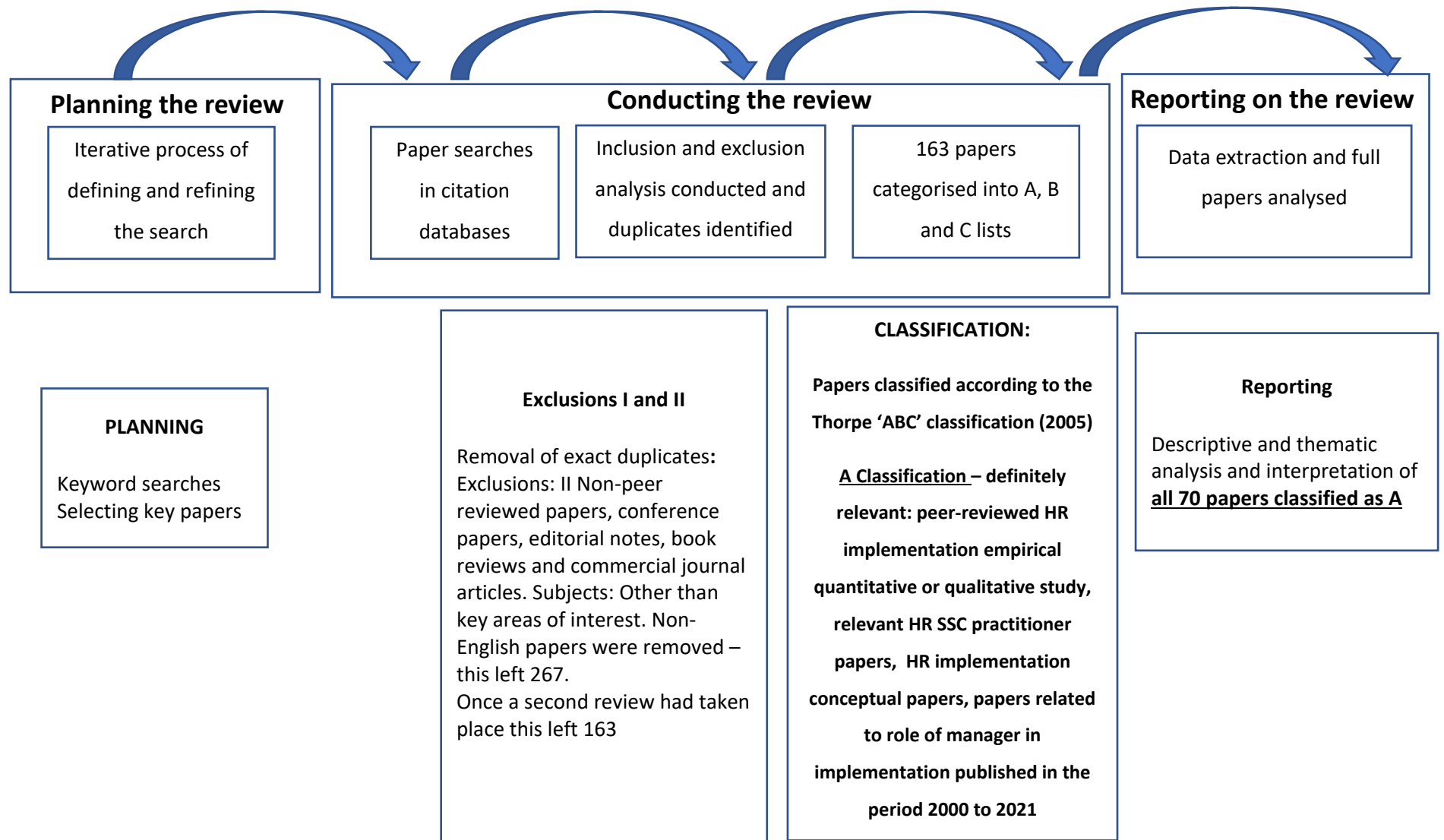


Figure 2 Steps followed in the analysis of the three literature strands

All articles were uploaded to a reference management programme (EndNote) and were categorised into key themes: HR implementation; HR implementation and HR roles; and HR implementation and HR SSC and delivery structures. The approach and search criteria were discussed with the supervision team to reach agreement on the articles to be included in the final list for this review. Following the guidelines specified by Thomas and Harden (2008), interpretation of the data followed a series of stages. Firstly, the text was reviewed and the descriptive themes were identified. The main findings emerging from each article, the key theory underpinning each study, the type of study (qualitative or quantitative), and the reported findings, were all logged in each case. This approach was taken to determine in each case the main findings and the methods used from which to derive the study findings. The literature review continued throughout the period of the study to ensure that any new relevant findings were incorporated.

2.3 What is meant by ‘effective’ HR implementation?

As we seek to understand the impact of the HR delivery model on implementation, it may be helpful to begin by considering what is meant by ‘effective HR implementation’. Effective HR implementation in the literature refers to the situation where implemented HR practices are equal to intended ones, or when the desired employee outcomes are attained (Khilji and Wang, 2006). Desired outcomes might be, for example, employee commitment, abilities, or satisfaction with HRM practices (Bondarouk *et al.*, 2019). Steffensen *et al.*, (2019) highlight that it is not enough to just have HR content ‘on the books’ (Sikora *et al.*, 2015, p.1909), as it cannot have meaningful effects if it is not applied throughout the organisation (Becker and Huselid, 2006).

Successful implementation has been described in the literature as the ‘effectiveness of line managers in implementing HRM practices on the work floor’ (Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2013, p.863). Effective implementation has also been expressed as the ‘*translation process by which HR practices are incorporated into daily life by HR professionals, targeted managers and employees through the design, introduction, application, experience and perception by also subsequent evaluation, redesign, and reintroduction of HR practices*’ (Bondarouk *et al.*, 2019, p.2996). The definition proposed by these authors takes into account the dynamic nature of HR implementation and the multiple feedback loops and considers the effect not only of the HR practices designed by the HR function but also those of the FLMs in communicating or ‘translating’ HR policies and procedures for their team members. Described by some as the ‘business model’ of HR, a unique situation exists whereby FLMs occupy a vital position between HR decision-makers and employees (Harris, 2002). Another model frequently referenced in the implementation literature is that of Wright and Nishii (2007). The authors considered the intended policies developed by decision makers, the actual implementation of HR practices, and

employees' perceptions of those practices (Wright and Nishii, 2007; Op de Beeck, 2017) and found that any gap between intended, actual and perceived HRM hinders successful organisational outcomes. Taking Wright and Nishii's model (2007) and thinking about it in practical terms, we can consider an example of a HR department's decision that employees should receive a formal performance appraisal once a year, using a specific evaluation approach. In practice, however, the FLMs will differ in the way they implement the policy or process with employees (Brewster *et al.*, 2013). As a result, the implemented HR practices are not equal to the intended ones. A lack of alignment between the intended HR practice and the implemented HR practice is problematic as it may lead to a failure to develop in their employee groups a consistent set of desirable work attitudes and behaviours (Yang and Arthur, 2019).

For most HR policies and practices, the HR department will intend for the implementation to be consistent across the organisation (Makhecha *et al.*, 2018). However, the overly simplistic assumption that HR implementation follows a top-down, sequential approach whereby carefully designed practices are implemented in a linear and controlled manner may need to be reconsidered as, - e.g., employees may also attempt to shape practices to bridge perceived gaps between the policy and the practice and to meet their needs (Budjanovcanin, 2018). Furthermore, we should not make the assumption that FLMs will always implement HR policies in the ways HR departments have designed them, as this is naïve and 'unhelpful' (Marchington and Grugulis, 2011, p.1120).

FLMs tend to play a central role in the practical application of HR policies in many organisations, whether that relates to interviewing candidates, conducting performance appraisals or pay discussions, or providing advice to their teams. FLMs also play a central role in the HR implementation process at the individual and unit level and therefore have considerable influence on the HRM process (Steffensen *et al.*, 2019). FLMs have the potential to influence employee attitudes and perceptions of HRM content through their behaviours (Nishii and Wright, 2008, p.235). They can therefore be seen as one of the critical links in the implementation process, bridging the gap between the intended and experienced practices (e.g., Gratton and Truss, 2003; McGovern *et al.*, 1997; Khilji and Wang, 2006; Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010; Woodrow and Guest, 2014). They '*are deeply involved in shaping the outcomes of HR practices from their team*' (Lopez-Cotarelo, 2018, p.255). FLMs are also likely to have a level of discretion in the way in which they implement policies. This flexibility can result in different perceptions of policies and practices at the business unit or team level (Nishii and Wright, 2007), which means that the policies are not applied in a consistent way across the organisation.

FLMs play a key role, therefore, in making sense of these policies for the employees in their team by interpreting the policies for their employees (Op de Beeck, 2017). FLMs can choose the type of content which is used with employees and how it is presented to them, and so the FLM's role is critical to understanding the impact of HRM on organisations (Yang and Arthur,

2019). Van Mierlo *et al.*,(2018) argue that HRM implementation refers to the translation from intended to actual HRM practices, FLMs are the key actors and so gathering data to understand FLM views is important (Brewster *et al.*, 2013; Geare *et al.*, 2006).

The academic literature on implementation considers it to be a 'one-way' street.(Van Mierlo *et al.*, 2018). However, the reality of HR implementation in many organisations today is often far less linear and far messier than a simple cascade from the HR department to FLMs who then implement it in a uniform manner. To take a concrete example: an organisation might have a policy of conducting annual performance reviews, and the HR professional responding to the surveys might report that 100 per cent of employees have had their performance review meeting. However, just because the policy reviews have been conducted does not mean that there has been universal or consistent implementation (Ang *et al.*, 2013).

The process and mechanisms by which the HR department interacts with FLMs will need to work smoothly to avoid 'implementation gaps' (Makhecha *et al.*, 2018; Budjanovcanin, 2018). 'Implementation gaps' may consist of gaps of omission, where parts of the HR practice are dropped by the implementors, or gaps of commission, where the content is adapted or amended by the implementors. Makhecha *et al.*,(2019) suggest that, furthermore, there may be gaps of initiation, where the implementors add content which is not part of the original intended content, or of non-realisation, where specific content is not delivered. Finally, gaps of non-experience may also arise, where the content is delivered but does not seem to have been perceived or noticed by the employees. Where implementation procedures were not standardised or formally communicated to FLMs, there appeared to be more adaption of HR practices. Governance mechanisms and a formal communication approach to sharing HR practice information with FLMs appear, therefore, to be important, from the evidence of this study. Both the governance approach and communication are likely to be influenced by the HR delivery model, which will be investigated further in this study.

As HR practices are implemented, they will need to go through a number of distinct stages; Bos-Nehles and Guest (2013) suggest a four-stage framework for HR implementation. The four-stage framework sets out that HR implementation begins with the decision to adopt a particular HR practice. The second stage concerns decisions about the content and quality of the HR practice. The third stage involves a decision about whether to make use of the practice with employees. The fourth and final stage concerns the quality of implementation. Some stages may therefore be dominated by the HR department (e.g., the first two stages) with the final stages dominated by the FLM.

2.4 The FLM and HR implementation

Several authors have found differences between the work of managers at different levels of the organisational hierarchy (e.g., Hales, 2005; Bos-Nehles and Van Riemsdijk, 2014). The support structure offered to managers at lower hierarchical levels may often differ to that provided to

managers at high levels e.g., middle managers or senior managers, and research by Conway and Monks,(2010) found little devolution of HR responsibilities to middle managers. Other studies, such as the study by McConville and Holden,(1999) highlight issues with middle managers acting as a buffer between staff and their seniors, playing a role which is different to that which is expected of the FLM.

This study focuses on First Line Managers (FLMs). The definition of FLMs in the literature however varies, with no single accepted definition. Purcell and Hutchison (2007) refer to line managers, especially FLMs, as those with *'direct supervisory responsibility – those in the lower echelon of the management hierarchy with immediate responsibility for their subordinates' work and performance'*. Hales (2005, p.473) defines a FLM as a manager *'to whom non-managerial employees report'*. Steffensen *et al.*,(2019) refer to FLMs as lower-to-middle managers (LTMMs). Bos-Nehles (2010, p.15) includes the performance of HR activities and defines FLMs as the *'lowest line managers at the operational level, who manage a team of operational employees on a day-to-day basis and are responsible for performing HR activities'*. Bos-Nehles' definition will be adopted here, as it includes both elements: performing HR activities and managing a team.

2.5 The themes and theoretical basis of HR implementation studies

The implementation literature is largely fragmented in terms of its theoretical foundations. Attribution theory has been used by many HR implementation researchers to explain why HR practices fail to work as intended (see e.g., Piening *et al.*, 2014; Sikora *et al.*, 2015; Dello-Russo *et al.*,2018; Chacko and Conway, 2019; Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2020; Canet-Giner *et al.*, 2020). Depending upon what reasoning employees attribute to being behind a HR practice, employees may view a HR practice positively – as they may believe that it is being implemented for their own wellbeing; alternatively, they may be less well disposed to it if they view it as exploiting or taking advantage of their situation. This will also be the case for FLMs. The attributions that FLMs make about specific HR policies are likely to affect how they implement HR practices with their teams. Hewett *et al.*,(2018 p.87) suggest that *'at the heart of attribution theory is the assertion that people are on a continuous quest to explain events that they encounter'*.

Theories considered in the HR implementation literature include e.g., (Ability, Motivation, Opportunity (AMO) which suggests that the core purpose of HR practices is to promote workers' ability, motivation, and opportunity to contribute to high performance in their jobs,Kurdi-Nakra *et al.*, (2022) in their review of the devolution literature suggested that AMO has been a key theory underpinning research relating to the delegation of HR tasks to managers. AMO theory continues to be used today in the HR implementation literature stream (see e.g., Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2013; Vermeeren *et al.*, 2014;Van Waeyenberg and Decramer, 2018). The 'Opportunity' aspect of the AMO model does not however always fit neatly to HR implementation research. HR implementation researchers appear to interpret the 'opportunity' element of the

AMO model in different ways with e.g. Bos-Nehles et al., 2013 suggesting that HR support falls under the 'opportunity' element of the AMO model. Others such as Van Wayenberg and Decramer(2018) consider the opportunity element of the model as referring to the availability of manager time to implement HR practices. This inconsistency and lack of agreement regarding the opportunity element of the AMO model makes it more difficult for future research to build on previous studies which have been underpinned by the AMO model. The inconsistency in how theories such as AMO have been used to understand HR implementation means that there is still significant scope for us to build our knowledge of the factors influencing effective FLM implementation.

Much of the implementation literature to date relies heavily, , on the concept of a 'strong HR system', taken from a paper by Bowen and Ostroff (2004) which has been developed with attribution theory at its basis. Studies which use Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) arguments to explain the link between HRM and firm performance include e.g., Guest and Conway (2011)and Garcia-Carbonell *et al.*,(2015). In their 2004 paper, Bowen and Ostroff argue that the key to the effective implementation of HRM is to ensure that certain key elements, or meta-features, of the HR system are present throughout the organisation. These elements are consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus among decision makers, which are necessary so that employees receive the same signals about what the 'appropriate' responses are. The paper suggests that without distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus amongst organisational actors, a weak HR system is likely to develop, which can result in a higher manifestation of individual reactions and interpretations (Dello-Russo, 2018). The concept of a 'strong' HR system which sends clear signals, prompting employees to view HR practices in a certain way, aligns with the idea of situational strength: the theory that a HR system can create a strong or weak situation.

The idea that HR system strength is desirable to support a consistent implementation of HR practices is both intuitive and logical. We would expect that a consistently implemented set of HR practices will send signals to employees and help to create a similar level of understanding and shared beliefs across all levels of the organisation (McDermott *et al.*, 2013). In contrast, if shared perceptions of what HR practices aim to convey are not formed in a consistent manner, then individual-level HR attributions and responses may predominate (Hewett *et al.*, 2018). To have individuals draw different conclusions from the same HR practice is clearly problematic for HR functions, whose goal is to achieve consistency both of implementation and in how HR practices are perceived.

The theory of the 'strong HR system' also serves to direct attention specifically to the importance of the process element in HRM (Brewster, 2013). If there is a 'strong HR system' in place, with consistent policies, and with consensus amongst all levels of the organisation regarding the purpose of the policies, then we might expect that there will be clear messages

being implemented by FLMS with team members. Empirical research has also established that a strong HR system can mediate between HR policies and employee HR attributions (Katou *et al.*, 2020).

There has, however, been some criticism of the idea of 'HR system strength'. Criticism of the model has centred around the potential consequences of a 'strong' HR system, that FLMS have limited autonomy to respond to different stakeholder interests (Gilbert *et al.*, 2011). Critics of the theory suggest that this lack of flexibility will negatively impact FLMS' belief that they are competent in their role, and could in turn result in a lowering of motivation (Li and Bagger, 2008). Strong systems can also be perceived by employees as controlling, thereby predicting negative employee outcomes (Hewett *et al.*, 2018). Despite some criticisms of the model, however, it is clear that for many researchers the theoretical framework provided by Bowen and Ostroff (2004) has been useful in prompting a common understanding of the factors that are important for the effective implementation of HRM.

The role of HR in implementation was first considered as part of this study (see Appendix A for those implementation studies which relate to the role of HR that were reviewed as part of this study). The researcher felt that it was critical to first examine the role of HR in the implementation process before broadening the review to consider the role of other organisational actors, such as FLMS. This review of the implementation literature through the lens of the role of HR led to some interesting observations. The papers relating to the role of HR in implementation were identified in the systematic literature review carried out by the researcher, and the table highlights the key findings, sample sizes, and countries in which the studies took place. The research findings included in this part of the literature review were not based on data gathered from a small number of countries but instead were based on data gathered from managers and employees across the world, including from the US, UK, Korea, Australia, Pakistan, Netherlands, Spain, Taiwan, the Maldives, and Scandinavia.

The researcher observed that of those implementation studies reviewed that were linked to the role of HR in the implementation process, around 35% were of a qualitative nature, 40% adopted a quantitative approach, and the remaining studies used a mixed method approach. The table shown in Appendix A also includes relevant conceptual papers to highlight the theories used across the HR implementation literature. The researcher found that the key gaps highlighted in the studies relating to the role of HR in the implementation process focused on three areas: the skills of the HR department, differences in perceptions between managers and the HR department regarding the service offered, and the need for collaboration between managers and the HR department to ensure effective implementation

When analysing the findings from the implementation papers linked to the role of HR, firstly, the researcher noted that a number of studies concluded that there were skill deficiencies

in the HR department which needed to be addressed (see e.g., studies by Wright *et al.*, 2001; Lengnick-Hall, 2003; Caldwell, 2004; Stirpe *et al.*, 2013). Researchers have acknowledged the difficulties faced by the HR department in moving from a transactional processing function and transforming to take on a more strategic, advisory function (Caldwell, 2004) and have argued that the effectiveness of the function may be linked to whether it is tasked by the organisation with being transactional or transformational (Steyn *et al.*, 2017). Nguyen (2018) proposes that the extent to which the HR department is considered central to the organisation will determine how effective it is in contributing to effective implementation. It has been suggested that the development of certain skills, such as communication skills, within HR departments, is key to successful HR implementation (Garcia-Carbonnell *et al.*, 2015). The importance of HR departments taking a more proactive stance and developing the ability to build rapport in order to influence effective implementation has also been highlighted in the research findings (Khatri *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the need for HR departments to be able to build trust has also been underlined by the research to date (Brown *et al.*, 2017). Stirpe *et al.*, (2013) emphasise the importance of the perceived credibility of the HR department, arguing that this is a key influencer of employees' acceptance of HR practices.

Secondly, the studies reviewed showed the significant differences between the perceptions of managers and the HR department regarding the service offered (Wright *et al.*, 2001) and of the effectiveness of HR practices (Guest and Conway, 2011). Researchers have also underlined the need for HR departments to remain committed to effective implementation and to take into account employees' perceptions of HR practices (see e.g., Khiji and Wang, 2006). It has been argued that HR departments need to build into the implementation process some discretion for managers to implement HR practices as an important means to effective implementation (Lopez-Cotarelo, 2018). Previous research has emphasised the need for the context in which HR practices are being implemented to be considered so that the operational aspects of HR practice implementation are aligned to the contextual setting (Bredin, 2011).

Finally, collaboration between managers and the HR department has been a theme in the implementation literature relating to the role of HR. The need for HR to work with managers to develop a 'shared approach' to implementing HR practices so that they are aligned with organisational objectives has been emphasised in the research (Dany *et al.*, 2008; Najeeb, 2013). Stirpe (2016) lists the many initiatives which HR departments can put in place to support managers in the implementation process. Baluch (2017) found that the support from HR does shape employees' perceptions of HR practices and we will discuss in this review how FLMs' perceptions of HR practices are influenced by HR support as we consider the FLM not just in their managerial capacity but also as an employee of the organisation.

There was, however, no evidence of implementation studies to date that consider how HR departments are organised to support implementation. The exception to this is the study by Francis *et al.*,(2014), who call for further research to examine the impact of distancing between HR departments and managers and its influence on HR implementation (see Appendix A for details of the studies included in the literature reviewed which relate to the role of HR in implementation).

2.6 The influence of the HR delivery model on implementation effectiveness

Many of the questions and issues concerning the role that HR professionals need to play in supporting desired organisational outcomes via implementation by FLMs are addressed in Dave Ulrich's work, *Human Resource Champions* (1997). Ulrich (1997) argues that the debate about the value of the HR function (or its 'reason of being') should focus on what the function contributes to the business instead of on its internal activities. He proposes that its value is not defined by what happens inside it, but rather by what its users or customers derive from it. Ulrich and his colleagues developed a framework for describing the added value of the HR function, with two main dimensions deflecting the focus away from operational aspects to strategic aspects and drawing attention to the conflicting demands facing HR professionals (Shakil *et al.*, 2019). Ulrich (1997) argues that organisational excellence can be delivered by the HR department by performing four distinct key HR roles.

- i) management of strategic human resources ('strategic partner')
- ii) management of transformation change ('change agent')
- iii) management of the employees ('employee champion')
- iv) management of administration ('administrative expert')

Although Ulrich's work '*is primarily prescriptive and didactic, rather than empirical*', it '*provides one of the most systematic frameworks for capturing the emergence of new HR roles*' (Caldwell, 2004, p.207). The Ulrich model is one of the most well-known approaches to the organisation of the HR function. Researchers have suggested that HR practices have a strong tendency towards isomorphism and towards approaches that have been widely praised as 'remedies' to solve organisational problems, and in this way Ulrich's model has been seen as a solution to the organisation of HR roles and has become widely accepted for HR functions throughout the UK. The Ulrich model presents the roles of HR in a way that many organisations have found attractive, and this has led to many larger organisations adopting this model and using it to transform their HR service delivery model. Guest and Woodrow (2012, p.111) suggest that '*despite Ulrich's own equivocation, this three-legged structural framework has been adopted with enthusiasm in many organisations*'.

2.6.1 HR delivery models and the different types of HR SSCs

The HR delivery model is important to the FLM experience of HR support as it helps to determine how easy it is for FLMs to access HR support. HR delivery models in larger organisations are likely to include a HR SSC, as well as centres of expertise which consolidate HR knowledge on specific subjects such as reward, talent management or compensation and which focus on a consistent approach across the organisation. The HR model is also likely to include a HR business partner role and can include local HR advisors (Horan and Vernon, 2003). As a result of the Ulrich model and the establishment of HR shared service centres, employees and FLMs are offered a new way of accessing HR support – via a portal or IT system and via a shared service centre. The need to access support via a shared service centre necessitates a behaviour change by both FLM and employee, as they are encouraged to be more self-sufficient in finding HR information independently, only contacting HR when they cannot identify suitable answers to their questions from the self-service literature made available to them.

Some of the objectives of implementing a new delivery structure which includes a HR SSC for many organisations are to allow standardisation, prevent duplication, and drive continuous improvement by having a large volume of activities consolidated in one team (McCracken and McIvor, 2013). Under the heading ‘HR transformation’, the cost of the HR function and the number of associated resources is reduced (Scully and Levin, 2010). With the implementation of a shared services centre, human resource activities that are otherwise dispersed throughout the HR organisation (e.g., benefits policy administration, payroll administration, and training administration, as well as transactional HR advice) are brought together in a central location (Yeung and Brockbank, 1994). It has been argued that HR departments become more strategic as a result of the change in delivery model, as they are required to redefine the roles and responsibilities of FLMs and human resource professionals. The use of HR SSC arrangements can therefore support HR in becoming more strategic (McCracken and McIvor, 2013).

HR shared service centres can, however, take a variety of different forms. Bredin and Soderlund (2011) discuss the configurational nature of HR structures, suggesting that the HR structure needs to be designed according to the relevant multi-dimensional organisational conditions. Redman *et al.* (2007) suggest that Ulrich’s (1995, p.14) explanation of shared services as ‘*the combining or consolidating of services within a corporation*’ implies that shared services are a single organisational phenomenon, occurring when separate business units within a company are brought together. However, the authors argue that in fact the practice of sharing services has moved beyond the boundaries of the single organisational unit in many cases. HR shared service centres will generally include transactional or transformational and professional advisory services, and it has been suggested that the area of professional advisory services is where there is much variation across organisations (Redman *et al.*, 2007). Meijerink and

Bondarouk,(2013) describe two types of model, transactional or transformational, describing the transactional model as one where administration and record keeping are carried out and the transformational as one where training and development and staffing are carried out.

There is a continuum of HR services offered as organisations move from a basic transactional model to a 'marketplace' model, including professional services, and the operation matures. The move to offer professional services more using a 'marketplace' model to business units in the organisation is often the key difference between organisations that are at the start of their HR SSC journey and those that are further along. Reilly and Williams (2017) discuss the trend for HR SSCs to join with other internal support functions, such as IT and finance, to form a joint service centre.

2.6.2 The reasons for the establishment of a HRSSC

Organisations might decide to implement HR shared service centres to support employees for a variety of reasons. Reilly (2000) suggests that the reasons for setting up a HR shared service centre include being part of a wider business change and introducing the concept of 'professional' services, achieving greater structural flexibility to be able to respond to change, and allowing HR to re-position itself as more strategic, reducing involvement in administration. The establishment of a HR SSC may result from major organisational re-structuring (Redman *et al.*, 2007). The authors suggest that the benefits of establishing a HR SSC are likely to be cost reduction, service quality improvement, process simplification, sharing best practice, and knowledge transfer.

The benefits of standardisation and economy of scale, leading to a better service for employees, are considerations which follow later (Horan and Vernon, 2003). In their paper, Horan and Vernon suggest that involving the business unit leadership in decisions about which services should move to a centralised HR SSC is crucial. The authors suggest that one size fits all is not appropriate for HR SSCs and that such centres need to be adapted to encompass cultural and resource issues. The organisation may, therefore, choose to retain services which require unique local knowledge or close partnership with local teams as a local HR function, and the most appropriate structure for each organisation will therefore have to be devised on a case-by-case basis. Internal governance will also need to be designed which allows suitable metrics to be provided to assess the performance of the HR SSC teams.

Farndale *et al.*,(2009) discuss the reasons why organisations set up HR SSCs, suggesting that this is either due to delivery logic, whereby the organisation wishes to achieve cost reduction, or professional logic, whereby the organisation is focused on quality improvement and customer orientation, and strategic contributions rather than standardisation and control. Meijerink and Bondarouk (2013) highlight the growth of HR shared service centres set up with the objective of economies of scale and improved HR service quality. However, the authors argue that the studies

in this area remain descriptive and do not outline under what conditions organisations can achieve the benefits they anticipate when setting up HR SSCs. Aalto *et al.*,(2019) suggest that the use of HR SSCs is an alternative way of empowering bottom-up thinking. Furthermore, the model provides 'sideways-in' lateral networks of professionals to challenge old bureaucratic thinking.

2.6.3 The effects of the establishment of an HRSSC on service quality

The establishment of a HR SSC can result in other benefits in addition to cost savings. It can lead to an increased focus on efficiency and professionalism – see e.g., the paper from Farndale *et al.*,(2009), which uses Paauwe's model of the HR function to focus on the delivery and professional aspects of the HR function's activities. The authors discuss HR SSCs that are in-sourced rather than out-sourced and that can deliver a consolidation of knowledge and skills. Research has found that service quality increases through the use of shared service centres due to better consistency and accuracy and due to the same process being followed throughout the organisation (Reilly, 2000).

The quality of the service provided by HR SSCs is typically evaluated by organisations using service metrics. Empirical studies have accumulated rich knowledge on evaluating HR services, including thorough measures of service quality and of perceived HR function performance (Meijerink and Bondarouk, 2013). These measures consider the extent to which a service meets the needs of stakeholders, such as speed of response, customer focus and required resolution timeframes (Gibb, 2001); however, it is the knowledge, skills, and experience of HR SSC staff that are key to the creation of value for end users (Scully and Levin, 2010). In their 2010 paper Scully and Levin suggest that when customers are happy with the service, the service-level agreement metrics cease to matter. Furthermore, they propose that service-level agreements too frequently focus on service behaviours that contribute to the final customer outcome rather than measure the service outcomes themselves. The authors suggest that it is vital to measure the outcomes of the HR shared service centre rather than the behaviours of the team members, as it is outcomes which are key to the organisation's performance.

For transactional HR services, however, the value to the end user of the service also needs to be taken into account – the amount of money, effort and time clients and end-users spend in order to receive transactional HR services (Meijerink *et al.*, 2013). Transactional HR services are often viewed by organisations as a 'hygiene' factor; that is, they do not increase end-user satisfaction once their quality exceeds a certain threshold and may even lower satisfaction if delivered poorly (Boselie and Paauwe, 2005). In other words, transactional HR services might not create value beyond a certain level even if their use-value increases. Transformational shared service centres will customise services so that they are suitable for clients or business units. It is this tailoring or customising of services which Scully (2014) considers as a key differentiator for

customers. The standard process will cover 80% of cases; however, as in life in general, the remaining 20% of cases will have to be dealt with in a more tailored manner. Scully argues that equipping HR SSC employees to be able to deal with this 20% of 'non-standard' cases will allow the organisation to be able to respond to fluctuations in demand and allow the HR department to be more flexible to cope with its peaks and troughs.

The establishment of a HR SSC may also be as a result of a certain degree of mimetic institutional isomorphism taking place (Paauwe and Boselie, 2005), with companies setting up shared service centres with much publicity regarding potential cost-savings (delivery logic), and other companies then being seduced into following the same trend in order to maintain their legitimacy and chances of survival in the marketplace. This copycat behaviour is likely to be beneficial because companies can realise very low-cost levels by adopting a 'one size fits all' approach. However, as organisations need to compete to sustain their competitive advantage, this might turn into a disadvantage or result in a lower level of agility.

2.6.4 The effect of the HRSSC model on the relationship between HR and FLMs

Whilst organisations typically locate HR SSC employees in one central location, writers such as Ulrich (1995) have suggested that HR SSC workers should not be physically centralised but co-located with their business teams (Redman *et al.*, 2007). The idea is that even if they are co-located with business teams, they still have to manage the complexity of being members of both the business team and the HR team, and visibility within the business remains of paramount importance. Where this does not happen, it is suggested that 'shadow staff' emerge – other workers who are not formally part of the HR department but who nevertheless take on aspects of HR work at a local level – because the business FLMs want to deal with someone close by. This lack of visible contact is also likely to influence FLMs' behaviours e.g., Reilly's (2000) study reported that both HR professionals and client organisations lamented the lack of a 'human touch' when professional shared services were centralised. Scully (2014) suggests that HR is often a collection of functional silos. This is exacerbated when the HR department includes an offshore element as part of its HR delivery model. Cooke,(2006) suggests that few studies have been carried out to investigate the challenges in establishing HR SSC effectively. This study aims to respond to this gap.

Meijerink and Bondarouk (2013) found in their study that the physical distance between HR SSC employees affected the extent of their knowledge sharing, resulting in them sharing information only with peers who worked in the same team, although this resulted in an increased level of organisational learning. It is not always clear which model is likely to be most effective for the organisation. Writing in 2010, Scully and Levin suggested that just as each organisation is unique, each HR SSC will also need to be unique. The data gathered in this study will allow us to

contribute to knowledge in the HR SSC literature and understand whether this assertion still holds true today.

Other considerations regarding the establishment of a more strategic HR function include the need for a shift in organisational culture (McCracken and McIvor, 2013). The change in the HR delivery structure and the move to a HR SSC structure are also likely to be significant functional changes. McCracken and McIvor highlight how in the practitioner literature relating to outsourcing HR work the focus for many organisations is on which activities 'move' and which activities 'stay'. The authors conclude that a preoccupation with 'what goes where' is likely, however, to prevent the organisation from considering the HR function's legacy and purpose and from focusing on obstacles such as the management of relationships within the firm. Furthermore, they highlight that few studies have examined in detail the establishment and management of HR SSC arrangements.

The delivery model may also result in the need for HR departments to carefully manage the customer experience along with the need for cost reduction. Under cost-reduction pressure, HR teams are often now juggling what seem like conflicting priorities – balancing the need for cost efficiency or cost reduction with the need for consistency in HR practice and fairness across all employees whilst simultaneously ensuring that all employees feel considered as individuals (Fu *et al.*, 2018). With the inclusion of HR shared service centres as part of the HR delivery model the HR department is no longer down the corridor or even in the same building or country for FLMs to consult. The impact of the distancing which is created by these self-service delivery models between line FLMs and the HR department in the move away from face-to-face HR support services, and the effects of this on HR implementation, have not been considered in any depth in the literature to date (Francis *et al.*, 2014).

Dany *et al.*,(2008) argue that optimal role distribution between HR departments and line FLMs is key to achieving organisational performance outcomes, but that disagreement still exists regarding the role that departments should take in implementing HR policies in relation to the role of the FLMs. There clearly continues to be a debate about the optimal 'split' of HR tasks between the line FLM and the HR department and the support which the HR department should provide to FLMs. This is important in the context of this study as it suggests that FLMs' expectations of the service from HR will not be aligned with the service that a HR department is resourced and staffed to provide. The influence of the HR SSC on how FLMs and HR professionals collaborate effectively to implement HR policies has received limited attention by researchers looking at the implementation process. There is a lack of research looking at, for example, the physical distance which has grown between FLMs and HR colleagues as a result of HR organisational structures, including offshore or even onshore shared service centres.

Earlier research suggests that few studies have investigated the challenges which are involved in implementing a change to the HR delivery model – see e.g., Brockbank (1999). Made over twenty years ago, this commentary still appears to be true today. The establishment of the HR SSC does not as a general rule include discussion with FLMs to determine their requirements or expectations and no study to date has considered the implications of the fact that HR SSCs are established without reference to the end users of their service. HR departments would argue that due to cost pressures they are unable to tailor the delivery model to the preferences of their end users. There is a case to argue, however, that without consulting with their end users the service that a HR department is offering will negatively influence the implementation efforts of FLMs throughout the organisation.

Consultation with the end users of the service may therefore be key to the success of the HR delivery model. McCracken and McIvor (2013) discuss a case study in which FLMs were not consulted before the HR SSC was set up with an outsourced provider. This resulted in FLMs feeling ‘passed by’ and that the change was in fact a *‘fait accompli’*. Attempts to standardise policies and procedures also met with resistance from groups such as trade unions, which in turn affected the speed with which work could be moved to the HR SSC and made standardisation extremely challenging. Departments that previously had been allowed autonomy in terms of how they applied HR processes were also resistant to following a standardised set of policies. Furthermore, some confusion existed about the distinction between the role of the HR SSC and that of the rest of the HR department, leading to issues not being dealt with effectively.

2.6.5 The effect of the HRSSC model on the skills and competencies needed by HR

The evolution of the HR organisational model from its traditional administrative function to the HR shared services approach of delivering support appears to have led to the need for different HR skills and competencies across the whole HR department, including a greater need for HR professionals to be able to communicate well. Engagement with stakeholders is suggested by the change literature as being an essential element of a successful change initiative. Although HR roles will clearly vary from organisation to organisation, skills in organisational change also become more important in the Ulrich-style organisation model for HR professionals to be seen as efficient and effective (Shakil *et al.* 2019). Researchers such as Trullen *et al.*, (2016) have suggested that more research is needed regarding the role of the HR department in implementation. This study aims to contribute to existing knowledge and to addressing this research gap

HR departments are forced to redefine the skills needed within their different teams as a result of any change in delivery model. HR partners in the new organisational structure, for example, are required to be highly skilled when working with key HR stakeholders, such as top management teams, other HR professionals, and FLMs, so that they have the skills to transform

business strategies into organisational capabilities (Zhao and Xu, 2020) . McCracken and McIvor (2013) suggest that when the role of the HR business partner changes due to the establishment of a HR SSC, the HR business partners themselves may not be clear about or willing to change to the new role which is demanded of them. In addition, the authors concluded that FLMs with whom HR teams in the new delivery structure interact may continue to find ways around the new HR delivery system, contacting people they were familiar with in HR rather than following the new channels to access HR. This can make the Ulrich HR delivery model and its required update of the HR business partner model very 'patchy'. The establishment of a HR delivery model which includes a HR shared service element will also require the organisation to consider how it can avoid the loss of key organisational knowledge amongst existing employees.

Perry and Kulik (2008) explore how in some organisations, HR managers may feel threatened by a devolution strategy and be fearful that it will diminish their role and may thus be unwilling or uninterested in engaging with FLMs. They suggest that if HR does not take the initiative, an appropriate HR-line partnership is unlikely to develop, as FLMs will be reluctant to ask HR for help. One of the very real problems HR professionals have had to face is achieving a balance between competing stakeholder interests and values. In addition, FLMs can, as a result of the implementation of a shared service structure, sometimes feel confused or 'lost in the system', resulting in the need for increased and focused communication from the HR department.

The move to a HR shared service delivery model may also result in role conflict, as those who used to know who to see and how to get things done now have to change their expectations and work norms (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2008). HR professionals who once developed an identity and reputation based on effectively serving the transactional needs of employees and FLMs now need to reorient themselves towards higher value-added activities and agendas. Redman *et al.*,(2007) explored the need for those HR staff working in the HR SSC to do more marketing and self-promotion and to be more proactive about image and profile. Findings from their study pointed to the increased need for political skills and relationship-building competencies. Their study found that HR SSC staff appeared to worry that they were not spending sufficient time on building relationships. The authors discuss the benefits to HR SSC staff of being co-located and working in a HR SS model. The study shares feedback from HR SSC staff who talked of 'working as part of a team', 'playing to people's strengths' and 'being able to bounce off each other'. Their study does point, however, to feedback from HR staff regarding the need to focus on communication in HR SSC as 'communication is more complex'.

The skills and knowledge of team members working in the HR SSC are also crucial to the perceived value for end users. Meijerink and Bondarouk (2013) suggest that in the HR SSC, competencies account for 20% of the difference in effectiveness as perceived by clients. The authors use the concept of intellectual capital to examine how the HR SSC can create value for

customers through the information, skills and experience of the HR SSC staff, suggesting that knowledge needs to be bundled in order to have value for end users. The authors discuss the different levels of knowledge resources within an organisation. There is human capital knowledge, which refers to the skills, knowledge, and abilities of the staff, including knowledge of HR functional practices such as training and reward and, for example, the ability to use HR technology. There is network social capital knowledge, which comprises the social networks and relationships between HR SSC team members and others throughout the organisation. And there is organisational intellectual capital knowledge, i.e., centralised documents in HR portals and standardised HR process documents – which they refer to as the knowledge that stays behind when ‘employees leave for the night’. Meijerink *et al.*, (2013) suggest that the transactional value for end users of a HR SSC service is likely to come from mechanistic organisational capital, whereas the transactional value from a HR SSC is likely to come from human capital, most likely enhanced by social relationships. The authors argue, using social exchange theory, that satisfying employee needs is likely to result in positive employee outcomes, such as organisational commitment and perceived organisational support – therefore, higher levels of transactional and transformational value contribute to organisational success. The findings from this study clearly illustrate that HR SSC will require HR staff to acquire new skills (Redman *et al.*, 2007).

2.6.6 Issues with HR SSCs

The establishment of a successful HR SSC is prone to a variety of issues. In addition to the need for the development of specific skills, such as the ability to network effectively across the HR function, many of the issues when establishing a HR SSC include possible work disruption or budgetary concerns (Horan and Vernon, 2003). There may also be technology adoption issues. The integration of any HR SSC across an organisation will need to be considered, and the HR SSC needs to customise the service where appropriate (Farndale *et al.*, 2009).

Issues of governance during and after establishing the HR SSC will also need to be developed, looking at how the HR SSC (and the HR processes) will link both horizontally and vertically across the organisation. HR delivery channels will need to be reviewed so that the HR delivery model continues to be well aligned with the organisation’s requirements. (Farndale *et al.*, 2009). The HR staff working in the HR SSC structure need to be clear on how flexible they can be whilst still delivering a consistent service.

By understanding the issues associated with supporting managers via HR SSCs, and of the effects which the HR shared service centre may be having on the implementation of HR practices by FLMS ‘on the ground’, we can start to work with HR practitioners to re-assess the HR delivery model and its influence on FLMS’ implementation of HR practices with their teams. If HR practitioners can further improve the effectiveness of HR delivery models, this is likely to have a positive effect on the effectiveness of the implementation process. Adopting a FLM’s perspective

would allow HR departments to explore the aspects of HR support which FLMs see as important when implementing HR practices. This could be balanced with a consideration of what the HR department considers to be important, ensuring that the right skills are available within the HR department.

Appendix B summarises the key literature relating to HR SSCs which was reviewed by the researcher. The table illustrates the limited number of academic studies looking at HR SSCs since 2010, with very limited sample sizes and a bias towards qualitative research methods. The academic studies reviewed by this researcher in the area of HR SSC are largely based on UK data (see e.g., the studies by Horan and Vernon, 2003; Cooke, 2006; Redman *et al.*, 2007; McCracken and McIvor, 2013; Francis *et al.*, 2014) apart from a handful of studies based on data gathered in the Netherlands (see e.g., studies by Farndale *et al.*, 2009; Meijerink and Bondarouk, 2013; Maatman and Meijerink, 2017) and a small number based on data from other countries such as Sweden (Boglund *et al.*, 2011; Wallo and Kock, 2018) and Finland (Aalto *et al.*, 2019).

2.7 FLMs and their different roles in the organisation

Turning from the HR department to the needs of the FLM, FLMs will need to play the role of leaders to their employees but also the roles of colleagues and peers to other FLMs in their departments or divisions, and each of these roles requires the FLMs to have certain skills and knowledge and to have access to relevant policy information from the HR department. Each of these different roles will therefore require different types of support from the HR department. Examining the evidence regarding the different roles that FLMs play in an organisation and the evidence we have from the extant studies will allow us to gain a more complete view of the interactions between the FLMs and the HR department. It will also show how all these interactions build up and influence FLMs' attitudes and behaviour as they implement HR practices with their teams.

Taking the existing knowledge from the devolution literature as a starting point, the analysis of evidence from HR implementation studies in the period 2000-2021 has therefore been set out as follows. Firstly, the researcher examined the different roles that FLMs play in an organisation, looking at the effect of HR support and the HR delivery model on FLMs' behaviours in each of these roles through three different role-aligned lenses:

- i) *the FLMs as organisational employees* themselves ('employee level') and how their own experiences and expectations as an employee affect their behaviours as they interact with the HR department
- ii) *the FLMs in their organisational role as people FLMs* ('manager level') and the factors affecting the FLMs' behaviours with their employees

- iii) *the FLMs as peers of other managers* and the influence of the business-unit context and other peers ('organisational level') on the FLMs' implementation of HR practices

For each role that the FLM plays in the organisation, the review examines how the HR department influences the FLM and how the delivery model may also be an important factor. The review then goes on to provide analysis of the research methodology used in HR since 2000 which refers to the role of the manager. It identifies the organisational actors who have provided data for the samples gathered to date and sets out information on whether the study includes any references to the delivery model. Following these steps, this chapter shares an overview that allows us to understand the research approaches taken to date, to see more clearly the limitations of the studies, and examines the key gaps in knowledge from a methodological perspective. Appendix C highlights the key studies reviewed by the researcher which relate to the role of the FLM in implementation and illustrates the variety of theoretical approaches adopted by researchers looking to understand HR implementation by FLMs. The table shows the increased interest in this topic since 2010, and also how the methods used reveal an almost even split between qualitative and quantitative research methods in investigating HR implementation. To ensure a complete view of the academic research papers published in this area, Appendix C also includes theoretical and conceptual papers which relate to the role of the FLM in the implementation of HR practices.

2.8 The FLM – an employee with their own needs and expectations

The literature review outlined in sections 2.8, 2.9 and 2.10 considers the different factors influencing FLMs' implementation. It examines factors relating to the FLMs themselves as employees and their own experiences of HR support, the FLMs as people managers and the factors influencing their implementation, and finally the FLMs in the context of working with other peers in a department or business unit and the factors influencing the FLMs' implementation at this departmental level. In each case this section highlights the ways in which the HR delivery model influences FLMs' experience of HR support from the organisation.

A conceptual model was developed by the researcher following the literature review and is shown in **Figure 3** of this section. It lists examples of the employee-level factors influencing FLM attitudes towards the implementation of HR practices. Taking each of the factors from the proposed contextual model in figure 3 in turn, the researcher reviews the evidence regarding the influence that these 'employee level' factors have on FLMs and how FLMs view the HR department and interact with it via the HR SSC delivery model.

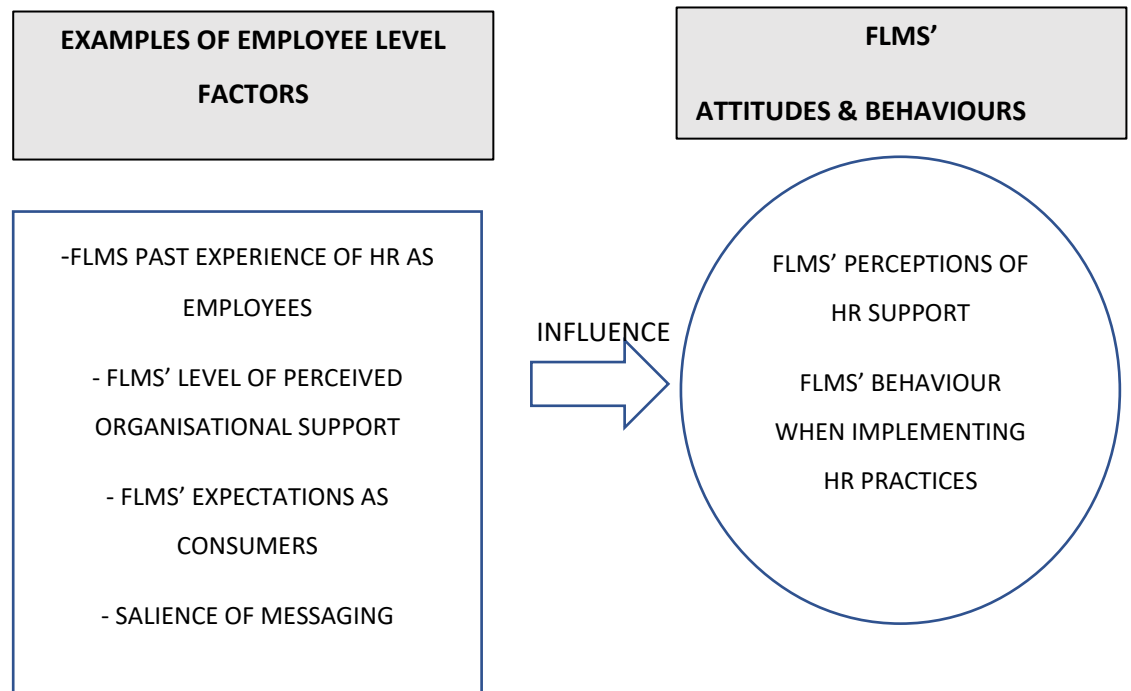


Figure 3 Proposed new conceptual model of the FLM as employee showing the employee-level factors which influence FLM attitudes and implementation behaviours

2.8.1 FLMS' own past experiences of HR practices and HR support as an employee

The ways in which FLMS themselves as employees view the HR department and the service provided by the HR department are factors which may influence how they implement HR practices. From their own past experiences of dealing with the HR department as an employee, the FLM may see the HR SSC as lacking integration with the wider firm's business units. Redman *et al.*,(2007) describe how they uncovered in interviews with HR staff at NHS trusts that CEOs referred to the HR shared service as separate or 'semi-detached', pointing to a lack of integration with the wider HR function. There may be issues, therefore, with the HR SSC being seen by employees as incapable of carrying out transformational work or as inefficient or detached, which can have an effect on how employees interact with the HR department.

Katou *et al.*,(2020) discuss how FLMS' behaviours when implementing HR practices are then likely to be influenced by how they view the HR department as well as by the attributions they form about HR practices as employees. The authors discuss how an employee's attribution could be, for example, that the organisation sees the employee as a cost, or, conversely, an asset which needs to be protected. The delivery model may also reinforce the FLMS' attributions about how the organisation views them, e.g., as a cost or a resource, and this attribution may affect their willingness to interact with the HR department and the effectiveness of their subsequent behaviour with their team as they implement the practices. If the FLM sees the HR practices as showing that the organisation values employees, the FLM may be more positively disposed to

implementing these practices. Katou *et al.*, (2020) argue that, based on social exchange theory, positive attributions are likely to result in an employee wishing to reciprocate, and this is also likely to lead to more positive behaviours. If employees' attributions are that the HR system has been built to intensify or control their work, however, they are more likely to react in a negative way. If we accept this logic, the support from the organisation may be viewed by FLMs as being reduced when a HR department evolves from providing face-to-face support to a more pooled-resource shared service HR model. The HR SSC may be viewed in a negative way. It follows that the FLM who feels less supported by the organisation as a result of the new delivery model may be less willing to engage with the HR department to ensure the effectiveness of the HR practice implementation.

However, employees' experiences and attributions regarding HR practices can also vary over time, depending on the positive and negative events they encounter. Using diary entries as a mechanism to track employee's perceptions of day-to-day HR events, Chacko and Conway,(2019) considered the employee perspective of HR implementation, asking employees to report positive and negative events as they occurred. The evidence from this study suggests that employee attributions do vary over time rather than remain consistent, and that there can also be within-person variations. Although based solely on feedback from workers from one London authority, the study by these authors demonstrates that employee perceptions of HR practices will, like motivation and employee engagement, vary and change over time, and shows how daily perceptions of HR will lead to longer term perceptions and attributions. It follows that understanding that employee perceptions will vary over time is useful to bear in mind for HR departments, and that changes to the delivery model, e.g., improved service from the HR SSC, are likely to result in changes in perception as the change of delivery model is implemented and bedded in. The idea that employee attributions may ebb and flow over time in the same way that employee engagement may change over time, can also help HR departments to continue to focus and position messaging and HR support more effectively on the basis that employee perceptions can be changed.

Navio-Marco *et al.*,(2019) examined managers' perceptions of the HR department and argue that if managers as employees of the firm do not perceive the relevance or strategic importance of HR, it is difficult to guarantee their commitment to HRM implementation and thus ensure its effectiveness. Although their study considered the perspectives of middle managers, the findings are also likely to have relevance for FLMs. It may then follow that if the employee does not view the HR department as important to their success in the organisation, they may be less likely to invest time interacting with the HR department, irrespective of the delivery model which is in place.

A recent study by Bos-Nehles *et al.*, (2020) examined FLMs' attributions, and whether FLMs as employees themselves were internally or externally focused. The authors considered the support from the HR department as falling under the area of external attributions and concluded that this is an area which merits further investigation. The authors also discuss the fact that a measurement instrument is lacking which would allow us to understand what line managers need to implement HR practices effectively. The present study allows us to start addressing this gap.

2.8.2 FLMs' level of perceived organisational support

FLMs' own perception of the organisational support available to them as an employee also needs to be considered when examining their implementation of HR practices with team members. It has been argued that FLMs will view the level of HR support available to them as showing the extent to which they are valued and supported as an employee of the organisation. As a result of the HR shared service centres delivery model, employees may feel demoralised and disillusioned by the fact that the company has 'de-humanised' them and that the company is saying that it does not care anymore (Cooke, 2006). HR SSC staff may have limited discretion to resolve issues and will be under pressure to pass on the case quickly if they cannot resolve it over the phone. In the findings highlighted in the study by Cooke (2006), HR SSC staff felt detached from the business and were reactive, acting almost in the handmaiden role depicted by Storey (1992).

Social exchange theory indicates that there is an exchange relationship between the employee and the organisation and a 'norm of reciprocity'. This norm of reciprocity means that when someone is treated well by a person or entity, they will feel an obligation to reciprocate (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theory is frequently used in HR implementation studies (Gilbert, 2011). When transposed into the context of HR implementation, social exchange theory implies that when employees see HR practices as investments in their own development and wellbeing, they are more likely to be motivated to demonstrate the desired attitudes and behaviours. Makhecha *et al.*, (2018) discovered that when FLMs felt that organisational support for HR delivery was low, they did not feel an obligation to fulfil the organisation's requirements and were more likely to adapt the message when implementing it. A 2018 study by Bos-Nehles and Meijerink also concluded that the level of HR support could signal how much the organisation values them via the POS construct. The study proposed that support from the HR department will demonstrate the organisation's concern and boost FLMs' motivation, for example by providing them with adequate time to complete their HR duties as well as other tasks.

FLMs who feel more supported as employees themselves will be more inclined to speak with their team members, helping them to understand the HR practices (Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2018). If we think about this finding in the context of the move to deliver HR support via a HR shared service centre model, the change to a remote support model could be viewed by the FLM as

reducing the organisational support which is available to them as an employee. In addition, if this change in support arrangements has not been communicated appropriately to the FLM who is the end user of the service, they may then draw their own conclusions about what this means regarding the support they receive from the organisation.

2.8.3 FLMs' expectations of the HR- as a 'consumer' of HR services

Employees are now becoming 'active consumers' of HR (Meijerink et al., 2016b), based in part on their experiences as consumers of services such as Amazon, Deliveroo, Uber and other on-demand services. This change in employee expectations, it could be argued, is likely to result in higher expectations of the HR department. As employees provide feedback about their needs and interests, they will expect that organisations will tailor the service offered to them accordingly (Meijerink *et al.*, 2016). The authors suggest that employees can also, in the way in which they consume services, be active participants in the process and can co-create services through their feedback to the service provider, playing a part in creating service value for themselves. This hypothesis is supported by their research carried out using a sample of 2,000 employees in the Netherlands. The study found that even when the same services are offered to employees, their perceptions can differ relative to the extent to which the service has satisfied their own needs and wishes. The study also found that employees consume more or less of the HR service depending on their competence in dealing with HR matters. The authors found that employees perceive more value when their own competence level is high. This area of employees' implicit expectations of the HR service as active consumers of that service, and the researchers' understanding of which specific aspects of the service are more valued by employees, have both received limited focus in the HR implementation literature to date, but are likely to be relevant when looking at the delivery model and how this compares with the expectations of FLMs.

For HR departments to be able to respond to employee requirements as consumers and 'co-creators' of HR services, it is therefore first necessary to understand what employees are expecting and what is their current level of competence. The HR department may need to develop different skills to become more customer focused and to understand their customers' needs. Aalto and Kallio (2019) discuss the need for SSC employees to develop a new mindset to see former colleagues as their 'customers'. However, even with this understanding, it is possible that the ability of the HR department to respond to changing employee expectations is restricted by an organisational delivery model which is reliant on a significant HR shared service element. A delivery model which incorporates a HR shared service centre element might, for example, limit the flexibility that the HR department has to be able to tailor services to employees, due to the standardisation and globalisation of HR processes which are necessary to ensure cost efficiencies. The delivery model which includes a HR SSC element may therefore have the result of limiting the

HR department's ability to offer FLMs a more personalised experience as 'consumers' of the service, and this in turn is likely to influence the effectiveness of implementation.

2.8.4 The 'salience' of HR messaging to all employees

The 'salience' of the HR message for the FLM as employee is also important for effective HR implementation. Sikora *et al.*,(2015) examined the impact of high-performance work practices on employee outcomes, such as turnover intentions and participative decision-making perceptions. The authors found evidence that to have an impact on employee behaviour, HR messages need to be seen as salient to the employee. This idea supports that of Bowen and Ostroff (2004), that HR practices need to be presented in ways that illustrate how salient they are and must develop shared meaning if they are to be successful in affecting employee attitudes and behaviours. Sikora and colleagues suggest that contexts are strong where employees have a common perception and that HR practices are a function only of the practices which they perceive to exist.

Employees are selective consumers of stimuli due to the limitations of the human capacity to absorb key information (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). We cannot, therefore, assume that the same HR messages about HR practices have the same impact on all employees. Social cognition theories suggest that employees will not pay attention equally to all aspects of their environment but will instead pay less attention to those practices not salient to them, often even ignoring them. It follows that when a HR practice is more salient to an employee, they will pay more attention to it, and will be more likely to react to it than to a practice which the employee considers to be less salient to them and to their individual goals (Garg *et al.*, 2020).

When communication in an organisation is unclear, employees will receive confusing signals. Instead of receiving accurate information on intended HR practices, employees will make their own subjective judgement of what is offered in terms of HRM (e.g., Nishii *et al.*, 2008). Signalling theory suggests that signal consistency, which is defined as the agreement between multiple signals from one source, is important to avoid confusing the receiver with conflicting messages (Den Hartog *et al.*, 2013; Connelly *et al.*, 2011), and allows us to understand why communication is important in the context of HR implementation. Signal inconsistency can also occur when different signals are sent from one FLM, but also between FLMs, affecting HR implementation. Dewettinck and Vroonen,(2017) draw on signalling theory in their study, suggesting that employees seek tangible information to be able to understand what is important in the organisation, and that this can be used to guide or strengthen behaviours.

The salience of HR messaging for employees appears to be fundamental, and this view is supported by studies looking at how employees experience HR practices. The recent findings of Garg *et al.*'s(2020) study also support the argument that HR departments need to gain an understanding of the needs of employees before implementing HR practices so that they can make the messaging more salient. In an earlier study, Trullen *et al.*,(2016) considered how HR

departments can influence implementation, e.g., by framing HR practices in appealing ways, by involving FLMs in their deployment and by seeking senior-level support. The study concluded that the HR department in its messaging and communication approach can influence successful implementation in multiple important areas by developing and communicating HR practices which are driven by an understanding of employee needs or preferences. The Ulrich delivery model (Ulrich, 1997), which includes a HR SSC element, will need to make the messaging regarding HR practices more salient for employees and FLMs.

There also appears also to be a need for a relationship of trust to be built between the HR SSC and the business units who are end users of the HR SSC service. Building such a trust relationship is likely to result in the HR SSC devoting more of its scarce resources to that business unit, increasing their knowledge of and value to that specific business unit, as Maatman and Meijerink found in their 2017 study. In the study, the authors discuss the need for knowledge sharing between the HR SSC and the business units, in order to build capabilities and motivate the HR SSC to increase its operational capabilities for that particular business unit. Using data gathered at the business unit level from 19 Dutch organisations, the authors considered the impact of informal trusting relationships and informal controls and found that formal control mechanisms were in fact dependent on informal trusting relationships being in place. The use of a more informal approach appeared to result in a higher perceived value of service. The findings from this study suggest that HR SSCs need to invest in building strong social relationships to ensure more tailored responses, and that this is the key to a HR SSC's organisational success. The evidence from this study serves to highlight the importance of collaboration between the FLMs in business units and employees in the HR SSCs to ensure that there is an understanding of the business units supported so that messaging can be made more salient.

To support effective implementation by FLMs, the HR SSC will, therefore, based on the evidence of the studies outlined above, need to provide information which is salient, clear, and accurate, and which allows a relationship of trust to be built between the HR SSC and the FLMs as an employee of the organisation. We now go on to consider factors regarding the FLMs' personal style and managerial skills, which the HR SSC will also need to consider so that the support provided by them is effective in supporting HR implementation. The conceptual model shown in **Figure 4** highlights the factors at 'manager level' which the HR SSC needs to take into account and which will be discussed further in section 2.9.

2.9 FLMs in their role as people managers

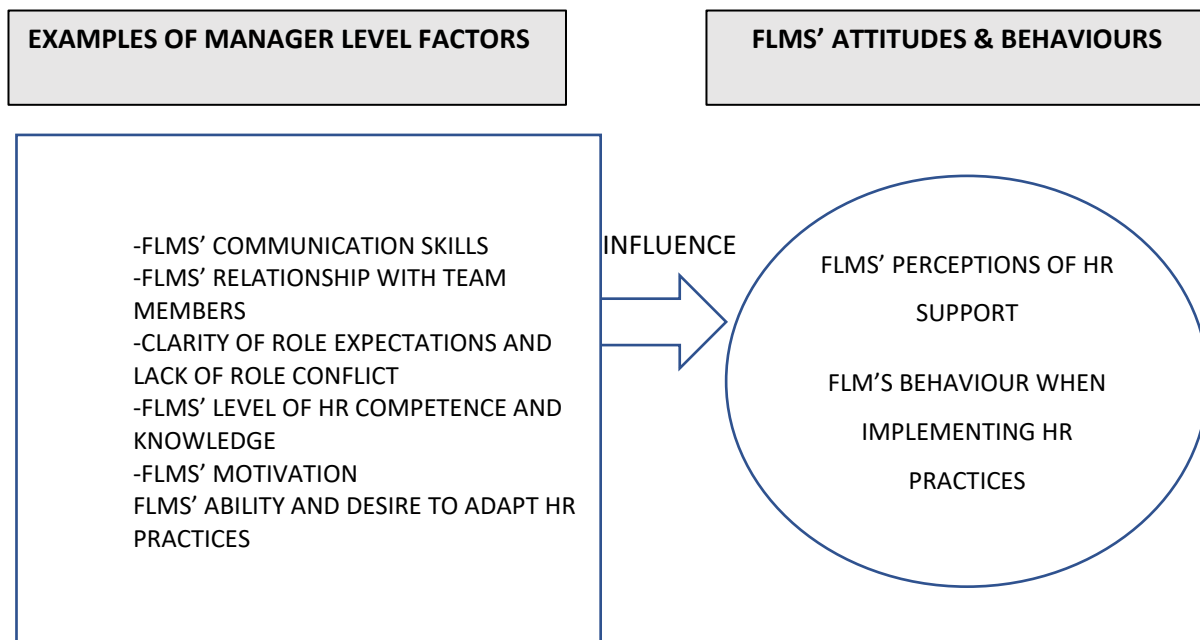


Figure 4 Proposed conceptual model considering FLMS as ‘people managers’ in the organisation and the factors which influence their attitudes and implementation behaviours

2.9.1 FLMS’ communication skills

Turning from looking at the FLM as an employee themselves to the FLM as a manager of others in the organisation, we see that FLMS’ communication skills with their own team members are key to effective HR implementation. Organisations need to have ‘interpretive enablers’, or organisational actors with the ability to translate any key message which needs to be communicated. The skills of these actors in sharing key messages can reduce ambiguity, help to ensure that there are fewer implementation gaps, and ensure that HR practices are more consistently and effectively implemented and experienced across the organisation (Makhecha *et al.*, 2018).

The implementation process relies on clear communication if it is to be successful. This claim is supported by the findings of studies Garcia-Carbonnell *et al.* (2016) and by Chacko and Conway (2019). FLMS need to act as ‘expectation handlers’, ensuring that they maintain a good level of communication with employees (Mirfakhar *et al.*, 2018). When FLMS visibly implement HR practices, they can promote common employee interpretations and positively impact the organisational culture and climate (see, e.g., Kozlowski and Doherty, 1989). Den Hartog *et al.* (2013) examined the quality of FLMS’ communications with team members, arguing that when the quality of FLMS’ communications is high, their intentions and organisational policies are clearer to employees, resulting in stronger employee reports about HRM. The authors also found evidence to suggest that, when FLMS are neither able nor willing to perform their HR implementation tasks, either due to lack of communication skills or lack of time due to other priorities, there is likely to be misalignment, so that the intended strategic HR practice falls short

of what the employee ultimately experiences. However, when FLMs can provide employees with accurate and useful task-oriented and organisational information, this aids employees' sense-making and reduces uncertainty. Den Hartog *et al.* (2013) conceptualise this by saying that when employees find the information communicated by FLMs to be useful, clear, sufficient, and consistent, employees are likely to have a more accurate insight into organisational policies, including those related to HR. When FLMs are inconsistent and confusing in their messages, there is less clarity and more uncertainty about organisational issues, and employees are then more likely to rely on their own subjective perceptions when interpreting HR practices (Nishii *et al.*, 2008). Clear, informative, and useful communication therefore forms a crucial tool in effectively implementing HRM. HR departments and HR SSC teams can support implementation by providing clear, accurate messaging to FLMs but also by providing training to FLMs on how to further communicate messages to their employees.

HR implementation by FLMs is likely to be more successful if they can build a shared understanding of HR practices. Pak and Kim (2018) found that when implementation is a team phenomenon, team leaders' or FLMs' implementation behaviour leads to enhanced employee behaviour by improving the teams' shared understanding of actual HR experiences. Drawing on social exchange theory to explain why employees' behaviour changes as a response to HR practices – psychological contract fulfilment leads to positive attitudes and behaviours – and FLMs' sense-making for employees, this study introduced the concept of the *visible* supervisor. Linked to communication skills, individual FLM's level of political skill has also been found to influence successful implementation, as revealed in a study by Sikora and Ferris (2015). Kehoe and Han, (2020) also suggest that FLMs' political competencies, including their ability to attract allies, might influence their effectiveness in organisations where they advocate change.

Given the findings from the study by Den Hartog *et al.* (2013) and the references to communication in the frameworks developed by Bowen and Ostroff (2004) and Wright and Niishi (2007), we might expect that many of the studies in the area of HR implementation would focus on communication as a means to ensure consistent implementation. Whilst many of the studies in this area focus on employees' and FLMs' HR attributions and signal what HR tasks FLMs are responsible for, few studies focus specifically on the communication process or on the steps involved in HR implementation.

One study which does focus on communication, however, is the research by Garcia-Carbonnell *et al.* (2015), which explicitly set out as its central finding the importance of the communication process when it comes to implementing HR practices. This study, which was based on a limited sample of 120 HR FLMs in Spain, nevertheless aimed to explain the gap between the messages about HR policies which the senior leadership wished to communicate and the messages that were eventually received by FLMs and employees. Taking as their starting point

the difference between intended strategy and reception, the authors looked at the stages that key messages go through, from the formulation phase to the strategic issue interpretation stage. Using Bowen and Ostroff's study (2004) and the logic of a strong HR system, the authors argue that effective implementation of HR practices requires HR departments to consider all the interacting elements and how they affect each other. Garcia-Carbonnell *et al.*'s (2015) study is noteworthy when considering the HR implementation literature, as it is one of the few to date which has focused attention on the HR communication process. A key limitation of the study, however, is that it relies on data from a single organisation and from a single source within the organisation – the HR managers – limiting its generalisability. The findings would have been strengthened by the inclusion of data from other organisational actors, such as, for example, the FLMS tasked with implementing the HR policies. The study also did not consider the effect of the delivery model in any detail.

Cooke (2006) suggests that the set-up of a HR shared service centre is likely to result in temporary confusion around roles and the ownership of tasks requiring different skills of employees and FLMS, leading to the need for FLMS to communicate any areas of confusion. Redman *et al.* (2007) point to feedback from HR staff regarding the need to focus on communication in HR SSCs as '*communication is more complex*'. Farndale *et al.*, (2009) define one of the critical success factors for an HR SSC as good communication with end users, so both the FLMS' communication skills as well as the ability of staff in the HR SSC to communicate will influence the effectiveness of FLM HR practice implementation.

2.9.2 FLMS' relationships with team members

FLMS' relationships with their team members also influence their employees' perceptions of HR practices. The dyadic relationship between FLMS and employees was considered in a study by Bos-Nehles *et al.*, (2018), with the authors finding that when employees have a stronger relationship with their team members, they demonstrate a higher awareness of the existence of HR practices, and in turn demonstrate higher levels of effective commitment to the organisation. The study found that when there is a strong relationship between FLMS and employees, this is likely to result in the FLM offering more support to the employee via, for example, training and development or social support. The study by Bos-Nehles *et al.*, (2018) is noteworthy in emphasising and highlighting the importance of the FLMS' additional role in communicating HR practices. Their research findings also suggest that when employees have a strong relationship with their FLM, they also view HR practices more positively (e.g., Martinson *et al.*, 2016; Sanders *et al.*, 2010). In a recent study, Katou *et al.*, (2020) also suggest that the higher the quality of the relationship between FLM and employee, the more likely it is that there will be smooth HR implementation by the FLM based on mutual respect, trust, and obligation. HR SSC teams can

support the establishment of trusting relationships by providing HR information which FLMs can rely on to be accurate in a timely manner.

The evidence that differences in the implementation of HR practices by FLMs can be explained by the strength of the FLM/employee relationship does, however, appear to contradict the idea of a 'strong' HR system. In a strong HR system, HR practices are implemented in a consistent manner by all FLMs and across all team members. It will not be a realistic proposition for organisations to expect FLMs to implement HR practices in exactly the same way across their teams, as there is also a social exchange relationship between the FLMs and team members where both parties respond to HR practices according to their own attributions and perceptions (Katou *et al.*, 2020). A higher quality relationship between FLM and employee is, it seems, likely to facilitate good HR implementation by the FLM based on mutual respect, trust, and obligation; however, there may be threshold levels, and this might contribute only partially to explaining the differences in implementation. The HR department may be instrumental in supporting FLMs to develop strong relationships with team members via the advice HR provides to FLMs when there are team member issues to be resolved.

2.9.3 Clarity of FLMs' role expectations and lack of role conflict

Active involvement by FLMs in the implementation of HR practices is important to FLM implementation effectiveness (Straub *et al.*, 2018). Straub *et al.*, (2018) highlight the fact that three elements are required to promote FLMs' active involvement in HR implementation. These are a conceptual understanding of the rationale for their involvement, their role clarity and capability, and their effective commitment to a belief in the value of their involvement in the intervention (Maxwell and Watson, 2006). Straub *et al.*, (2018) also conclude that training which explains the rationale behind HR initiatives and HR practices may also enhance intervention outcomes (Nielsen and Abildgaard, 2013). When FLMs are actively involved and are advocates of the HR policy and understand the role they are required to play, this appears to make a difference to effective implementation.

Clarity about the role they are expected to play is key when it comes to effective HR implementation by FLMs. When role expectations are unclear, FLMs will adjust or interpret their role themselves. The devolution literature suggests that clarity of role is key for managers (e.g., McConville and Morley, 2006; Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2006). Organisational roles with more relational complexity, or those involving 'organisational crossing', are likely to be more prone to experiences of role ambiguity and overload (Gilbert *et al.*, 2011). The authors suggest that role stress is due to a larger set of people across the organisation having expectations and making demands of the incumbent. This appears to be the case with FLMs' role in implementing HR practices – the FLM is required to communicate with the HR department via the HR shared service centre or expertise centre and with higher line management. The FLM ends up occupying a place in the middle,

between HR and employees. Meijerink and Bondarouk,(2013) highlight that HR SSCs need to 'manage' end users, ensuring that they are involved and that their roles are clearly articulated. FLMs often feel an obligation and strong organisational pressure to take their role seriously, as found by a study by McGovern *et al.*, (1997), but they need to perform the role that the organisation expects them to play in HR implementation.

Gilbert *et al.*,(2011) investigated three potential antecedents of role stress: the task requirements of the manager role, the organisational context, and the personal characteristics of the manager, such as their competencies. Using data from a sample of 169 managers in 47 organisations, the authors of this study focused on the aspects of role ambiguity and role overload in their analysis of the HR role of the manager. The paper considered both the organisational and individual factors which result in role stress, as well as those areas which can be influenced by the HR department, such as the type of tasks FLMs are asked to take care of, the level of incentives to perform their HR role, the level of support from the HR department, and the competencies of the FLMs to perform their role. Their findings included the conclusion that, due to increased complexity, FLMs will be faced with a more difficult context in which to operate alongside other organisational individuals and will require time to gather the information they need, making it difficult to predict expectations and demands, subsequently leading to role ambiguity. The authors further suggest that an area requiring further research is not just to focus on the FLMs wellbeing as a consequence of role stressors but also to consider the impact on FLMs' employees and whether team members in turn experience the negative effects of HR role stressors. This study responds to that call for further research in this area.

Because FLMs are not HR experts, they rely on support from the HR organisation to clarify information, and if they experience a lack of support this is also likely to lead to role stress (Gilbert, 2011). FLMs themselves report concerns about the level of specialist expertise they feel is necessary to manage HR issues (Harris *et al.*, 2002). Van Waeyenberg and Decramer (2018) considered the possibility that role conflict could arise for FLMs if there are conflicts between their different organisational roles and concluded that this was likely to have the effect of reducing their implementation performance. Role conflict can signal that FLMs' opportunity to implement HR practices is insufficient to fulfil the role effectively. When FLMs have the ability, motivation, and opportunity (AMO) to implement policies they should also have the capacity to successfully make the performance system salient for their team members. Van Waeyenberg and Decramer's sample was gathered in the education sector, so the generalisability is limited in the sense that the context is very specific; however, the study did find that line FLMs' AMO did relate positively both to system strength and to satisfaction with the policy as rated by employees. The only variables which did not show a positive correlation were tenure at the organisation and role

conflict; line FLMs' AMO and role conflict were not significantly related. FLMs' role conflict was negatively related to employees' satisfaction with the system.

The establishment of a HR SSC model creates additional complexity and heightens the need for roles to be clearly defined in order to avoid role conflict, and this also requires that methods of interaction are clearly communicated. If roles are unclear and communication is not effective, role stress can result from the demands placed on the FLM and from the changing expectations which are placed on them (Evans, 2015). There is scope to build on our limited understanding of the specific factors at play when implementing HR practices which result in role stress for managers (Evans, 2015). As more and more HR work continues to be completed at the FLM level of the organisation, understanding what FLMs value most from the HR department via the HR delivery model requires additional research attention to ensure that FLMs are supported appropriately.

2.9.4 FLMs' level of HR competence and knowledge

A higher level of HR competency amongst FLMs and FLMs' HR-related knowledge and skills appear to significantly influence HRM implementation effectiveness (Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2013; Kellner *et al.*, 2016; Kuvaas *et al.*, 2014; Ryu and Kim, 2013). The provision of HR support can reduce perceptions of role overload. Perry and Kulik (2008) suggest that it would be overly simplistic to assume that FLMs can assume greater responsibility for people management without regular and systematic support from HR specialists to ensure that they avoid costly mistakes (Renwick, 2003; Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). The impact of HR support was a key finding from the study by Gilbert *et al.*, (2011), who found that the level of support received from the HR department and the level of competency possessed by the FLM can reduce role ambiguity and role overload. The results of the study pointed to the importance of specific elements, including training, the development of FLM competencies, and the provision of key HR information – visible information which is made available to FLMs to show them how these practices work. The study also found that HR departments should show empathy when providing HR support. The authors found that there is a need for further research to understand the impact of HR role stressors on FLM wellbeing and HR role effectiveness. Sikora and Ferris (2015) also studied HR-related skills and abilities and prior job experience and highlighted the importance of FLM HR competence. A more recent paper by Kehoe and Han, (2020) further supported this view, highlighting that a lack of FLM competencies in HR matters may have performance implications for the organisation. Organisations do not always focus time and resources on providing training to FLMs tasked with implementing HR practices, with some organisations providing only limited HR support.

The establishment of a HR SSC may provide the impetus for organisations to invest in FLM training in new competencies such as the use of technology, as this delivery model requires FLMs to have technical skills. Scully (2016) discusses how mobile apps play a huge role in the less-is-

more HR SSC model, empowering FLMs and employees to carry out HR transactions using their mobile devices, with human intervention only required when there is a problem or in otherwise rare exceptions, and/or when self-service is seen as the main delivery channel. With HR delivery models reliant on HR technology, FLMs will need to be trained and competent in using the technology required to access the HR SSC. Successful HR SSC operations will therefore require visionary leaders and HR staff who understand the importance of FLM competency and will support and develop FLMs in increasing their level of competence (Redman *et al.*, 2009).

2.9.5 FLMs' motivation

FLMs' motivation to implement HR practices is another factor which has been examined by researchers looking at HR implementation. Woodrow and Guest (2014) suggest that it is generally assumed that many line managers are reluctant to accept their responsibilities for implementing HR practices, and there is evidence to support this view (McGovern *et al.*, 1997). However, this might not always be the case. FLM motivation was specifically considered in a study by Bos-Nehles *et al.*, (2013), who used AMO theory to understand the role of the FLM in implementation. Using data from a survey of 174 FLMs and 1,065 employees (not matched to FLMs) in two organisations, the authors found that ability appeared to be the best predictor of a FLM's HR implementation performance. Motivation did not moderate the effect of ability on performance as predicted, and the authors therefore suggested that more work is required in this area. Kellner *et al.*,(2016) suggest, based on qualitative data, that ability and motivation are interdependent in such a way that FLMs who are highly motivated to implement HRM practices effectively also tend to make sure that they possess the skills to do so, and FLMs who lack the ability to implement HRM practices effectively usually also lack the motivation to invest in HRM implementation effectiveness.

The need for organisations to focus on motivating FLMs could, it seems, be over-estimated, as the findings from this study suggest. Self-efficacy theory is likely to be relevant when it comes to FLMs' implementation of HR practices when they are operating in an environment where they need to be self-sufficient and able to access HR support via technology or a shared service centre. Self-efficacy theory was originally developed by Bandura (1977), who defines it as '*the conviction that one can successfully execute a given behaviour required to produce certain outcomes*' (p.193), and it has since been adapted by various authors to suit a range of domains. The study by Bos-Nehles *et al.*,(2013) is one of only a few to point out the importance of efficacy theory when considering FLMs' AMO, as, for example, employees who are not able to perform well might also not be motivated because they feel that performing is too difficult for them or has a low likelihood of success. Confidence and self-efficacy have, interestingly, not been referred to in the studies to date, which would appear to be a gap in the extant studies. Further insights into the areas of confidence and self-efficacy when it comes to HR implementation could be used by HR departments to

structure their support systems in order to respond to the needs of FLMs. Meijerink *et al.*, (2016) suggest that employees who have strong HR competencies might be more self-confident. Bos-Nehles *et al.*,(2020), however, discuss the need for further work on occupational self-efficacy to operationalise competence.

FLMs' ability, motivation, and opportunity to implement HR practices have also been positively linked to employees' satisfaction with the HR system. Van Waeyenberg and Decramer,(2018) used the performance appraisal process as a HR practice to investigate how FLMs implement HRM. Taking data from 71 FLMs and 318 employees working in the Flemish education sector, they predicted that the effectiveness of the performance appraisal process would depend on ability, motivation, and opportunity in terms of time to implement the HR practice. Their study concluded that employees were more satisfied with the HR practice when FLMs were motivated and when they devoted more time to the implementation of the practice.

FLM motivation to implement HR practices can be influenced by the HR SSC delivery model, in part due to the change in how they interact with HR and, for example, by the loss of face-to-face contact. Cooke (2006) provided feedback from FLMs that the move to a shared service centre meant that they no longer had HR contact, with the result that they were nervous that they might do something that was procedurally incorrect and so would end up in a tribunal. End users of the HR SSC service, when interviewed, described how they felt uncomfortable discussing confidential issues with a person they had never met. Some employees also discussed the removal of the emotional support which they previously been given by HR; instead, they found that the function was turning into an administrative centre with a lack of personal touch. The HR SSC as part of the HR delivery model is therefore likely to have an influence on FLMs' motivation to implement HR practices.

2.9.6 FLMs' desire to adapt HR practices

FLMs may also desire the ability to change and adapt HR practices and this will result in HR implementation differences. This idea was investigated by Makhecha *et al.*, (2018) in a study carried out in India in a multi-unit hypermarket group using data from FLMs, employees, and HR professionals. The authors hypothesised that an implementation gap might occur when FLMs adapt HR practices to suit their specific requirements. In this way, employees in the same organisation but in different business units may have different experiences of HR practices due to the way their individual FLMs adapt them. To examine where possible gaps might be occurring, the authors gathered data from the HR function to understand the 'intended' and 'actual' HR practices (from the FLMs) and the 'experienced' HR practices (from the employees). The authors found differences between the implementation gaps in the different operating units, but they also found different levels of implementation gaps depending on the HR practice.

The HR department can help to avoid misunderstandings and ensure adaptation of HR practices through effective communication and by clarifying the intent of the policy. The skills of the HR professionals working to advise FLMs are key in ensuring that FLMs understand the desired outcomes envisaged by the HR practice. The shared service literature suggests that the skills required in shared services are very specific – for example, to have a passion for continuous improvement (Quinn, 2000, p.134). Maatman and Meijerink (2017) distinguish between two different types of capabilities needed for HR SSC staff: operational capabilities, which involve providing day-to-day services in a consistent manner and repeatedly performing these day-to-day activities, and dynamic capabilities, meaning the ability to create or extend the organisation’s capabilities to respond to environmental requirements. The dynamic capability suggested by these authors could be argued to include the skills to be able to explain to FLMs when and how HR practices can be adapted to continue to achieve the desired organisational outcomes.

2.10 The FLM as a peer in the department – ‘organisational level’ factors influencing FLM’s attitudes and implementation behaviour

We have so far examined the factors which influence effective implementation. We first considered the FLMs as employees of the organisation and looked at the factors which affect their attitudes as employees. We then went on to consider factors such as their skills and motivation in their role as team managers. We now go on to consider FLMs in the organisational and departmental context in which they operate and as ‘peers’ of other managers. The conceptual model (Figure 5) shows the relevant factors which need to be considered at the departmental or organisational level and which will be discussed in section 2.10.

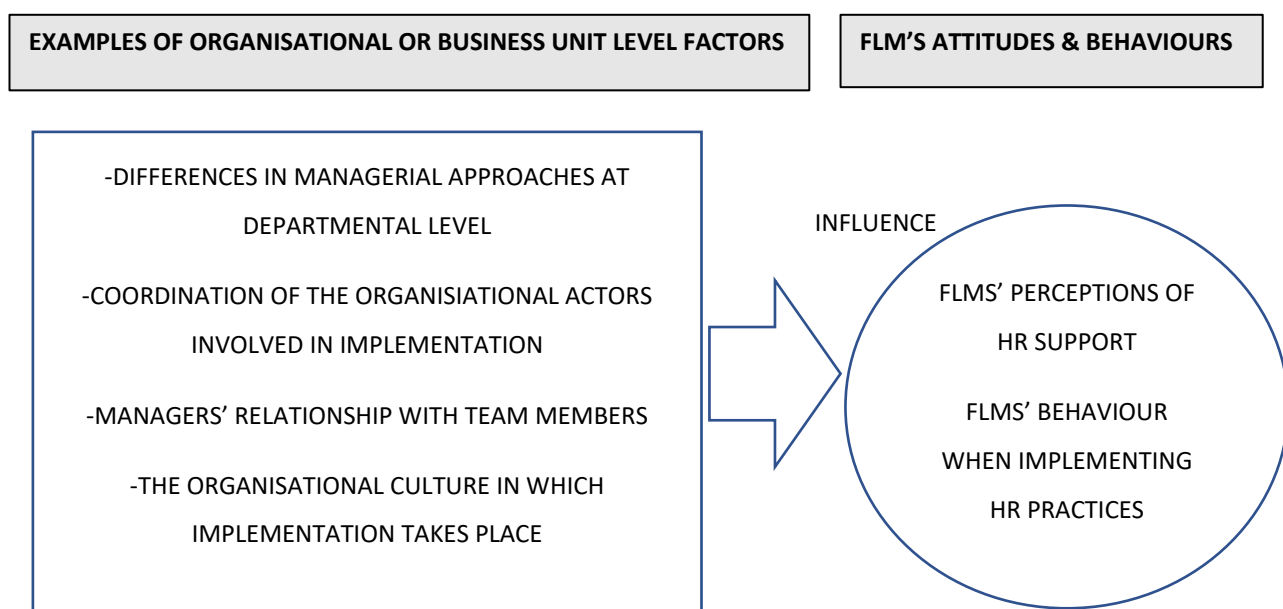


Figure 5 Proposed conceptual model considering FLMs as ‘peers’ of other FLMs in the organisation, and the organisational or unit-level business factors that influence their attitudes and implementation behaviours

2.10.1 The organisational culture in which implementation takes place

The development of an organisational culture is a factor which appears to be key to the idea of system strength and effective implementation. Organisational culture has been described as the norms and beliefs that shape a company's people structure and control system so that they become behavioural norms (Schein, 1992). The degree to which HR can influence the development of a shared set of understandings, perceptions, and culture is therefore relevant to an analysis of HR implementation (Chow, 2012). It has been suggested that variability often exists at the work-unit level because line managers may differ in how they implement HRM (Nishii and Wright, 2008; Pak and Kim, 2018).

The organisational climate in a department will also influence the HR implementation behaviour of FLMs. To test the hypothesis that HR implementation and culture are mediators in the link between HR policies and performance outcomes, Chow *et al.*, (2012) gathered data from 243 middle managers and FLMs in China. Their findings confirmed the importance of an organisational culture acting as a mechanism by which HR practices influence performance. The study found that culture acted as a mediator between HR practices and outcomes, which supports the theory that there is a need for a consistent culture to be created across organisations if it is to achieve performance outcomes. Quantitative data gathered from FLMs implementing performance appraisals in organisations in Belgium also revealed that an organisational culture which values high performance is a determining variable for HR implementation (Dewettinck and Vroonen, 2017).

The HR department plays a significant role in supporting and shaping organisational culture. The development of a consistent culture is, however, still reliant on consistent signals from individual FLMs working with team members. The HR SSC model will need to take account of the organisational context if it is to be effective in supporting HR implementation. Meijerink and Bondarouk (2013) looked at a specific organisation in the Netherlands in their study, aiming to understand why end user satisfaction with the service was reduced following the establishment of the HR SSC. The study found that the organisation redeployed existing staff into the new HR shared service centre but that business unit decision-making remained decentralised. Aalto *et al.*, (2019) suggest that the benefits from shifting to a SSC model do not always result as expected, as shared services are often used in a different way from the one intended by executives. To focus attention and to reflect on the organisational context and the actors involved at different levels will help the HR SSC to respond to differences in desired organisational outcomes.

Kehoe and Han,(2020) also found that HR involvement by line managers is shaped by a multitude of different contextual factors. The authors suggest that these include the structural and political contexts of the organisation, the characteristics of the HR function, the HR decision-making process and resulting HR practices, the individual characteristics of the FLMs responsible

for implementation, and the characteristics of the units and employees for which FLMs are responsible. Following their literature review, Kehoe and Han,(2020) concluded that future research should assess the interplay among contextual factors, FLMs' individual qualities, and the distinct forms of HRM involvement.

HR implementation involves change at different levels of the organisation, therefore Mirfakhar *et al.*,(2018) adopted Pettigrew's strategic change framework to review the literature on HRM implementation, looking at the implementation of HR practices as an organisational change. If we reflect on the establishment of a HR SSC as part of the HR delivery structure, the change-management literature may provide a helpful theoretical basis. The establishment of the HR SSC results in significant changes to roles and responsibilities. The shared service centre literature also emphasises the changes required when implementing the HR SSC in terms of the shift in power and skills requirements. Feedback gathered by Redman *et al.*,(2007) aligned with this view, with employees discussing the need for them to be more 'agile' and flexible. HR SSC workers needed the skills to manage multiple demands from different groups, and also of organisational politics. The evidence from the HR director interviewed, highlighted the increased scrutiny and visibility attending the move and the subsequent resignations of staff who did not have the political skills or interpersonal skills to cope in the new environment. There are also likely to be obstacles to the creation of a common culture and core identity for the HR team and the creation of a sense of belonging (Redman *et al.*, 2007). This will have an impact on the service offered if the HR SSC is unable to retain staff.

Using change theory can allow us to understand some of the issues which have resulted from 'HR transformation'. McCracken and Mclvor (2013) refer to the change approach outlined by Kotter (2007). This approach to change includes factors such as forming a coalition of key stakeholders in order to guide the change, planning for and creating short-term wins, and institutionalising the change. McCracken and Mclvor (2013) suggest that resistance to change is an intrinsic element which needs to be managed to arrive at a successful HR delivery model. This idea of the establishment of a HR SSC as being a 'change' initiative for an organisation opens up a whole new area of learning, allowing us to draw from studies underpinned by change theory.

2.10.2 Differences in FLM implementation at department or business unit level

The business unit or department context has been examined in the implementation research and has been found to be relevant when studying FLM implementation behaviours. The HR implementation study by Bos-Nehles *et al.*,(2013) explored the context in which the FLM operates and the contextual mechanisms which enable action. The authors suggest that the relationship between the FLM and HR professionals will be context dependent.

Vermeeren (2014), in a study carried out in Belgium using data from 315 employees and 41 FLMs, considered the issue of varying outcomes to see whether HR practices implemented by FLMs affected employees' perceptions of HR, resulting in better unit performance. The authors highlighted the differences which can exist between units in the same organisation and the ways in which HR has been implemented by FLMs. They found differences not only at the organisational level but also at the team or business unit level. The HR departments, in the way in which they set up suitable contexts and environments to be able to provide HR support, can influence FLM attitudes in the department towards HR practices (Dewettinck and Vroonen, 2017). The findings from the study by Dewettinck and Vroonen, suggested that HR involvement should be increased, not reduced, in any HR delivery model, as levels of HR support are positively linked to FLMs' attitudes towards HR practices.

Differences between teams and various FLMs' implementation of HR practices at the business unit and cross departmental levels were examined by Pak and Kim (2018) in a study which used data from multiple sources, with 183 matched responses across 51 teams. The authors found that differences exist not only between FLMs in the same department but also between FLMs in different departments in the same organisation. Following the logic that FLMs will have some discretion in how they implement practices, and that this will result in different employee perceptions across the organisation, the authors referred to the shared elements within organisations, such as norms, leadership, and HRM, and explained that FLMs' communication with employees provides the context in which employee perceptions of HRM are formed. The authors suggested that the differences they found highlighted the need for context to be taken into account when considering HR implementation effectiveness. The ways in which the HR SSC delivery structure can support the creation of organisational norms may therefore be a further consideration when looking at the support needed for effective implementation.

Dello Russo *et al.*, (2018), in their multi-level study underpinned by attribution theory, gathered data from the healthcare sector in the Netherlands. The authors examined how the variability of employee perceptions within a department contributed towards the individual experience of a given HR practice. The authors looked at implementation inconsistency across a department. The findings from this study also served to illustrate that individual perceptions are embedded in a broader context which provides cues guiding individuals to conduct sense-making, cues which can be influenced by line managers as peers. FLM peers in the same department communicate and share meaning in very different ways, leading to different outcomes across teams in the same department. The authors suggest that individual perceptions of implementation will be affected by sense-making cues in the organisational context, and in this way the organisational context can overshadow individuals' own perceptions of HR practices.

The findings from the study by Dello Russo *et al.*, (2018) suggest that the HR delivery model can only be effective if it is appropriately aligned with the business context in which it

operates and if it supports FLMs by explaining the context in which the HR practice is being implemented. The effectiveness of implementation in each department is, it seems from the research, reliant on the contextual cues provided by the FLMs to their team members. We can therefore expect that coaching from the HR department would help FLMs by, e.g., sharing the context of the development of the HR practice and what the intended outcome is. This would allow FLMs to be clearer in their communication to team members and peers in their department. If this contextual scene setting is not provided, the HR practice might not be accepted and adopted by FLMs, or the HR SSC delivery model might push FLMs to seek advice elsewhere in the organisation. Kehoe and Han,(2020) suggest that a current research gap in the literature relates to our understanding of the lateral and upward influence efforts through which FLMs seek broader support for their localised HR practice deviations – this could be, e.g., from line managers or peers.

2.11 Conclusions

This literature review has explored the evolution of the HR structure, the need for HR professionals working in the new HR SSC to acquire additional skills, and all the role conflicts which are likely to exist. The move to a delivery model which includes a HR SSC element is also likely to result in a change in the role and role expectations of FLMs who are end users of the service. Evidence from the shared services literature would suggest that certain factors are key to ensuring that the HR SSC is perceived positively by end users of the HR service. These factors include an emphasis on collaboration between the HR SSC and HR teams external to the HR SSC, a focus on the business units served, and an ongoing focus on developing the competencies of HR SSC staff. Centralising HR staff in one location or as part of a central HR SSC may result in a loss of face-to-face contact for FLMs, which could impact both their motivation to engage with HR and their perceptions of organisational support. The HR SSC could be viewed by some FLMs as adding an administrative burden by transferring HR work to them (Ulrich and Dulebohn, 2015). There is a need to customise the service provided to end users when appropriate; this may actually help HR SSCs to be perceived as offering more value-added services to their end user FLMs.

The review has focused on HRM implementation in organisations by FLMs and explored how the different roles which the FLM plays in the organisation and how the HR SSC delivery model is important in each case. The effects of poor service from the HR SSC on FLM behaviours have also not been examined by the shared services or HR literature. These effects could include, for example, time spent by FLMs searching for information via informal networks or via their own line managers. End users of the HR SSC are required to be more independent, and there is a need for self-efficacy. The need to be more self-sufficient as a FLM is mentioned in the shared service literature, but it is not discussed or explored in any depth using extant theory or knowledge.

The review of the HR implementation literature in this chapter has highlighted some critical gaps in our understanding. Appendices A, B and C highlight the research carried out to date, including the theoretical basis and research methods adopted and the existing knowledge regarding the implementation of HR practices by managers. This chapter has outlined how the studies to date have not put the spotlight specifically on how the structural set-up of the HR function might be impacting FLM behaviour or how it might be influencing the effectiveness of FLM implementation of HR practices. The gaps outlined show the need to investigate further the complex set of variables which combine when HR support is provided to FLMs via a HR SSC model in an organisation. This research aims to bridge these gaps as part of both a theoretical and practical contribution, seeking to improve our understanding of how a HR service delivery model affects FLMs in organisations.

The research questions which this study will answer are therefore:

Research Question I: *Which elements of HR support do FLMs value most when implementing HR practices?*

Research Question II: *To what extent does the location of the HR SSC influence FLMs' perceptions of the elements of HR support which they value most?*

Research Question III: *How does the HR support received by FLMs influence their implementation of HR practices?*

2.12 Chapter summary

This literature review (Chapter 2) has considered the evolution of the role of the front-line FLMs and the requirements demanded of FLMs. The evolution of the HR structural set-up has been outlined, including the requisite changes needed to be made to HR roles and the change in key skills required by the HR department. Using a mixed-methods methodology (Chapter 3), followed by a review of a set of quantitative results (Chapter 4), a discussion of the treatment of the qualitative data (Chapter 5) and finally detailed findings (Chapter 6), this study will now share insights from the data gathered, which will answer the research questions posed in this chapter.

Chapter 3 Methodological Considerations

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the approach and methodology followed in this study. Section 3.2 describes the research paradigm and philosophy. Section 3.3 then sets out the overall study design and methodological approach taken in this study. Section 3.4 discusses the rationale behind the choice of case studies to respond to the research questions and the two case study organisations selected for this study. Section 3.5 provides evidence of the research approach, the sample used, and the results of the focus group phase of this study to develop a measurement instrument. Section 3.6 discusses the pilot testing of the measurement instrument, the sample used and the data analysis carried out. Section 3.7 points to the key information which will be shared in the following chapter (Chapter 4) concerning the quantitative data gathered and the analysis carried out. Section 3.8 discusses the approach taken in the qualitative phase of the study, including the sample used. Section 3.9 outlines the ethical considerations considered by the researcher, and Section 3.10 provides a chapter summary.

3.2 Research paradigm and philosophy

Social ontology is concerned with whether social entities are objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, and whether they can and should be considered as social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Bryman, 2016; Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Seale, 2018). Two ontologies prevail in academic studies, positivism and constructivism, with a third approach, pragmatism, allowing a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to be used based on the research questions rather than '*paradigmatic affiliations*' (Seale, 2018, p.310). Positivism has been described as a scientific and empirical approach to research, a deterministic philosophy whereby researchers transform ideas into discrete tests, such as the variables which comprise hypotheses and research questions (Cresswell, 2014). For positivists, organisational research should provide scientifically objective, accurate, and valid explanations of how the organisational world really works (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Constructivists, on the other hand, focus on the context in which people work and recognise that their own backgrounds shape the research, interpreting the meanings others have of the world (Cresswell, 2014). Philosophical approaches taken by previous studies in the HR implementation area include both positivist approaches, drawing conclusions based on quantitative data, and constructivist approaches using, e.g., interviews (see Appendices A and C for details of the studies reviewed as part of this study).

Pragmatism has its origins in the US. Instead of searching for metaphysical truths, pragmatists consider truth to be '*what works*' and present a '*very practical and applied research philosophy*' (Tashkorri *et al.*, 1998, p.30). Pragmatist researchers propose that research always

occurs in social and other contexts and focus on looking at both the 'what' and the 'how' (Cresswell, 2014, p.11). Pragmatism allows the researcher to explore how participants 'make sense' of their social context (Seale, 2018, p.311). This research adopts a pragmatist philosophical position to answer the research questions. This study thus sets out not only to draw conclusions based on the quantitative data gathered but to explain the data in context. This philosophical approach is aligned to the mixed method approach, outlined below, and is driven by the research question, because for the pragmatist researcher, answering the research problem is more important than the method or worldview adopted.

Mixed method studies combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches within different phases of the research process (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). In mixed method research, key quantitative data may be used as the starting point to then carry out a deeper analysis to understand the 'why' and 'how' of the quantitative data gathered. Using the mixed method approach to researching a problem, the researcher collects both qualitative and quantitative data and integrates them – with the core assumption being that combining qualitative and quantitative approaches will provide 'a more complete understanding of a research problem' (Cresswell, 2014, p.4). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) suggest that mixed method research provides the opportunity to draw stronger inferences and can simultaneously address a range of confirmatory and exploratory questions (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009, p.33).

The use of a mixed method approach for this study was appropriate for a number of reasons. Firstly, the researcher wished to understand which aspects of HR support were important to managers. To answer this research question a survey questionnaire was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to gather and analyse data from a cross industry sample of managers to understand which elements they valued. The results of the analysis of this data showed that HR advice, HR service quality and HR tools and systems were three factors which needed to be considered and the results are described in detail in chapter 4. The survey data also revealed that there were significant differences between the two organisations which participated in the survey data collection in the main study. This led the researcher to question what may have caused the significant differences in FLM perceptions of HR support in these two organisations. As the organisations were providing support via two different HR delivery models, one with a HR shared service centre team based onshore and one with a HR shared service team based offshore two additional research questions were therefore developed to assess the effect of the HR shared service team's location. A qualitative approach was seen as most appropriate to answer the additional two research questions as a qualitative approach would allow the researcher to explore these differences in more depth to understand what factors may be responsible and what effect the location of the HR shared service delivery model was having on how *FLMs implement HR practices*. The research study design is described in detail in sections 3.3 and 3.4.

3.3 Overall study design and methodological approach

This mixed method study included, firstly, the development and testing of a measurement instrument to understand HR delivery support and, secondly, the gathering of data using the measurement instrument developed. In the final phase of the study the researcher carried out interviews using a qualitative research approach to explore the quantitative results in more depth to understand why the key factors from the quantitative analysis were valued by FLMs and what effect the support received had on how FLMs implemented HR practices. The quantitative phase of this study had established that there were significant differences present between the organisations. Given that the two organisations had different HR delivery models, one with an onshore HR shared service team and one with an offshore shared service team, and significant differences between the two organisations were revealed by the quantitative data analysis a sequential mixed methods approach was appropriate for this study. The initial quantitative phase and analysis of the quantitative data led the researcher to develop additional research questions to understand the quantitative results and what might be behind the significant differences in FLMs perceptions of HR support in the two organisations. The qualitative phase was therefore used to explore the quantitative results. For this reason a sequential mixed method approach was used rather than a concurrent mixed methods approach. The use of a sequential mixed method approach allowed the qualitative stage to explain and further explore the quantitative stage. This research is considered explanatory because the initial quantitative data results are explained further using the qualitative data (Cresswell, 2014; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Using quantitative data alone would not have allowed the researcher to understand the reasons for the differences in results. The use of a mixed method approach allowed the researcher to understand from a significant sample of managers (282 in total plus 137 in the pilot phase) the elements of HR support which they valued most before going on to explore these aspects in more depth in the qualitative phase of the study. The use of a qualitative study alone would not have allowed the researcher to compare how FLMs rated the support they received and would not have allowed the richness of insights which was gained using the mixed method approach.

As part of the quantitative phase of the study which looked at which aspects of HR support were valued by FLMs, analysis was carried out to check if there were significant differences between the two organisations. The results of the analysis are outlined in chapter 4 and the analysis revealed that there were significant differences between the two organisations in terms of FLMs' perceptions of the HR support they received. Based on the literature review carried out, no HR implementation studies to date – to the researcher's knowledge – have used a mixed method approach to compare FLMs in two different organisational case studies where the two case studies have very different HR organisational delivery models, one with a HR SSC based offshore and the other with a HR SSC based onshore. The researcher therefore considers that this study offers an original insight to implementation by FLMs by presenting an analysis of differences

in FLMs perceptions of HR support and considering the influence of the HR shared service centre location in each case. A cross-sectional snapshot of these two organisations rather than a longitudinal view was adopted. This was primarily due the limited time scope and limited access to organisations at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 when data-gathering activities for the qualitative phase of the main study was taking place.

The strength of adopting a mixed methods approach for this particular study was that after the initial quantitative data collection the researcher could, in the qualitative phase of the research, explore specific elements of the context relating to the delivery of HR support to FLMs, rather than simply draw statistical generalisations (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The researcher could build on the findings of the quantitative data which confirmed significant differences in how FLMs in the two organisations viewed the HR support they received. The use of a mixed method approach provided the opportunity for the researcher to explore whether the differences in FLMs' perceptions of the service received from HR were in fact due to the location of the HR shared service teams. The qualitative data which emerged from the initial quantitative data-gathering phase were therefore used to understand the effect of the HR delivery context and specifically the location of the HR shared service team on the results and to explain the ways in which the HR organisational structure and more specifically the location of the teams influence FLMs' perceptions of HR support in the areas of HR coaching and advice, HR service quality and HR systems and tools.

The use of a mixed method approach does, however, pose certain challenges. These challenges include, for example, the need for extensive data collection, the demands of the time-intensive nature of analysing both qualitative and quantitative data, and the need for the researcher to be familiar with both quantitative and qualitative forms of research (Cresswell, 2014; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). However, the use of a mixed method study allowed for a broader range of issues to be addressed than might otherwise have been possible using a single method (Seale, 2018, p.314). The quantitative phase of this mixed-method study included the development of a measurement instrument for HR delivery support, the pilot testing of this new measurement instrument, followed by the use of the newly developed measurement instrument to gather data from the FLMs in two case study organisations with different HR delivery models to compare FLMs' perceptions of the HR department. Nevertheless, by using a mixed method approach, the researcher was able to gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the factors impacting effective HR implementation in the two case study organisations.

The research data gather exercise can be broken into the following phases:

- i) the initial phase, which involved the use of an inductive approach using focus groups to develop a suitable set of items for the quantitative phase of the study
- ii) the pilot testing phase of the study, including the development of a measurement instrument for HR delivery support and testing of that newly developed measurement

scale using data gathered from FLMs across multiple industries to validate the instrument. This phase aimed to assess whether all the items included in the measurement instrument were suitable or if they needed to be refined

- iii) the quantitative phase of the main study, which included a deductive approach using data gathered via an online survey from two organisations
- iv) analysis of the data gathered from the two organisations with different HR delivery models and HR shared service teams based either onshore or offshore to assess whether there were significant differences in FLMs' perceptions of HR support in the two organisations

the final phase of the main study, which adopted an inductive approach, when FLMs and HR professionals were interviewed to understand their experiences of HR support and how this influenced FLMs' attitudes. The aim of this phase of the study was to understand in more detail the elements of HR support which were most important to managers and to assess the influence which the HR delivery team's location was having on FLMs' perceptions and attitudes

Cresswell, 2014 suggests that the use of a mixed method approach is recommended when the quantitative and qualitative research questions can be used to advance the purpose of the research study. In the case of this study the purpose of the data gathering was to understand firstly what elements of HR support were important to FLMs and then to explore the reasons behind differences in FLMs perceptions of HR support. The differences in HR delivery teams location led to the research exploring how the location of HR support teams influenced FLMs as they implemented HR practices. The three research questions combined provide an original insight into the implementation process by firstly determining which aspects of HR support make a difference to FLMs, then exploring these elements of HR support and the interaction between FLMs and HRSSC front line team members in the qualitative phase of the research. The qualitative phase also allowed the researcher the opportunity to investigate the effects of the HR support received by FLMs on others in the organisation. The use of these three research questions meant that the research built on the initial foundations of enquiry established through the quantitative data gathering. Through the qualitative phase of the study the study then explored the aspects of HR support which were valued by FLMs from both organisations, adding an additional layer and richness of data to the initial survey responses to allow the researcher to understand the effect of the organisational context and HR location on FLMs attitudes towards HR implementation and to be able to answer the research questions. The second research question in this mixed method study therefore built on the first by exploring the elements of HR support which were important to FLMs to understand the extent to which these elements of HR support were influenced by the location of the HR team in each organisation.

Research Design

(adapted from Cresswell 2014, p220)

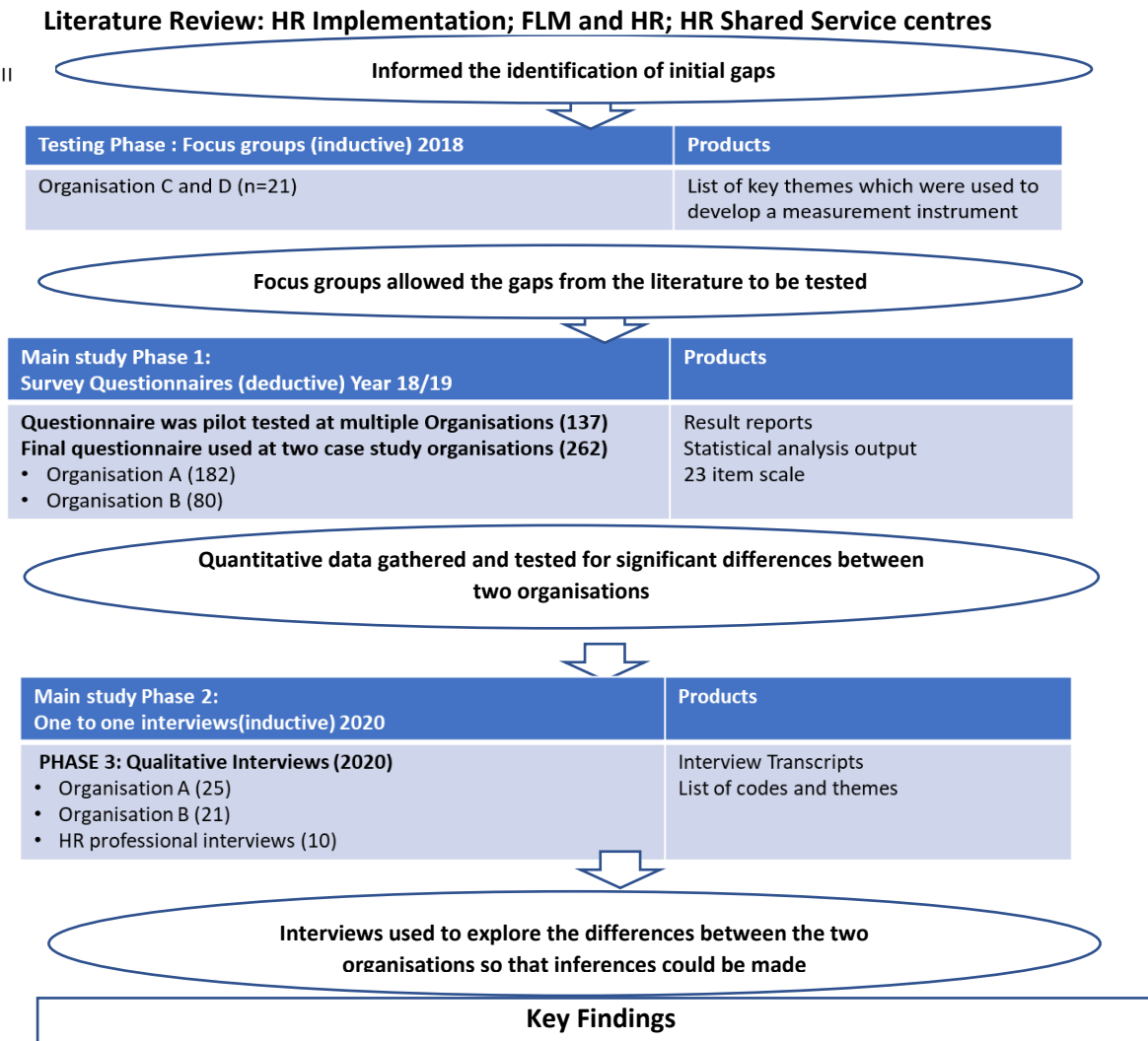


Figure 6 Overall research design, summarising the phases and following the guidance from Cresswell (2014, p.22)

A purposive sampling strategy was used in this study, following the 4-aspects guidance by Miles and Huberman (1994). This study targeted organisations that take a formalised approach to Human Resource Management, as one of the fundamental aims of the research is to understand the impact of the HR delivery structure on the HR support which can be provided to FLMs. The sample sizes were chosen to be in line with previous implementation studies, but also to allow a saturation point to be reached by which time no further useable data could be gathered. During the period from the early 2000s onwards, investment in operating models became the norm, with survey research showing that over 95% of organisations had undertaken HR transformation and over 50% investing in the 'Ulrich model' of HR delivery (CIPD, 2015). Organisations with over 1,000 employees are more likely to have developed a structured HR delivery offering for their employees (CIPD, 2015). The two case study organisations chosen were seen to have sufficiently diverse HR delivery structure characteristics to provide suitable variation in the data collected. This allowed the researcher to collect data and to analyse this data to determine whether there were key differences between FLMs' perceptions of HR support at Organisation Offshore, which had an offshore delivery model, versus at Organisation Onshore, which had an onshore delivery team (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Each organisation had a different service delivery model, but none of the models was unusual for UK firms of between 5,000 and 15,000 employees, making the findings from studying these two organisations more likely to be relevant to other contexts. **Figure 7** shows the differences in delivery models between the two organisations.

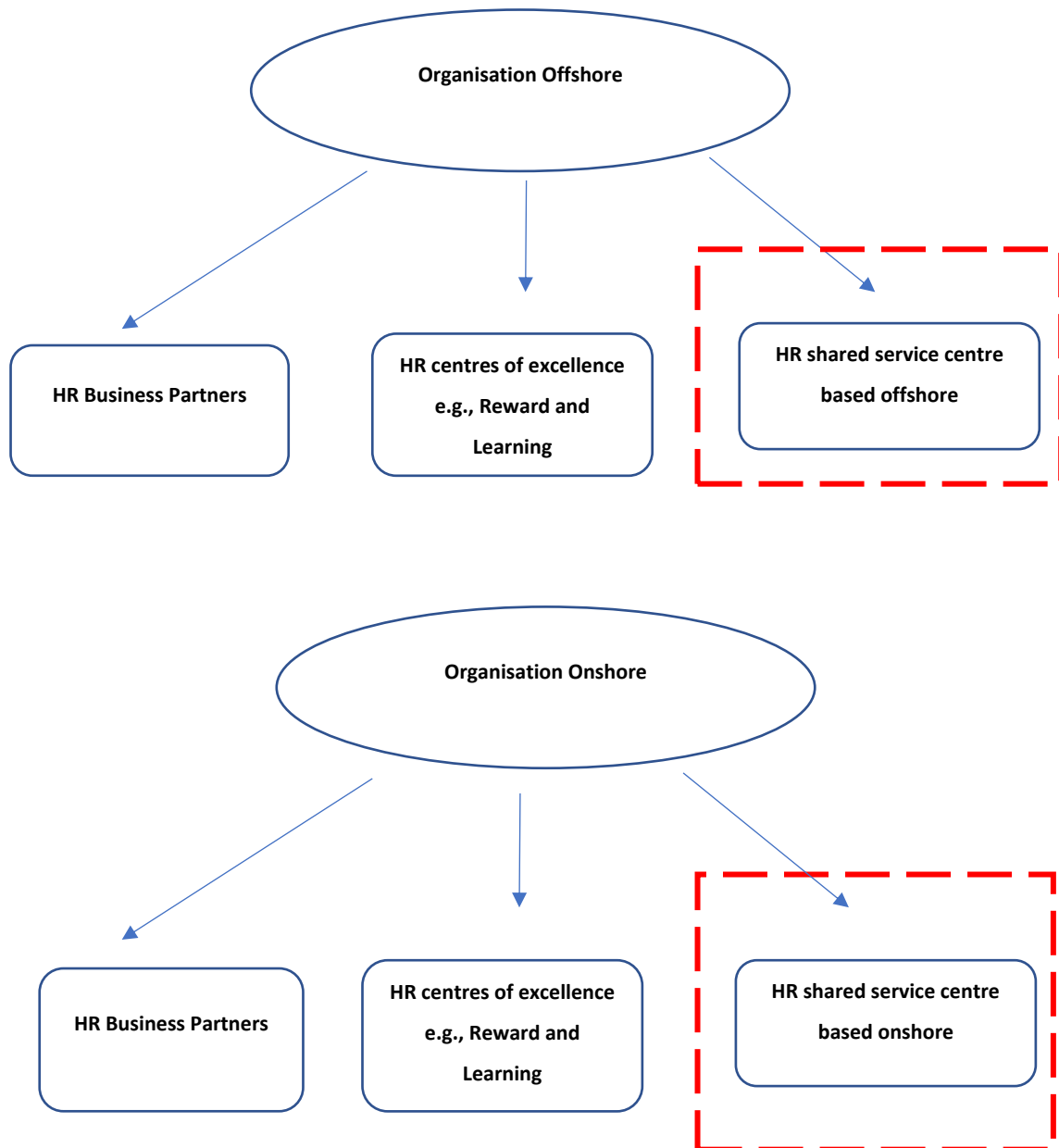


Figure 7 HR delivery models in the two case study organisations

The researcher was interested in understanding the aspects of HR support which were most important to FLMs and also the impact of the context in which the interview data was gathered and whether FLMs felt that there was a difference in the way in which they were supported by the HR department as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This ensured that the data gathered would be relevant to other time periods. The FLMs in both organisations spoke of the greater volume of information in general, and the fact that they no longer saw HR professionals during the early Covid-19 pandemic; however, they did not feel that the quality and standard of support had changed. The researcher was confident that the data gathered during this period was therefore reflective in general of FLMs' perceptions of both the HR delivery model and the support available to them.

The quality of the research undertaken as part of this study can be judged via the trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability of the research approach (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

In the case of this study, the trustworthiness of the data was assured by adopting a systematic approach to the analysis of the participants' accounts using thematic analysis, and by the supervisory team peer-checking the approach taken to the thematic analysis. The credibility of the research was achieved by sharing a summary of the key findings with the key contacts in the participating organisations to ensure that the findings resonated with them. The transferability of the research was accomplished by following a clearly documented research protocol which could be replicated with other organisations with similar delivery structures, e.g., to other countries.

3.4 The use of case studies

Case studies are useful for capturing the dynamic nature of implementation processes, allowing the expansion of how to implement knowledge from the perspective of informants who experience the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). For this study, two case studies were chosen which offered a HR delivery model widely used in other similarly sized organisations. Two organisations with different HR organisational delivery structures were identified via the researcher's personal network that would enable a comparison of FLMS' perception of HR and the HR support they receive. **Figure 7** shows the difference in delivery structure in each organisation.

Yin (2014) suggests that the use of a case study provides an up-close view in a real-world context and allows the researcher to understand the conditions relating to the cases, and so goes further than the study of isolated variables. Yin suggests that case study research has been used as a common research method in business, education, and other contexts as it allows investigators to retain a 'real world' perspective by studying group behaviour, organisational processes, and the maturity of industries (Yin, 2014, p.4). Case study research is appropriate in answering 'how' or 'why' questions and allows the researcher to examine contemporary events when access is available to a variety of sources, such as documents, artifacts, and interviews. When defining a case study, Yin refers to Schramm (1971), who points out that *'the essence of a case study is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions; why they were taken, how they were implemented and with what result'* (Yin, 2014, p.15). Case study research can include a single case or multiple cases used to answer the research questions and can include both quantitative and qualitative research.

Criticisms of case study research concern the level of rigour or the accusation that systematic procedures have not been followed, with the concern that all evidence should be reported fairly and without bias. A third concern, according to Yin, regards the ability to generalise from case study evidence. Yin suggests that the purpose of the case study is not to represent a 'sample' but to allow the researcher to expand on theory. Further concerns regarding case studies relate to the length of time required for case study data-gathering and analysis and the view that case study research may be overlooked and experiments or quantitative data gathering studies used instead. Nevertheless, case studies offer the researcher unique insights from participants

into the internal processes and workings of an organisation, allowing the researcher the opportunity to explore and probe certain aspects of the data gathered to be able to draw conclusions that allow for valuable theory building.

The first case study organisation that was included in this main study provides educational services and has c.5,000 employees in the UK. This organisation had been through a series of restructuring programmes, and the HR department had in 2016 established an offshore HR SSC as part of its HR delivery model. The delivery model at this organisation also included HR business partners who were often based in another country and so were physically distanced from the FLMs they supported. This organisation is referred to in this study as 'Organisation Offshore'. The second case study organisation selected was an organisation with c.1,200 employees in the UK and produces a range of digital geographic resources. This organisation has centralised HR support in its UK headquarters and offers support to managers virtually, but also includes HR business partners who are on-site as part of its HR delivery model. This organisation is referred to in this study as 'Organisation Onshore'. Choosing two organisations, one with an on-shore delivery team and one with an off-shore delivery team, allowed the researcher to explore the differences that arise when HR support for FLMs is provided by a team based in another country compared with a delivery team based in the same country, and also to understand the influence of the HR mode of delivery on FLMs' implementation of HR practices.

3.5 The use of focus groups to develop a measurement instrument

Before going into the quantitative data-gathering phase, the researcher aimed to discover whether the factors that had been derived from the extensive literature review were in line with those perceived to be pertinent by FLMs in the workplace. This allowed the researcher to develop a measurement instrument for HR delivery support. The researcher therefore adopted an inductive approach to the preliminary pilot phase of the study, gathering key themes from FLMs using focus groups. In the initial phase of the study, four separate focus groups were held with FLMs at two organisations in the different industry sectors with offices in the UK, Organisations A and B. These organisations did not go on to form part of the main study but were only used in this phase to gather feedback on the key themes.

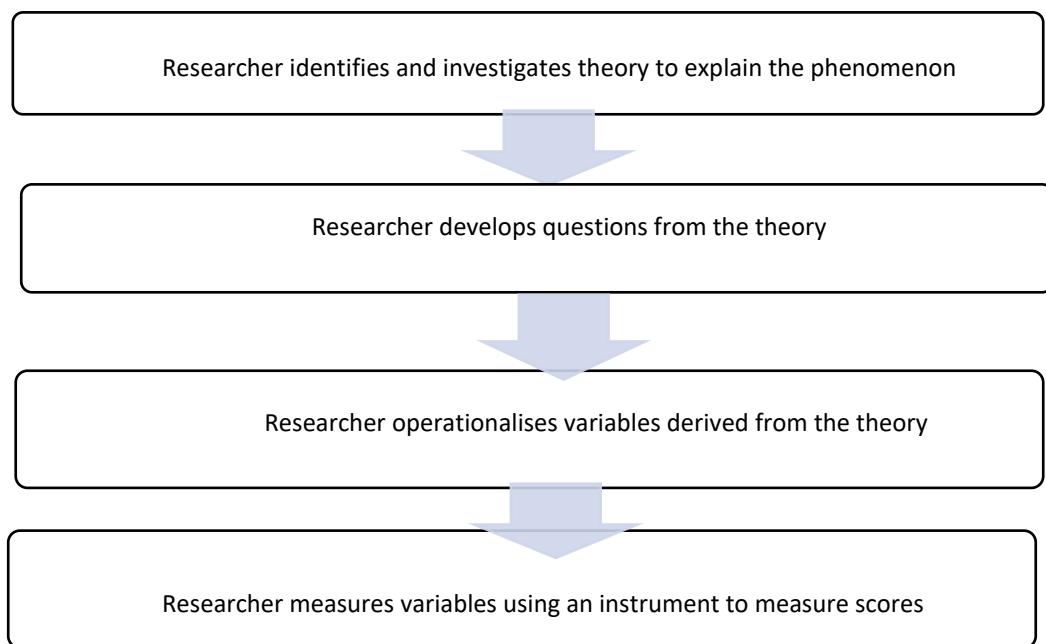


Figure 8 Steps followed using a deductive approach to the quantitative phase of the study

3.5.1 Sample used for the focus group phase (n=21)

To allow the researcher to examine those factors that resonated most with FLMs, four different focus group sessions were set up, with FLMs across two organisations based on the south coast of England. The four small, separate focus group sessions took place in the period from February to March 2018 and included a total of 21 FLMs (n=21). The first two of these focus groups included FLMs from a consulting organisation; the third and fourth focus groups included FLMs from a police force. The fact that the two organisations were from different sectors with different delivery models allowed the researcher to test whether there were some common themes which were not sector specific. The samples were taken from organisations with 1000+ employees according to the sampling criteria defined by the researcher. Males comprised 73% of the respondents at Organisation A (which was in line with the overall FLM population) and the average age was 39. 46% possessed a degree and 40% possessed a postgraduate qualification; 93% worked full-time. For Organisation B, males comprised 50% (also in line with the overall FLM population) and there was an average age of 46; the average level of qualification was postgraduate and all FLMs worked fulltime. The detailed list of participants is shown in Appendix D.

3.5.2 Procedure followed with the focus groups to generate measurement scale items

To be able to measure FLMs' perceptions of HR delivery support, a suitable measurement scale was required. The HR implementation literature review reveals that HR support had been measured in previous studies, such as that by Bos-Nehles *et al.*, (2013), in which HR support was measured using seven items from Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry's (1988) service quality scale (e.g., 'The HR managers have the necessary knowledge to answer my questions'). The scale used

by Bos-Nehles *et al.*, (2013) originated from a non-HR domain and had been validated for the HRM domain of line managers by performing a confirmatory factor analysis. However, it only allowed the researcher to assess FLMs' overall perceptions of HR support and not the sub-dimensions and specific factors which may have led to these perceptions of the support they received. As the present study aimed to explore the elements of HR support which were important to FLMs and to determine what influence the HR delivery model had on the HR delivery support FLMs received, a different measurement instrument was required.

The use of focus groups as well as information regarding the HR delivery model in these case study organisations therefore allowed the researcher to gather first-hand participant experience to verify themes from the literature review. In addition, this method allowed the researcher to check that the key areas of interest resonated with FLMs and their practical experience of working with the HR department and were not industry-sector specific. Guidance from Saunders *et al.* (2016) regarding the most effective way to carry out focus groups was adhered to, with participants offered the opportunity to participate in focus groups and given a choice whether they wished to attend..

3.5.3 Output of the focus group phase- a set of measurement scale items

The focus groups explored key themes regarding HR service delivery that were important to FLMs, with participants asked to discuss situations in which they had interacted with the HR department and their experiences of working with the HR department. The focus group framework included questions reflecting three areas of interest: HR practices, the HR relationship with FLMs and the HR delivery structure. From this exercise, valuable insights into the opinions of front-line FLMs regarding their HR responsibilities were gathered. Themes which emerged from these focus groups included the importance of the accuracy of the information they received from the HR department, ease of access to HR information, HR competence, active engagement and a proactive approach from the HR department, and the need for the HR department to take ownership in resolving any issue raised.

Following the first focus group, key themes were analysed and the approach to the next focus group was amended in order to take account of what had been effective with the first group and to decide what adjustments were required to ensure that the next focus groups were as effective as possible. A further three focus groups were held, and themes were explored with these groups until it was felt by the researcher that a saturation point had been reached and no new themes and insights regarding the topics of interest were emerging (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). The final phase of the focus group element of the research process entailed a collation and analysis of the themes that had emerged most strongly from the focus groups. Each focus group discussion was transcribed by the researcher and then themes were extracted which were

common to both groups. Items were categorised using a table to show the frequency of themes mentioned and how highly they were rated by participants in terms of importance.

Focus group data gathered from this phase included:

- Audio recordings using MP3 format using phones
- Written notes from interviews (MS Word documents)

As a result of the focus group input a 40-item measurement instrument was developed to gather data from FLMs regarding their perceptions of HR delivery support. This measurement instrument was then tested using a pilot test sample as outlined in section 3.6.

3.6 Pilot testing of the measurement instrument

The themes from the focus groups were used to build an initial set of 44 survey questionnaire items. The face validity of the initial 44 questions was reviewed by the supervisory team, who assessed the items for ambiguity, readability, and completeness, and this resulted in four items which were similar in meaning being deleted leaving 40 usable items.

Data were then gathered during this pilot testing phase using this measurement instrument via online surveys, thereby adopting an objective ontology and a deductive theory testing approach. The data gathered during this pilot testing phase were analysed and this analysis allowed the researcher to refine the measurement scale. The researcher followed the steps recommended by Cresswell (2014, p.59), as shown in **Figure 8**, for this stage of the study.

3.6.1 Sample used for the pilot testing of the measurement scale (n=137)

As this study was explicitly focused on perceptions of support for FLMs, the most appropriate way to gather data was by using self-reported data and by directly asking the intended recipients of HR support about their perceptions of the HR support they received from the HR department. The pilot testing of the questionnaire was considered important for verifying the survey instrument's reliability and for validating the questions which would be included in the final measurement scale to be used in the main study. A sample of over 120 FLMs across multiple industry sectors in the UK was targeted to allow any patterns that emerged to be viewed as of interest, as they were occurring in different contexts and in companies with markedly different characteristics. After checking for missing data, 137 usable responses remained, which was the sample used to test the measurement instrument (including 120 from a research bureau). The 137 responses were coded; the code book is included in Appendix M, which shows the questions used in this pilot test, the associated codes, and the questions used to gather demographic data.

In terms of the demographic breakdown of participants, the highest percentage of participants in the pilot testing of the questionnaire were male (61%). Over 46% of the respondents were educated to degree level or higher. For the majority of the respondents, the average length of tenure at their organisation was over five years (82.5%). A question designed to check the status

of employment was included in the survey to assess whether those managers working on a part-time basis might differ from the managers working on a full-time basis; however, the majority of the respondents in reality were full-time employees (98.5%), which meant that this assumption could not be explored. (The breakdown of demographic data for the pilot sample has been included in Appendices E and F).

3.6.2 Procedure followed in the pilot testing of the measurement scale items

The survey questionnaire using these 40 items was then attached to a 7-point Likert scale, and an online anonymous survey was set up to pilot test the items with FLMs at organisations across different sectors in the UK. The data were collected in August 2018 with the purpose of validating the newly developed measurement scale for HR delivery support. Self-reported questionnaires allowed FLMs to share their perceptions of the HR support they received from the HR department. Following guidance regarding questionnaire development (Saunders *et al.*, 2016), a questionnaire was developed and issued using an email link. An identifier was added to the online survey questionnaire to allow follow-on surveys to be sent if required, as the original research design included a follow-on survey. Participation needed to remain anonymous, whilst leaving open the possibility to return to participants to address further questions. To ensure this, participants were assigned a unique participant ID on the survey tool. The use of a password-protected computer for storing electronic data and a secure Sharepoint filing cabinet for document storage ensured confidentiality and compliance with the institutional code of ethics.

3.6.3 Reduction of the survey items for the measurement instrument (using a pilot testing sample of 137 cases)

3.6.3.1 Checking the suitability of the data for factor analysis

SPSS software was used to screen the data and to carry out a preliminary analysis and scale reduction. The initial set of questions is shown in Table 1. Initial analyses were conducted on the data collected including reviewing normality (Hair *et al.*, 2006), and the data were checked using frequency data analysis. Prior to performing PCA, the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed by looking at the 40x40 correlation matrix. Table 2 shows the 40 X 40 correlation matrix for all the items in the HR delivery support scale.

Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of correlations between -0.058 to 0.819, and items with a loading of over 0.8 were removed to eliminate singularity. The analysis was re-run and the correlations among the items ranged from 0.117 to 0.78. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was also confirmed by checking that the KMO value was over 0.6 and at 0.946 it met this criterion. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at $p=0.00$. Both these tests indicated the suitability of the sample for factor analysis. The scree plot also showed that a 2-factor analysis was optimal. The results of the Monte Carlo Parallel analysis supported the decision to retain only two factors for further investigation. SPSS software was used to screen the

data and to carry out a preliminary analysis and scale reduction. The initial set of questions is shown in Table 1. Initial analyses were conducted on the data collected, including reviewing normality (Hair *et al.*, 2006), and the data were checked using frequency data analysis. Prior to performing a Principal Component Analysis, the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed, looking at the 40x40 correlation matrix. Table 2 shows the 40 X 40 correlation matrix for all the items in the HR delivery support scale.

Table 1 HR delivery support measurement scale- the initial 40 items capturing HR delivery support

1	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides its services at the time it promises to do so.
2	The employees working in the Human Resources department tell me exactly when their services will be performed.
3	The Human Resources department is always willing to help me.
4	The Human Resources department has the necessary knowledge to answer my questions
5	The Human Resources department has my best interests at heart.
6	The Human Resources department understands the specific needs of line management.
7	It is easy to access advice from the Human Resources department in my organisation
8	I can independently locate Human Resource policy information via the self-service system in my organisation.
9	The Human Resources team members in my organisation share information effectively between them to resolve issues.
10	The Human Resources department in my organisation takes ownership to ensure that any HR issues I raise are resolved.
11	I only have to explain my question to the Human Resources department once and they make sure that it is resolved.
12	I have access to training regarding HR policies and procedures.
13	The Human Resources department at my organisation provides practical training which helps me in my role as line manager.
14	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides guidance on how to effectively implement a HR policy when it comes to my team.
15	I am aware of what is expected of me as a line manager.
16	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides training for new line managers.
17	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides a guide to HR policies for new line managers.
18	The communication regarding the training on how to use our HR tools and HR systems has been clear and easy to understand.
19	The quality of the content and the way my organisation structures the training activities on how to use our HR tools and HR systems are satisfactory.
20	I have access to face-to-face support at my office for Human Resource questions.
21	I know who my Human Resources contact is.
22	I know who to contact in the Human Resources department in my organisation to get answers to my questions.

23	I have access to a named Human Resources contact
24	I receive personalised advice from my Human Resources contact.
25	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides coaching to support me in having difficult conversations with my team members.
26	The Human Resources department in my organisation tailors the support they provide to meet the needs of the line manager.
27	The Human Resources department in my organisation is available to answer questions informally.
28	I am clear on the services provided by the Human Resources department in my organisation.
29	The Human Resources department in my organisation is visible.
30	The Human Resources department at my organisation is easily accessible.
31	The Human Resources department in my organisation actions feedback regarding how policies or procedures could be improved.
32	The HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are adjusted to the specific needs I have as a leader when it comes to getting the best out of my employees.
33	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are flexible enough to be adapted to my personal leadership style.
34	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are flexible enough to be adapted to the individual needs of my employees.
35	All in all, the HR tools and systems in my organisation help me perform my leadership duties in a successful way.
36	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation have increased my satisfaction with my managerial responsibilities.
37	If I had my way, I wouldn't let the Human Resources department in my organisation have any influence over issues that are important to me
38	I would be willing to let the Human Resources department in my organisation have complete control over my future in this organisation.
39	I really wish I had a good way to keep an eye on the Human Resources department in my organisation.
40	I would be comfortable giving the Human Resources department in this organisation a task or problem which was critical to me, even if I could not monitor their actions.

3.6.2.2 Exploratory factor analysis

Principal components analysis undertaken in the next step revealed the presence of five components with eigen values exceeding 1, explaining 54.566%, 5.880%, 3.621%, 6.1%, and 2.924% of the variance respectively. Having checked how the items mapped to the five components, further analysis was carried out using Varimax orthogonal factor analysis and suppressing values under 0.5, which revealed that component 1 was the key component that 19 items loaded to and which explained 67% of the variance, and a second component that five items loaded to and which explained 5% of the variance. From the initial 40 items used with

managers in the pilot survey a total of 23 items showed a score of 0.75 or higher. A score of 0.75 or higher was used as the cut-off point rather than 0.8 to allow for the inclusion of items covering a broader domain of HR support (see Appendix O for a table showing the final list of 23 items used in the main study). Due to the size of the pilot group consisting of 137 responses it was decided to run the EFA again with the larger sample from the two case study organisations to check the factor structure with a larger sample. Chapter 4 provides details of the data analysis carried out on the quantitative data gathered as part of the main study.

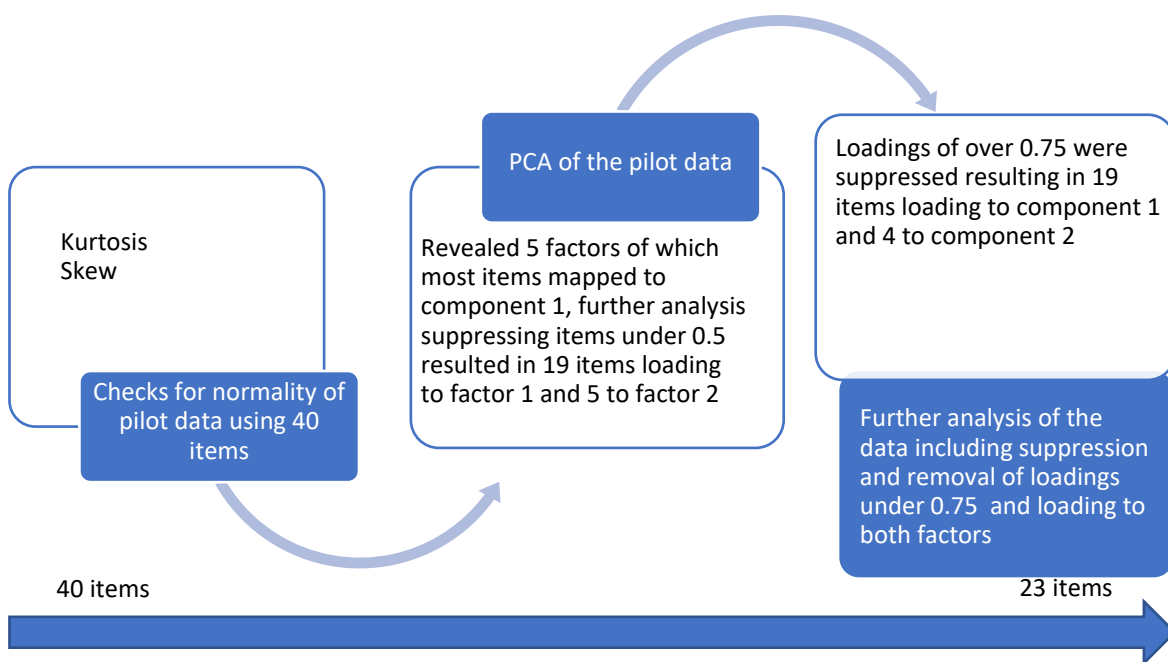


Figure 9 Steps carried out to analyse the pilot testing data and reduce the scale items following guidance by Hair (2006)

Table 2 Correlation matrix for the 40 scale items used in the pilot testing

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	S21	S22	S23	S24	S25	S26	S27	S28	S29	S30	S31	S32	S33	S34	S35	S36	S37	S38	S39	S40	
S1	1.00																																								
S2	0.65	1.00																																							
S3	0.60	0.64	1.00																																						
S4	0.48	0.71	0.68	1.00																																					
S5	0.56	0.60	0.69	0.55	1.00																																				
S6	0.49	0.71	0.64	0.73	0.67	1.00																																			
S7	0.60	0.69	0.75	0.60	0.69	0.65	1.00																																		
S8	0.52	0.62	0.65	0.47	0.49	0.67	1.00																																		
S9	0.58	0.65	0.63	0.61	0.70	0.63	0.66	0.58	1.00																																
S10	0.49	0.61	0.66	0.68	0.62	0.68	0.62	0.50	0.66	1.00																															
S11	0.59	0.71	0.67	0.65	0.64	0.69	0.68	0.49	0.67	0.68	1.00																														
S12	0.55	0.52	0.64	0.47	0.58	0.45	0.56	0.64	0.51	0.50	0.50	1.00																													
S13	0.50	0.64	0.75	0.57	0.62	0.53	0.67	0.63	0.63	0.62	0.59	0.67	1.00																												
S14	0.55	0.65	0.67	0.60	0.59	0.59	0.68	0.61	0.58	0.57	0.60	0.71	0.68	1.00																											
S15	0.29	0.43	0.46	0.46	0.32	0.35	0.41	0.40	0.43	0.56	0.36	0.44	0.50	0.44	1.00																										
S16	0.06	0.02	0.05	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.05	0.07	0.22	0.05	0.14	0.13	0.01	0.18	1.00																									
S17	0.41	0.57	0.55	0.52	0.55	0.51	0.61	0.59	0.60	0.66	0.54	0.54	0.63	0.57	0.41	0.08	1.00																								
S18	0.52	0.63	0.66	0.57	0.64	0.58	0.70	0.63	0.62	0.62	0.62	0.53	0.74	0.64	0.49	0.04	0.64	1.00																							
S19	0.49	0.69	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.69	0.66	0.62	0.58	0.71	0.62	0.56	0.66	0.57	0.50	0.05	0.65	0.69	1.00																						
S20	0.57	0.56	0.58	0.48	0.52	0.51	0.53	0.46	0.50	0.45	0.54	0.54	0.56	0.62	0.45	0.02	0.43	0.59	0.50	1.00																					
S21	0.36	0.38	0.50	0.41	0.46	0.38	0.39	0.42	0.44	0.58	0.37	0.50	0.40	0.42	0.56	0.15	0.48	0.42	0.53	0.42	1.00																				
S22	0.52	0.46	0.59	0.44	0.52	0.40	0.56	0.58	0.50	0.49	0.41	0.58	0.62	0.49	0.50	0.22	0.42	0.59	0.54	0.44	0.56	1.00																			
S23	0.29	0.35	0.52	0.36	0.37	0.36	0.46	0.43	0.34	0.42	0.33	0.47	0.47	0.43	0.57	0.10	0.42	0.55	0.48	0.39	0.57	0.55	1.00																		
S24	0.38	0.51	0.58	0.43	0.54	0.50	0.63	0.50	0.53	0.63	0.44	0.47	0.64	0.55	0.45	0.07	0.59	0.62	0.61	0.45	0.48	0.47	0.49	1.00																	
S25	0.45	0.56	0.64	0.49	0.59	0.49	0.60	0.58	0.65	0.61	0.55	0.58	0.66	0.57	0.57	0.09	0.60	0.59	0.57	0.52	0.48	0.52	0.48	0.54	1.00																
S26	0.52	0.61	0.62	0.54	0.58	0.51	0.63	0.58	0.68	0.66	0.56	0.54	0.70	0.57	0.56	0.04	0.65	0.62	0.57	0.54	0.48	0.53	0.47	0.62	0.78	1.00															
S27	0.57	0.68	0.67	0.56	0.68	0.61	0.69	0.60	0.64	0.57	0.58	0.63	0.69	0.59	0.50	0.11	0.61	0.66	0.69	0.56	0.52	0.58	0.55	0.58	0.67	0.65	1.00														
S28	0.50	0.59	0.72	0.64	0.60	0.51	0.67	0.63	0.55	0.73	0.59	0.63	0.71	0.57	0.59	0.19	0.60	0.67	0.68	0.46	0.52	0.60	0.56	0.57	0.61	0.63	0.67	1.00													
S29	0.42	0.57	0.68	0.53	0.55	0.55	0.64	0.55	0.56	0.65	0.58	0.61	0.69	0.66	0.58	0.05	0.59	0.65	0.59	0.60	0.55	0.49	0.59	0.66	0.61	0.63	0.65	0.65	1.00												
S30	0.40	0.61	0.65	0.58	0.52	0.52	0.63	0.60	0.56	0.59	0.55	0.49	0.67	0.62	0.54	0.15	0.61	0.66	0.62	0.57	0.45	0.49	0.55	0.59	0.62	0.71	0.64	0.67	0.68	1.00											
S31	0.40	0.50	0.54	0.53	0.47	0.40	0.53	0.43	0.55	0.64	0.51	0.45	0.58	0.51	0.55	0.15	0.64	0.66	0.50	0.40	0.51	0.41	0.48	0.52	0.62	0.61	0.51	0.52	0.58	0.57	1.00										
S32	0.59	0.65	0.71	0.62	0.62	0.55	0.68	0.59	0.71	0.62	0.55	0.63	0.77	0.65	0.54	0.12	0.60	0.70	0.60	0.60	0.46	0.60	0.47	0.66	0.67	0.72	0.70	0.60	0.64	0.63	0.62	1.00									
S33	0.54	0.62	0.69	0.57	0.62	0.56	0.64	0.61	0.66	0.64	0.64	0.65	0.69	0.67	0.53	0.08	0.59	0.63	0.62	0.56	0.47	0.48	0.45	0.60	0.74	0.69	0.69	0.65	0.65	0.67	0.62	0.72	1.00								
S34	0.50	0.63	0.64	0.60	0.68	0.62	0.59	0.62	0.69	0.71	0.61	0.58	0.65	0.62	0.55	0.13	0.66	0.62	0.68	0.55	0.52	0.44	0.45	0.60	0.73	0.76	0.71	0.64	0.66	0.68	0.64	0.69	0.82	1.00							
S35	0.49	0.55	0.71	0.58	0.67	0.51	0.58	0.53	0.65	0.66	0.61	0.58	0.72	0.63	0.48	0.09	0.59	0.64	0.59	0.51	0.42	0.51	0.44	0.62	0.73	0.69	0.64	0.69	0.62	0.63	0.60	0.71	0.78	0.77	1.00						
S36	0.61	0.72	0.70	0.65	0.65	0.58	0.69	0.70	0.71	0.65	0.66	0.66	0.79	0.64	0.45	0.05	0.65	0.69	0.69	0.53	0.41	0.54	0.40	0.56	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.65	0.63	0.60	0.58	0.82	0.73	0.70	0.72	1.00					
S37	0.20	0.27	0.14	0.26	0.33	0.39	0.28	0.15	0.23	0.19	0.27	0.18	0.18	0.16	0.14	0.17	0.16	0.14	0.31	0.23	0.16	0.08	0.15	0.23	0.22	0.16	0.24	0.15	0.19	0.19	0.13	0.19	0.15	0.23	0.11	0.24	1.00				
S38	0.36	0.52	0.46	0.47	0.52	0.53	0.49	0.38	0.48	0.44	0.57	0.37	0.49	0.42	0.18	0.22	0.47	0.41	0.53	0.39	0.27	0.18	0.26	0.46	0.47	0.48	0.46	0.37	0.47	0.41	0.39	0.44	0.48	0.53	0.42	0.53	0.57	1.00			
S39	0.03	0.28	0.11	0.21	0.12	0.26	0.15	0.16	0.13	0.12	0.25	0.15	0.15	0.14	0.14	0.17	0.11	0.21	0.19	0.24	0.04	0.04	0.12	0.12	0.14	0.09	0.08	0.11	0.20	0.09	0.15	0.13	0.11	0.14	0.11	0.23	0.53	0.43	1.00		
S40	0.51	0.67	0.58	0.59	0.58	0.58	0.61	0.55	0.59	0.54	0.66	0.50	0.55	0.60	0.36	0.05	0.45	0.51	0.58	0.53	0.42	0.41	0.44	0.50	0.57	0.52	0.59	0.45	0.52	0.56	0.47	0.62	0.61	0.56	0.52	0.66	0.34	0.63	0.27	1.00	

Appendix O shows the final 23 items which were retained following the principal component round of analysis, including the factor loading for each.

3.7 Quantitative data gathering approach and results- main study

For ease of review, the approach taken and the data analysis carried out on the quantitative data gathered as part of the main study have been extracted from this chapter and are outlined in detail in Chapter 4. In Chapter 4 the researcher sets out the steps taken using ANOVA and MANOVA analysis in order to ascertain whether there were significant differences between the two case study organisations, and which sub-dimensions displayed significant differences between the two data sets. An online survey was issued to FLMs in the two organisations to gather data for the main study. The strengths of the survey questionnaire methodology used to confirm that there were significant differences in FLM perceptions in the two organisations were that it allowed for the collection of standardised data from a sizeable population in an economical way and that it provided data which could be analysed using inferential statistics to suggest possible reasons for relationships between variables (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

One of the limitations of the questionnaire survey technique, however, is that the questionnaire layout and order are determined in advance, and it is not possible to change the order or content of items for respondents. In addition, overcoming survey fatigue and avoiding duplication of questions already covered by the existing employee engagement survey were concerns raised by the contacts at the two case study organisations. Furthermore, ensuring a suitable level of response via the online survey, ensuring the quality of the email list, and encouraging responses, were also concerns, as well as ensuring that the sample size was representative of the target population. These limitations were addressed in this phase of the study by ensuring that participation was voluntary, by sending the email from a known senior contact within the organisation (Organisation Offshore), and by offering participants the opportunity to receive a high-level summary of the final report (Organisation Onshore).

The sample used and the procedure followed for the quantitative phase of the main study are described in sections 4.2 and 4.3 of Chapter 4. The researcher discovered from the analysis carried out (and outlined in detail in Chapter 4) that there were in fact significant differences between the two organisations in terms of FLMs perceptions of HR service quality and HR advice. Consequently, the final phase of the study explored these differences in order to understand the factors which lay behind the differences in FLM perceptions.

3.8 Qualitative data gather using interviews at the case study organisations

In the final phase of the main study, the researcher then used a series of one-to-one interviews with FLMs to understand in more depth the factors which were more important to them regarding HR support. This was complemented by interviews with HR professionals at each organisation to also understand their experiences of supporting FLMs. 25 FLMs from Organisation Offshore and 21 FLMs from Organisation Onshore were interviewed to understand their experience of working with the HR department to access the information and guidance they needed to be able to implement HR policies. This sample size was chosen for reasons of accessibility and due to the time constraints. The FLMs were chosen using systematic sampling of every 4th manager who had responded to the quantitative survey. This final phase of the main study, which included interviews with FLMs and HR professionals, therefore used a subjective ontology with the objective of adding depth to the study and explaining the qualitative findings. (Further details of the approach taken to the qualitative data gathering are outlined in Chapter 5 and the qualitative findings are outlined in Chapter 6).

Using accounts of FLMs' experiences of working with the HR department allowed the researcher to determine specific contextual factors which may have influenced the implementation process and which may have been linked to the location of the HR delivery teams in place in each organisation. This approach also allowed the researcher to examine participant narratives of specific instances of HR implementation; the researcher was then able to develop detailed descriptions of how implementation took place in reality. The researcher subsequently used the descriptions shared by FLMs with HR specialists, seeking to test their veracity, to clarify ambiguous aspects, and to fill in the parts of the implementation process taken from the perspective of the HR department. **Figure 10** shows the steps followed by the researcher during this qualitative phase.

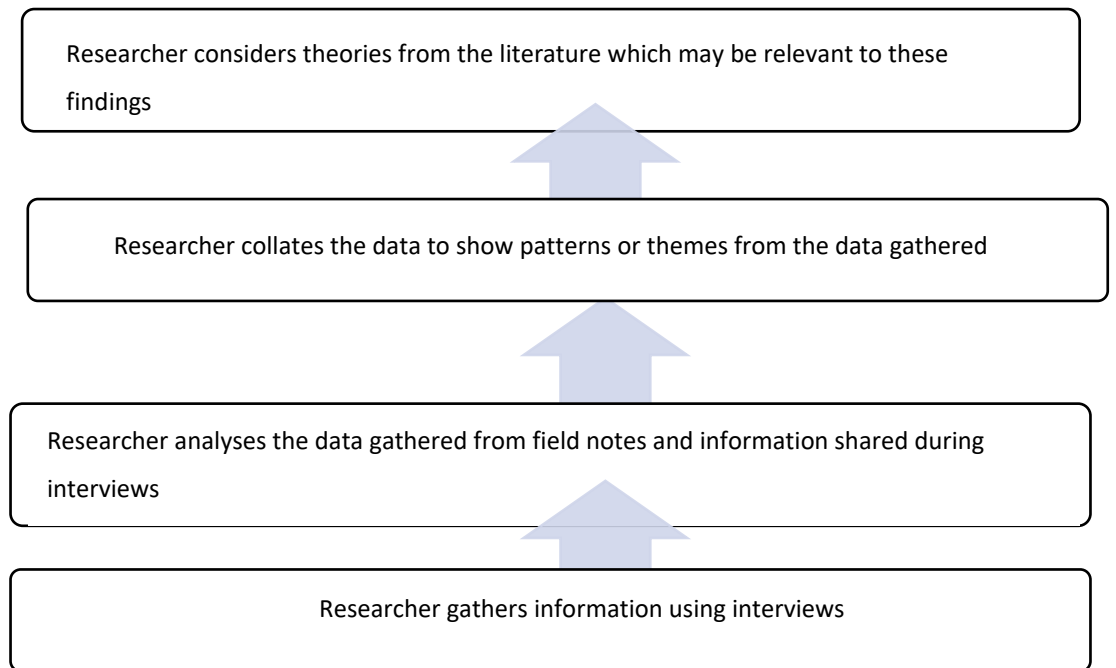


Figure 10 Steps followed using an inductive approach to the second phase of the main study

3.8.1 Sample used for the qualitative phase of the main study (n= 46 FLMs and n=10 HR professionals)

The qualitative phase of the study adopted a non-probability, purposive sampling method (Cresswell, 2014) specifically targeting FLMs who had responded to the initial survey. The strength of the explanatory, sequential, mixed methods research design was that it allowed the researcher to take a sub-set of the FLMs who had completed the original survey and to follow up and explore the overall results in detail with them (Cresswell, 2014). Due to the small size of the intended interview sample (planned to be between 45 and 50 interviews in total), it was considered inappropriate to use a stratified sample based on the data from their previous self-reported surveys to target specific FLMs who had provided extreme results or demographic details, and so this was rejected. A systematic sampling approach was used, with the researcher choosing a start point on the list and selecting every fourth numbered person based on the total number in the sample. Appendix L shows the demographics of the FLMs included in the interview stage of this study. Females comprised 72% of the respondents at Organisation Offshore and the average age range was 45-54 (40%). The FLMs were educated to a high level, with 20% possessing a master's degree qualification and 32% qualified to degree level. All worked full time, apart from one part-time participant. The detailed list of participants is shown in Appendix L.

In this final phase of the study a total of 25 interviews took place with FLMs at Organisation Offshore and 21 with FLMs at Organisation Onshore. The difference in sample size was due to the larger size of the FLM population at Organisation Offshore (c.5000 employees in the UK versus c.1200 employees in the UK). The interviews with FLMs at both case study organisations took place using Microsoft Teams, due to Covid-19 restrictions preventing face-to-

face interviews. For any situations where there were technical issues with Microsoft Teams, a telephone interview was used instead. This was the case for two interviews. Interviews ranged from 22 minutes to 45 minutes, with an average length of 25 minutes. The researcher confirmed at the start of each interview that the interview would be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of the study, with only high-level themes shared with the HR leadership team at the organisation. Each FLM was asked if they were comfortable to have the interview recorded solely for the researcher's use, and all agreed that they were happy to have their interview recorded.

The researcher did not take steps to specifically target an equal number of male and female participants, tenure, or spread of qualifications, due to limited access being provided to the FLMs at the two organisations because of the systematic sampling, and who then participated on a voluntary basis. Demographic data regarding gender, age, level in the organisation, tenure as a FLM, and tenure in the organisation was gathered, however, and analysed to determine whether it was skewed in any respect and could have biased the findings. The researcher was cognizant of the possibility that, as the interviews were voluntary, the FLMs who attended the sessions may have been FLMs who felt more strongly about the HR support.

3.8.2 Procedure followed for the qualitative phase of the main study (n= 46 FLMs and n=10 HR professionals)

This final phase of the pragmatic, sequential, explanatory, mixed method study included the use of open-ended interview questions with FLMs. These questions were designed to be exploratory in nature for gathering information on the experiences and perceptions of the HR support received, and examples of the situations in which FLMs had worked closely with the HR function. The researcher wished to explore in more detail the elements of HR support which were most valued by FLMs (identified in the quantitative phase) and as the quantitative phase had shown significant differences between FLMs' perceptions of HR support in the two case study organisations, the researcher wished to ascertain whether the location of the HR shared service teams was having an influence on FLMs perceptions of HR support. The researcher followed a set of open questions but avoided a prescriptive, very structured interview protocol, as the aim of these interviews was to gain a more in-depth, nuanced understanding of these FLMs' perceptions of the aspects of HR support which they valued. These aspects (identified in the quantitative data analysis) were explored further with the researcher discussing with FLMs their experiences of working with the HRSSC colleagues. Building on the knowledge gained in the quantitative phase of the main study, this qualitative phase of the study explored in depth the key areas of HR support which were most important to FLMs and investigated the influence of the location of the HR teams. The lack of a rigid protocol allowed the researcher to adapt and explore the answers and ensure that the data gathered was rich. This approach was appropriate for explaining phenomena undergoing constant change (Gioia *et al.*, 2013).

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical questions, such as ensuring privacy for each subject and guaranteeing the objectivity of the researcher, were addressed by the researcher, firstly by documenting in full the purpose and methodology to be followed in the research, and secondly by obtaining ethics approval from Southampton University. Southampton University has its own code of ethics and requires a process to be followed (ERGO) that sets out ethical working practices for its researchers. The researcher submitted ethical documents to the institutional review board (the ERGO application has been included in Appendix Q). This ethics application includes a description of the study, Questionnaire A, ethical considerations, a participant information sheet, a risk assessment, and a point of contact in case of complaints. The review board approved the ethical request. Participants were given an overview of the study and informed that all data would be strictly confidential and that anonymity would be assured. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary, and participants were offered the opportunity to withdraw at any time without consequence. Incentives were not offered to participants, as this was not appropriate for this research and would be likely to create a bias in the results. In accordance with the University of Southampton Data Protection Policy and Research Data Management Guidance, the data was stored on a cloud storage drive ('My Documents' and on a secure SharePoint site). The SharePoint group and 'My Documents' files were regularly backed up, and access to the data was restricted to those requiring access to support the DBA, such as supervisors. Access to data via 'My Documents' was restricted to the researcher.

The researcher had no prior knowledge of the experience of the working environment at Organisation Onshore; however, the researcher had worked at Organisation Offshore two years before this study took place and for a short period following the survey data gathering phase, and so had some prior knowledge of the organisation. The fact that the researcher had previously worked at one of the case study organisations gave rise to a risk of bias, and so particular care was taken by the researcher throughout the analysis process to ensure that the data interpretation was not influenced by prior knowledge of the organisation, and by discussing the findings and having them validated both by the supervisory team and with the key contacts at the organisations, ensuring that the findings resonated with them. Acknowledging this potential for bias, the researcher made every effort to ensure objectivity and to maintain an open frame of mind throughout the data analysis phase.

Participant anonymity was protected by adding an identifier to the survey to be able to track responses, and a participant code was used to match the interview data collected with the participants during the interview phase (Appendix L shows the coding of interview participants for the qualitative phase). Permission from the organisation to carry out the research was gained following emails and telephone discussions with the Head of Employee Culture at Organisation Offshore and with the Head of HR Services at Organisation Onshore.

The following key principles were adhered to throughout the study following guidance from the university ethics policy:

- Principle of informed consent for all participants.
- The risk of harm to participants will be minimised.
- All participants (individuals and organisations) will be offered the opportunity to be anonymised.
- Confidential research data will not be disclosed and participants will not be identified unless consent has been obtained (or there is a legal and professional duty to disclose).
- The researcher will act with integrity and show respect for persons (the participants and other members of the firm).
- Where necessary, interview and participant observation data will be stored separately from the identifier references.
- Full compliance with University of Southampton ethics procedures (ERGO).
- Full compliance with University of Southampton data management and protection procedures.
- Approval from participating organisations (where necessary, legal department and HR sign off).

3.10 Chapter summary

This methodology chapter comprises nine sections, with Section 3.1 providing the introduction and research approach. Section 3.2 outlined the research paradigm adopted and the pragmatic, sequential explanatory mixed method research design, underpinned by the literature review (Chapter 2). Section 3.3 discussed the decision to adopt a mixed method approach to allow the initial quantitative stage of the research to be supplemented with a qualitative phase run sequentially, allowing the researcher to better understand and explain the quantitative findings. Sections 3.5 and 3.6 described the focus group phase and the approach taken for the pilot testing phase. Section 3.7 outlined the quantitative data gather approach, which is detailed in Chapter 4. Section 3.8 discussed the qualitative data gather approach. Finally, section 3.9 highlighted the ethical considerations taken into account, and section 3.10 provided a summary of this chapter.

Chapter 4 Quantitative phase of the main study

4.1 Introduction

The refined measurement instrument reduced from an initial 40 items to a 23-item scale was used to gather data regarding FLMs' perceptions of HR support in the two organisations chosen for the main study. The two organisations had significantly different HR delivery structures, one with a HR SSC based offshore and one with a HR SSC based onshore. The researcher carried out analysis of the data to determine the key factors which were important to FLMs and then further data analysis, to confirm that there were, in fact, significant differences between the two organisations studied before going on to explore the reasons why this might be the case.

This chapter sets out the sample used for the quantitative phase of the main study (section 4.2) and the procedure followed (section 4.3). The chapter also reports the analysis which was carried out on the data using the final measurement scale (sections 4.4 and 4.5). The MANOVA and ANOVA results are outlined (section 4.5) and the chapter summary describes how the quantitative data analysis allowed the researcher to confirm that there were in fact significant differences between the two organisations (section 4.6). This led to the qualitative phase of the research allowing the researcher to explore why there were significant differences in FLMs' perceptions of support at the two organisations.

4.2 Sample used for the quantitative phase of the main study (n=262)

Following the pilot testing, the questionnaire was sent to FLMs at Organisation Offshore and Organisation Onshore, with a final set of 182 completed questionnaires received from Organisation Offshore and 80 from Organisation Onshore. In terms of the sample for the main study there was a more equal gender split of participants, with 56.1% male and 43.9% female managers answering the survey. This was broadly in line with the manager populations in both organisations. Data regarding the highest level of education achieved was gathered from the managers who completed the survey, and there was a spread of data across the different education levels. For the main study, males comprised 56% of the respondents. The average level of qualification was degree level and 98.6 % worked full-time. Interestingly, only a very small number of managers who responded to the survey were working on a part-time basis, which may reflect the lower numbers of managers in general who work on a part-time basis. It could also be reflective of the limited time available to managers working on a part-time basis, which might have meant that they were unwilling to invest time in this study. As a result of the lack of data from part-time workers the researcher was unable to test whether the contract type could have had an impact on manager perceptions of the HR support received.

4.3 Procedure to gather quantitative data in the main study

The quantitative phase of the study looked to isolate the relevant factors that would allow the researcher to ascertain whether there were, in fact, significant differences in FLMs' perceptions of the HR support they received in the organisations which had different delivery models (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012). The online questionnaire was shared during the period November-December 2019 using the Qualtrics survey platform. A participant anonymity identifier was included in each survey to allow the researcher to track responses. The 23-item scale was presented using a 1- to 7-point Likert scale, where 1 represented strong disagreement and 7 represented strong agreement.

4.4 Data analysis carried out on the 23-item measurement instrument (n=262)

Two hundred and sixty-two managers across the two organisations completed the online questionnaire, 182 from Organisation Offshore and 80 from Organisation Onshore. Using the code book set up, the responses from the 262 FLMs were added to SPSS. The data were checked using SPSS, firstly using the frequency data. Principal components analysis was run again to check the factors with the sample from the two case study organisations. The output from the analysis was used as the basis for further data gathering. The rotation provided a set of three factors, one relating to HR Service Quality factors when it comes to HR support, one relating to HR advice and tailored coaching to implement HR policies, and one relating to HR tools and systems. Thus, the three-factor model based on the 23 items was accepted for use in subsequent analyses. The three-factor model was then analysed to identify the reliabilities of each factor.

Whilst the pilot sample was helpful in providing data to reduce the total number of items, the researcher noted that finding three factors from the main study sample did not correspond with the initial EFA carried out with the pilot data group. The pilot data had suggested the presence of one key component to which 19 items loaded and which explained 67% of the variance and a second component to which 5 items loaded and which explained 5% of the variance. The researcher concluded that the difference between the findings in the pilot phase versus the main study may have resulted from the fact that the data gathered and analysed in the pilot sample was across multiple industry types and also included FLMs from smaller companies. This may have had an influence on the quality of the initial EFA findings as the HR structure and HR tools and systems in smaller companies is likely to be less developed than those in larger companies. As the main study was focused on the HR delivery model in larger organisations it was decided to rely on the findings from the larger main study sample as the researcher could verify the sample quality. Analysis of the data from the main study produced a set of three factors which could be investigated further.

From the data gathered as part of the main study, the reliability of the first factor, which related to HR service quality factors and contained eight items, was 0.90; the reliability of the second factor, relating to the provision of HR advice tailored support and coaching, had seven items and a CA of 0.90; and the third factor, relating to HR tools and systems, had five items and a reliability of 0.90, allowing the researcher to have confidence in the reliability of the measurement scale.

4.5 MANOVA and ANOVA analysis carried out on the 23-item measurement instrument (n=262)

In order to determine the presence of differences between the two case studies, a MANOVA analysis was carried out to test the following hypothesis :

Hypothesis: Differences in the HR delivery model will result in differences in FLMs' perceptions of HR support.

Table 3 shows that the outcomes of a Boxes Test of Equality of Variance were significant [F = 5.28, $p < 0.05$], suggesting that the groups did differ; table 4 shows that Pillai's test was significant [F = 0.94, $p < 0.05$]; the Wilks' lambda score [F=0.06, $p < 0.05$] also suggests significant differences. Levene's test of equality of variance should be non-significant if there was homogeneity of variance; however, the results shown in Table 5, below, show that in fact there were significant differences between perceptions of HR support across the two organisations. Table 6 shows the tests between subjects and shows that for the three factors there were significant differences between the two organisations.

Table 3 MANOVA analysis, Box's test of Equality of Covariance

Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices

Box's M	32.171
F	5.278
df1	6
df2	153737.397
Sig.	0.000

Tests the null hypothesis that the observed covariance matrices of the dependent variables are equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + CONTR10

Table 4 Results of the multivariate tests

		Multivariate Tests				
Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	0.94	1313.002 ^b	3.000	258.000	0.000
	Wilks' Lambda	0.06	1313.002 ^b	3.000	258.000	0.000
	Hotelling's Trace	15.27	1313.002 ^b	3.000	258.000	0.000

	Roy's Largest Root	15.27	1313.002 ^b	3.000	258.000	0.000
CONTR10	Pillai's Trace	0.14	13.837 ^b	3.000	258.000	0.000
	Wilks' Lambda	0.86	13.837 ^b	3.000	258.000	0.000
	Hotelling's Trace	0.16	13.837 ^b	3.000	258.000	0.000
	Roy's Largest Root	0.16	13.837 ^b	3.000	258.000	0.000

a. Design: Intercept + CONTR10

Table 5 Levene's Test of Equality of Error

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances^a

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Fact1HR Service quality	Based on Mean	18.48	1	260	0.000
	Based on Median	18.31	1	260	0.000
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	18.31	1	252.539	0.000
	Based on trimmed mean	18.66	1	260	0.000
Fact2HR advice	Based on Mean	16.16	1	260	0.000
	Based on Median	16.26	1	260	0.000
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	16.26	1	244.849	0.000
	Based on trimmed mean	16.39	1	260	0.000
Fact3 HR systems and tools	Based on Mean	5.83	1	260	0.016
	Based on Median	5.85	1	260	0.016
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	5.85	1	259.308	0.016
	Based on trimmed mean	5.85	1	260	0.016

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + CONTR10

Table 6 Test of Between-Subjects Effects

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	Fact1HR service quality	41.08 ^a	1	41.083	32.122	0.000
	Fact2HR advice	37.79 ^b	1	37.792	25.213	0.000
	Fact3HR system and tools	4.48 ^c	1	4.477	2.517	0.114
Intercept	Fact1HR service quality	4982.03	1	4982.026	3895.373	0.000
	Fact2 HR advice	4476.75	1	4476.753	2986.665	0.000
	Fact3HR system and tools	3360.39	1	3360.391	1889.165	0.000
CONTR10	Fact1HR service quality	41.08	1	41.083	32.122	0.000
	Fact2HR advice	37.79	1	37.792	25.213	0.000
	Fact3HR systems and tools	4.48	1	4.477	2.517	0.114
Error	Fact1HR service quality	332.53	260	1.279		
	Fact2HR advice	389.72	260	1.499		
	Fact3HR systems and tools	462.48	260	1.779		
Total	Fact1HR service quality	5837.78	262			
	Fact2HR advice	5333.26	262			
	Fact3HR system and tools	4315.88	262			
Corrected Total	Fact1HR service quality	373.61	261			
	Fact2HR advice	427.51	261			
	Fact3 HR system and tools	466.96	261			

a. R Squared = .110 (Adjusted R Squared = .107)

b. R Squared = .088 (Adjusted R Squared = .085)

c. R Squared = .010 (Adjusted R Squared = .006)

The initial data analysis had shown that there were three key factors which were important to FLMs. The MANOVA analysis then subsequently revealed that there were in fact significant differences noted between the two organisations in FLMs' perceptions of HR support and so an ANOVA analysis was carried out.

The ANOVA analysis revealed that factor 1, which contained items relating to HR Service quality, showed significant differences between the two groups (sig 0.00 < 0.05), and also that factor 2, which contained items relating to HR service advice, showed significant differences

between the two groups studied (sig 0.00 <0.05). However, factor 3, which related to HR tools, did not show significant differences (sig 0.11>0.05). Despite the findings regarding factor 2, the fact that two of the factors demonstrated significant differences between the two organisations meant that the researcher could take the study into the next phase and gather qualitative data to help to understand the influence of the delivery model on FLMs' perceptions of HR support in these two organisations.

Table 7 ANOVA results for Factor 1 HR Service quality

ANOVA

Fact1HR service quality

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	41.08	1	41.083	32.122	0.000
Within Groups	332.53	260	1.279		
Total	373.61	261			

Table 8 ANOVA results for Factor 1 HR Advice

ANOVA

Fact2HR advice

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	37.79	1	37.792	25.213	0.000
Within Groups	389.72	260	1.499		
Total	427.51	261			

Table 9 ANOVA results for Factor 3 HR systems and tools

ANOVA

Fact3TOOLS

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.48	1	4.477	2.517	0.114
Within Groups	462.48	260	1.779		
Total	466.96	261			

Table 10 Item statistics Factor 1: HR Service Quality

Reliability Statistics			
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items	
0.90	0.90	8	
Item Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
The Human Resources department in my organisation takes ownership to ensure that any HR issues I raise are resolved.	4.92	1.49	262
The Human services team at my organisation is easily accessible.	4.58	1.61	262
The HR services department is always willing to help me.	4.86	1.45	262
The Human Resources department understands the specific needs of line management.	4.61	1.52	262
The Human Resources department has the necessary knowledge to answer my questions	4.87	1.44	262
I only have to explain my question to the Human Resources department once and they make sure that it is resolved.	4.04	1.64	262
The Human Resources team members in my organisation share information effectively between them to resolve issues.	4.29	1.48	262
It is easy to access advice from the Human Resources department in my organisation.	4.35	1.78	262

Table 11 Item statistics Factor 2: HR Advice

Reliability Statistics			
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items	
0.90	0.90	7	
Item Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
The Human Resources department in my organisation provides coaching to support me in having difficult conversations with my team members.	4.48	1.63	262
The Human Resources department in my organisation provides guidance on how to effectively implement an HR policy when it comes to my team.	4.34	1.53	262
The employees working in the Human Resources department tell me exactly when their services will be performed.	3.82	1.57	262
I am clear on the services provided by the Human Resources department in my organisation.	4.19	1.70	262
The HR Business Partner for my area is easily accessible.	5.11	1.82	262
The Human Resources function balances the interests of the organisation with the individual needs of managers and employees.	4.37	1.48	262
The Human Resources department in my organisation tailors the support they provide to meet the needs of the line manager.	3.92	1.63	262

Table 12 Item statistics Factor 3: HR Systems and Tools

Reliability Statistics			
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items	
0.90	0.90	5	
Item Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
all in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are adjusted to the specific needs I have as a leader when it comes to getting the best out of my employees.	4.00	1.57	262
All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are flexible enough to be adapted to the individual needs of my employees	3.70	1.61	262
All in all, the HR tools and systems in my organisation help me perform my leadership duties in a successful way.	4.12	1.58	262
The quality of the content and the way my organisation structures the training activities on how to use our HR tools and HR systems are satisfactory.	3.63	1.55	262
The communication regarding the training on how to use our HR tools and HR systems has been clear and easy to understand.	3.70	1.64	262

Table 13 ANOVA analysis descriptives for Factor 1: HR Service quality

Descriptives

Fact1HR service quality								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Org Offshore	182	4.30	1.248	0.09	4.12	4.49	1.00	7.00
Org Onshore	80	5.16	0.80	0.09	4.99	5.34	2.75	6.38
Total	262	4.57	1.20	0.07	4.42	4.71	1.00	7.00

Table 14 ANOVA analysis descriptives for Factor 2: HR Advice

Descriptives

Fact2HR advice								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Org Offshore	182	4.0754	1.34	0.10	3.88	4.27	1.00	7.00
Org Onshore	80	4.9000	0.89	0.10	4.70	5.10	2.14	6.29
Total	262	4.3272	1.28	0.08	4.17	4.48	1.00	7.00

Table 15 ANOVA analysis descriptives for Factor 3: HR Systems and Tools

Descriptives

Fact3HR systems and tools								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Org Offshore	182	3.75	1.40	0.10	3.54	3.96	1.00	7.00
Org Onshore	80	4.03	1.17	0.13	3.77	4.30	1.00	6.00
Total	262	3.83	1.34	0.083	3.67	3.10	1.00	7.00

4.6 Chapter summary

This quantitative chapter addressed the quantitative data gathered to answer the Research

Questions I and II:

Research Question I *Which elements of HR support do FLMs value most when implementing HR practices?*

Research Question II: *To what extent does the location of the HR SSC influence FLMs' perceptions of the elements of HR support which they value most?*

Section 4.2 described the sample used in the main study to measure the aspects of HR support which FLMs value most when they implement HR practices. Section 4.3 provided a summary of the approach taken to gathering data in the quantitative phase of the main study. Sections 4.4 and 4.5 described the data analysis carried out using MANOVA and ANOVA to ascertain if there were significant differences between the two case study organisations in terms of FLMs' perceptions of HR support. The purpose of this stage was to build on to initial data analysis which identified the key elements of HR support which were important to FLMs. The quantitative data analysis revealed three key factors which were important to FLMs: HR advice and coaching, HR service quality and HR systems and tools. In order to ascertain whether there were in fact significant differences in the perceptions of HR support between the FLMs in the two organisations with HRSSC teams based in different locations the researcher carried out Manova analysis which confirmed that FLMs view of the HR support they received were significantly different when comparing the two organisations. This led to the researcher to develop the second research question which explored why there were significant differences between FLMs perceptions in the two organisations and more specifically whether the location of the HRSSC team could be responsible for the differences in FLM perceptions. The researcher explored this interesting difference in perception between the two organisations by carrying out the qualitative analysis outlined in chapter 5.

The next chapter (Chapter 5) evidences the treatment of the qualitative data which was gathered as part of the main study to build on and help to explain the quantitative findings. The results of the qualitative analysis are then presented in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5 Treatment of the Qualitative Data

5.1 Introduction

The findings from the quantitative phase of the main study which were used to ascertain whether there were significant differences between FLMs' perceptions of support in the two case study organisations can be found in Chapter 4. This chapter describes how the qualitative data in the main study was collected and analysed. The qualitative phase of the main study was used to explore in more depth the elements which FLMs had confirmed in the survey questionnaire that they valued. Using the sample set out in Chapter 3, section 5.2 of this chapter describes the procedure followed to gather qualitative data, the interview questions used by the researcher, and the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Section 5.3 describes the preparation of the qualitative data and section 5.4 outlines the approach taken to analyse the data. Section 5.5 summarises the information shared in this chapter.

5.2 Procedure followed to gather the qualitative data

The quantitative data analysis revealed significant differences between the two organisations in the areas of perceived HR Service quality and HR advice, whereas the area of HR systems and tools did not reveal significant differences. The quantitative data highlighted that FLMs at Organisation Offshore rated HR Service quality and HR advice higher than the FLMs at Organisation Onshore. The second phase of this research was therefore focused on exploring why the FLM responses showed significant differences, and whether the HR delivery model in place in each organisation and specifically the location of the HR teams was impacting FLMs' perceptions of the effectiveness of the HR support they received.

The final phase of the study adopted a subjective ontology, a non-realist epistemology, and used an inductive theory testing approach to gather rich data to explore and explain the quantitative findings and to understand the outputs of the data analysis from phase 1. In this phase, the use of an open-ended set of questions allowed the researcher not only to gather information relating to the two key factors which were found to show significant differences between the two organisations, but also to understand what influence these factors were having on FLMs' behaviours at the two case study organisations. This qualitative phase of the research study comprised a total of 46 interviews with FLMs and 10 interviews with HR professionals and was focused on exploring the following research questions.

Research Question I: *Which elements of HR support do FLMs value most when implementing HR practices?*

Research Question II: *To what extent does the location of the HR SSC influence FLMs' perceptions of the elements of HR support which they value most?*

In addition, the researcher sought to understand what influence the HR support they received might have on their behaviour with colleagues and team members, and in doing so address the following question.

Research Question III: *How does the HR support received by FLMs influence their implementation of HR practices?*

5.2.1 Methods used to gather the qualitative data

One-to-one interviews with FLMs were conducted either by telephone or via Microsoft Teams, as this phase of the data collection exercise took place during the period of Covid-19 restrictions from May 2020 to September 2020, which meant that face to face interviews were not possible. The researcher outlined to each participant at the start of the call the purpose of the research study and confirmed two aspects with them-that any responses they shared would be anonymised, and that only summary feedback regarding the key themes would be shared by the HR leadership team at the organisation. Participants were asked if they were comfortable having the interview recorded for the researcher's use only, and all provided their consent. Following guidance from Yin (2014), the researcher documented the field notes; and the electronic transcripts as well as these field notes were stored on a password-protected computer and a secure Sharepoint site to ensure confidentiality and compliance with the institutional code of ethics. The interview transcripts were only accessed by the researcher. Participants were chosen from among FLMs who had participated in the original survey as part of the quantitative phase of this study using a systematic approach to select every second completed survey. Interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 45 minutes and lasted an average of 25 minutes. In addition, 10 interviews took place with HR professionals across different levels of the business: Five from each organisation.

The FLMs were asked about their experiences of working with the HR function in executing HR processes, interpreting HR policies, and explaining these to their team members. The objective of the interviews carried out during the qualitative data gathering phase with HR professionals was to gain an understanding of HR professionals' views on how well the HR function was supporting FLMs and where they perceived the challenges to be, and to provide an alternative lens through which to consider how HR support was being delivered to FLMs at their organisation. The approach taken by the researcher was to use a set of open questions to gather rich data regarding the FLMs' experiences of HR support.

5.2.2 Interview questions used

The interviews with FLMs were deliberately kept broad in content to ensure that FLMs were encouraged to speak about their experiences and were not guided to focus on specific characteristics. Guided by the findings from the literature review, the questions explored the FLMs' experience of working with the HR department and did not focus explicitly on the delivery

model; instead, open questions were used, which encouraged FLMs to provide specific examples which would reveal the elements of the HR support that were important to them and, conversely, the areas of HR support which were not helpful or that caused them frustration, stress or anxiety.

Question 1: Can you tell me about your experiences of HR support at (organisation name), either positive or negative, which you have had to date?

The inclusion of this question at the start of the interview prompted the FLMs to consider their recent experiences of the support they had received from the HR department. The question was open-ended and without prompts to promote the gathering of rich data concerning the different situations when FLMs worked with the HR department.

Question 2: Can you give me an example of this? What happened exactly?

This question was posed to ensure that additional factors influencing HR implementation not evidenced in the literature were considered. The factors which FLMs shared during this part of the interview allowed the researcher to compare FLMs' expectations of HR skills with those identified in the literature review. The question also allowed the researcher the opportunity to consider factors such as the availability of support and the importance of the location of the HR team.

Question 3: Can you tell me more about this experience?

This question continued the approach of questions 1 and 2 in allowing the researcher to understand specific situations when the FLMs had worked with the HR department, and to learn which elements FLMs judged to be important in such interactions. The quantitative results suggested that advice from HR and the quality of HR service were the factors where these two organisations differed. Additional clarifications and explanations were therefore required, and this question was included in the interviews.

Question 4: What was the implication of this for you?

The literature review suggested that, more and more frequently, FLMs needed to access HR information via alternative sources, such as through colleagues or their immediate line manager. This question examined the FLMs' real-life experiences of accessing HR information from other sources, allowing the researcher to compare their experiences with the HR implementation literature, considering any other impacts that HR support may have had on the FLMs' behaviour.

Question 5: Who else in the organisation did you feel that you could approach for advice on HR issues?

This question tested the assumption that if FLMs did not receive suitable support from the HR function they would instead turn to colleagues.

Question 6: How was your own line manager able to help you on HR topics?

This question tested the assumption that if FLMs did not receive suitable support from the HR department they would instead turn to their own line manager; if they did not have colleagues, they could ask their line manager.

Question 7: How did that affect how you carry out your job?

This question examined the FLMs' views on whether the support they received impacted their motivation to carry out their management role. This allowed the researcher to compare the responses with the HR implementation literature and assess what impact it had on their behaviour.

Question 8: How did that affect how you feel about your job?

The literature review suggested that the support that FLMs receive from the HR department impacts their motivation to carry out their management role (Bos-Nehles and Meijerink, 2018), allowing the researcher to compare the answers with the HR implementation literature.

Question 9: How did that have an impact on how you feel about the organisation?

This question examined the FLMs' views on whether the support they received influenced how they felt about their organisation, so that the researcher could compare the responses with the findings from the HR implementation literature, such as Chow (2012), who suggests that the successful implementation of HR policies leads to better performance.

Question 10: How aware do you think that the employees in your team are of the support you receive from HR?

The literature review did not reveal any studies which examine whether FLMs' support from HR influences how they behave with their employees. This question examined the FLMs' views on whether the managers felt that the support they received impacted their behaviour with direct reports. This allowed the researcher to compare their perceptions with the HR implementation literature.

5.2.3 Steps followed to ensure the trustworthiness of the coding of data

The trustworthiness of the coding and findings during the qualitative phase of the study was assured by following the guidance from Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), who suggest that the following elements need to be followed in the research process:

- A clear conceptual framework and method must be applied and must follow logical principles, which for this study are outlined in the methodology considerations (Chapter 3)
- The model used must be grounded in the subjective meaning that the action has for each 'actor', and that the use of their own words to convey their point of view strengthens the validity of the research (Patton, 2002). In the case of this study, FLMs were asked to share in their own words their perceptions of HR service quality, prompted by the researcher using the open questions shared in section 5.2.2 of this chapter

- There must be consistency between the researcher's constructs and those found in common-sense experience. The model must be recognisable and understood by the 'actors' within everyday life. In this study, member checking was later used to confirm that the terms resonated with senior leaders across the organisations.

The procedure documented in this chapter and followed by the researcher demonstrates that the approach taken by the researcher ensured that the findings were trustworthy.

5.3 Preparation of the qualitative data

Data preparation for the focus group interviews was primarily based on collating information from the literature and on a set of key themes to be explored in the focus group discussions. Thematic analysis was then used to review the data collected (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). The interviews were recorded using Microsoft Teams, which allowed the researcher to record video footage as well as audio files, and interview transcripts were loaded into NVivo to facilitate thematic analysis. The use of video calls was adopted as the period of qualitative data gathering coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic and it was accepted business practice during this period to interact via video calls rather than audio calls. The video footage was a useful tool to provide insights into the engagement of the participants. It permitted the researcher to supplement the audio files by also viewing the participants body language as they answered the interview questions. However, the video footage was used in this study as a secondary input to the qualitative analysis and the audio files were used as the primary data source for the thematic analysis. Using the audio files the researcher followed a thematic analysis approach as outlined in section 5.4. The supervisory team carried out a review of the key themes, and coding was used to validate and provide additional integrity to the findings.

5.4 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen by the researcher as the most appropriate method for this phase of the study. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying and analysing patterns of meaning in a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006), with the results highlighting the most salient constellations of meanings present in the data set (Joffe, 2012). Thematic analysis illustrates which themes are important in the description of the phenomenon under study (Daly *et al.*, 1997). Rubin and Rubin (2011) describe themes as statements which summarise what is going on, explain what is happening, or suggest why something is done the way it is (Saldana, 2016, p.199).

5.4.1 Thematic analysis steps followed

The following section describes the phases of thematic analysis which follow the approach recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), including familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes and producing the report. As recommended by Joffe (2012), whilst the researcher may have commenced data collection with some preconceived categories in mind, derived from theories

and the literature review, the researcher remained open to new concepts that emerged through the inductive process of analysing the data at this stage of the study. The stages followed in the data analysis process are outlined below, but the process also involved an iterative, recursive approach, moving back and forth through the phases as required (Braun and Clarke, 2006), rather than following these steps in a strictly linear way.

5.4.1.1 *Stage 1: Familiarisation and reviewing the data gathered*

Following each interview, the researcher documented an initial set of 'field -notes' to capture the researcher's understanding of the key points. The next activity undertaken as part of documents. To make the most efficient use of time, and to focus most effort on the analysis of the interviews, an external provider completed the initial transcription of each interview; the researcher then listened to each audio file and checked it against the transcription document for accuracy. The researcher listened for any key themes which emerged and made notes on them – themes such as communication and accuracy, which were clearly important to the FLMs interviewed. The researcher noted ideas which recurred throughout the interviews with a view to using these later in the coding phase. Each interview transcript was then uploaded to the NVivo 11 software to facilitate analysis.

5.4.1.2 *Stage 2: Generation of the codes and coding of the data*

The data from the interviews was coded using a thematic analysis approach, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher started by reading the transcripts carefully to get a sense of the whole and then picking a transcript and asking what it was about (Tesch, 2013), reducing the information in each interview transcript through the generation of initial codes. In this step, an outline description of each new code was created to ensure consistency when identifying the same code across the 46 transcripts. The coding was done by generating codes from the first transcript and building on them when coding the subsequent transcripts. A codebook was prepared using NVIVO software to document the coding carried out. In the interests of transparency, the researcher has also included in Appendix P examples of the data which was gathered during this qualitative phase of the research and how it was coded.

In the final stage of the analysis, differences between the two case study organisations were examined to identify any patterns or factors which might explain differences between FLMs' perceptions of HR support in both organisations (Yin, 2003). The trustworthiness of the data was maximised by recording each interview, taking, and transcribing the researcher's notes during the interviews, and discussing the findings with key contacts at both organisations after the interview phase had concluded. No significant issues were raised during the discussions when sharing the initial findings with either organisation.

An initial list of codes was identified across the gathered interview data, which was used to explore the reasons for the differences in the quantitative results set out in Chapter 3. Coding

was data-driven at this stage rather than theory-driven. As per the guidance by Braun and Clarke (2006), the codes were reviewed by the researcher, and visual colour-coded mapping was carried out to analyse patterns and determine how the codes fitted together. The final set of codes extracted was then reviewed and re-categorised to form the key themes, which were based on analysis of the frequency of the occurrence of these themes in the transcripts, as well as on the researcher's interpretation of the key messages in each interview. Frequency of occurrence was just one aspect which was considered at this stage, in line with Joffe (2012, p219), who suggests the following:

The aspiration of TA is to reflect a balanced view of the data, and its meaning within a particular context of thoughts, rather than attaching too much importance to the frequency of codes abstracted from their context.

An iterative process took place with each review of the transcripts, and continued familiarisation with the data facilitated the generation and refinement of codes. The initial list was grouped into key high-level themes, which are reflected in the thematic maps summarised at the end of this chapter.

5.4.1.3 Stage 3: Review of key themes and naming of the key themes

As part of the next phase of analysis, the researcher reviewed the key themes again, following the recommendation by Braun and Clarke (2006) that each theme should have internal homogeneity – i.e., the data inside the themes should be related – and external heterogeneity – i.e., the themes themselves should be distinct from each other. The data which had been categorised under each theme was reviewed by the researcher for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. The amended set of key themes was then shared with the supervisory team to validate the themes and sub-themes proposed.

The next stage of the thematic analysis required each of the themes to be defined and named. Each theme was initially linked to a specific research question (RQ) and then each theme was examined.

Theme 1: FLMs' expectations of HR Communication linked to Research Question I: Which elements of HR support do FLMs value most when implementing HR practices?

This theme included the many facets of communication between FLMs and the HR function, including how FLMs communicated with HR, the content of the communication and messages from the HR function, the difference between the internal groups involved in communication from the HR function, and the style of communication from HR. Communication was a topic which was covered spontaneously by the FLMs interviewed by the researcher and was then explored explicitly and in depth with FLMs as the interviews went on. FLMs spoke about communication in

terms of the quality of support from the HR function – including HR attending meetings with their business area team – their own ability to find information online, their ability to talk through issues, and the formal and informal methods of communication used to access HR information. The finding that communication may be a key factor influencing FLMs' expectations and perceptions of HR support is not an area which has been explicitly addressed in many implementation studies, though it is implied in the literature relating to the creation of a '*strong HR system*' (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004) and also in the idea of the FLM as interpretive filter and in the concept of intended versus implemented HR practices (Niishi and Wright, 2006). The theme of communication helps close the gap in the implementation literature to help understand those elements of communication which are important for effective implementation.

Theme 2: The HR team's skills and knowledge linked to Research Question I: Which elements of HR support do FLMs value most when implementing HR practices?

This theme included an extensive list of skills, attributes, and competencies which FLMs expect of the HR function, including responsiveness, expert knowledge, business knowledge, and empathy. The theme helps to address the gap in the current implementation literature regarding the skills, attributes, and competencies that are valued by FLMs and which influence the successful implementation of HR practices. In some cases, FLMs' expectations were not shared explicitly with the HR department, but nevertheless they affected their perceptions of the HR support received. In other cases, FLMs' expectations were shared with the HR department, but the HR department may not have been able to meet these expectations, for reasons which we will explore further in Chapter 6.

Theme 3: The influence of HR support on FLMs' attitudes linked to Research Question III: How does the HR support received by FLMs influence managers' behaviours?

This theme reflected the feedback shared by FLMs regarding the impact of HR support on, e.g., FLMs' wellbeing/stress levels, and encompasses the frustration FLMs express when HR support is not available or of the right quality. This theme also contributes to the implementation literature regarding e.g., the influence of HR support on FLM motivation.

Theme 4: The influence of HR support on others in the organisation linked to Research Question III: How does the HR support received by FLMs influence managers' behaviours?

This theme explored the effect of HR support on FLMs; behaviours included e.g., seeking alternative sources of advice if they are not satisfied with the service they receive. This is an area of focus in the practitioner literature around the use of organisational networks and network learning rather than the formal communication of information; even so, it has received limited attention in the academic literature, and this theme addresses this gap.

Table 16 Index of Proof Quotes for 1st Order Concepts

High level theme (2 nd order concept)	1 st order concept	Example Quotes
1) HR Communication	Clarity	<i>Well, with the offshore support there are multiple people to respond and it is not always clear. The terminology is not always that clear regarding what you asked about: if it is a simple process, they are process led and very good but if it is something a bit more personal and unique, go to the local contact</i>
	Salient/personalised or tailored information	<i>There is an element of mistrust; you don't know if the information that you're getting back is correct for you if that makes sense. I suppose because everybody is offshore or you just can't get hold of somebody to actually talk to, you question, I suppose, more the information that you're given</i>
	Frequency of information	<i>The updates are very far and few between. There isn't much information coming through (add participant code here).</i>
	Ease of access to information	<i>I've found it a bit painful at times. As I say, I've not had to use it very often, so it's okay, but whenever I do have to use it and raise a query, it can be a bit frustrating at times</i>
2) HR team's skills and knowledge	HR team's technical skills	<i>I've been with HR having conversations with team members to discuss performance improvement and sickness absence. You know, very personal, sensitive subjects where you need to have somebody on site to protect both you and the employee and make sure that both parties are getting the same information, and the right information. Those sorts of sensitive subjects are the ones that I think HR need to support and help with, and obviously they're the ones that have done all the study about employment law and tribunals and all that sort of stuff</i>
	HR team's personal skills	<i>It felt like the HR person didn't care, and it could have been made more human, giving personal support on questions asked – for example, as it became personal for those going through it and due to the way it was handled it became difficult to work with colleagues due to the lack of support from HR</i>
	HR team's tacit or corporate knowledge	<i>Corporate memory can be quite short. Having the continuity of an HR BP, which is not always possible, I recognise that it helps to understand the history sometimes of situations. Conversely, not understanding the history can also be an advantage</i>

High level theme (2 nd order concept)	1 st order concept	Example Quotes
3) Impact on FLMs' attitudes	Confidence	<i>Yes (if I receive the right level of HR support) I am definitely happier and more confident and secure that I am doing the right thing</i>
	Wellbeing	<i>At the moment it feels very lonely, I don't have that person who can advise me</i>
	Perceptions of organisational support	<i>I think the HR at (my organisation) is a credit to the business rather than anything else – I have built a relationship and I feel supported by the organisation</i>
	Motivation	<i>No, I don't think it does (affect my motivation), the motivation comes from myself and wanting to help my team to achieve</i>
4) Impact of FLM HR support received on others	FLMs' direct reports	<i>We used to be a team of five ... (the delays in hiring replacements into the team), it's not just affecting me. It's affecting other people in the wider team</i>
	Impact on colleagues	<i>Well, you just have to get somebody else, a colleague, a helpful colleague who's not an HR person who will say to you, ah yes, I've done this. There's a box here that you really must tick or there's a field that you have to fill in</i>
	Impact on FLM's own line manager	<i>I have my line manager and we try to support each other as best we can but it's not the same</i>

5.4.1.4 Stage 4: Producing the report

The final phase of thematic analysis was to document phases in a report. The documentation was produced to provide a clear audit trail for the research and to document the final data structure based on the guidance and notation by Gioia *et al.*,(2013, p.21). The thematic maps are shown at the end of this chapter, and Chapter 6 takes this thematic analysis and explains in more detail the findings under each theme.

The following techniques were employed in this phase of the study to ensure the validity of the data collected. The researcher documented her role, the role of the participants and how they were selected, and the context of the data collection. A report on the initial findings was shared with the key senior HR stakeholder at both Organisation Offshore and Organisation Onshore using a 'member checking' approach to validate the data gathered and to confirm that the themes identified 'resonated' with a key stakeholder at each organisation (Cresswell, 2014, p.201). The data analysis strategies used were reported in detail to provide a clear and accurate picture of the methods used. All phases of the study were reviewed by the supervisory team, whose members were experienced in qualitative research methods and could provide an objective point of view and critical review of the approach taken.

The trustworthiness of the qualitative data was checked by following the guidance from Yin (2014), documenting the procedure followed and following the same steps in the analysis of data with participants at both case study organisations. As per the guidance from Gibbs (2007), the transcripts were checked to make sure that they did not contain obvious mistakes; the codes were checked continually to make sure that there was no drift in the definition of codes; the coding was also checked by the supervisory team to ensure that there was agreement in the coding and the terms used. The researcher ensured that robust procedures were followed in analysing the data so that these could be used in future studies to gain an understanding of the generalisability of the approach and key findings (Yin, 2009). Figures 11, 12 and 13 present the final data structure based on guidance from Gioia *et al.*,(2013, p.21). Further thematic maps have been included in chapter 6.

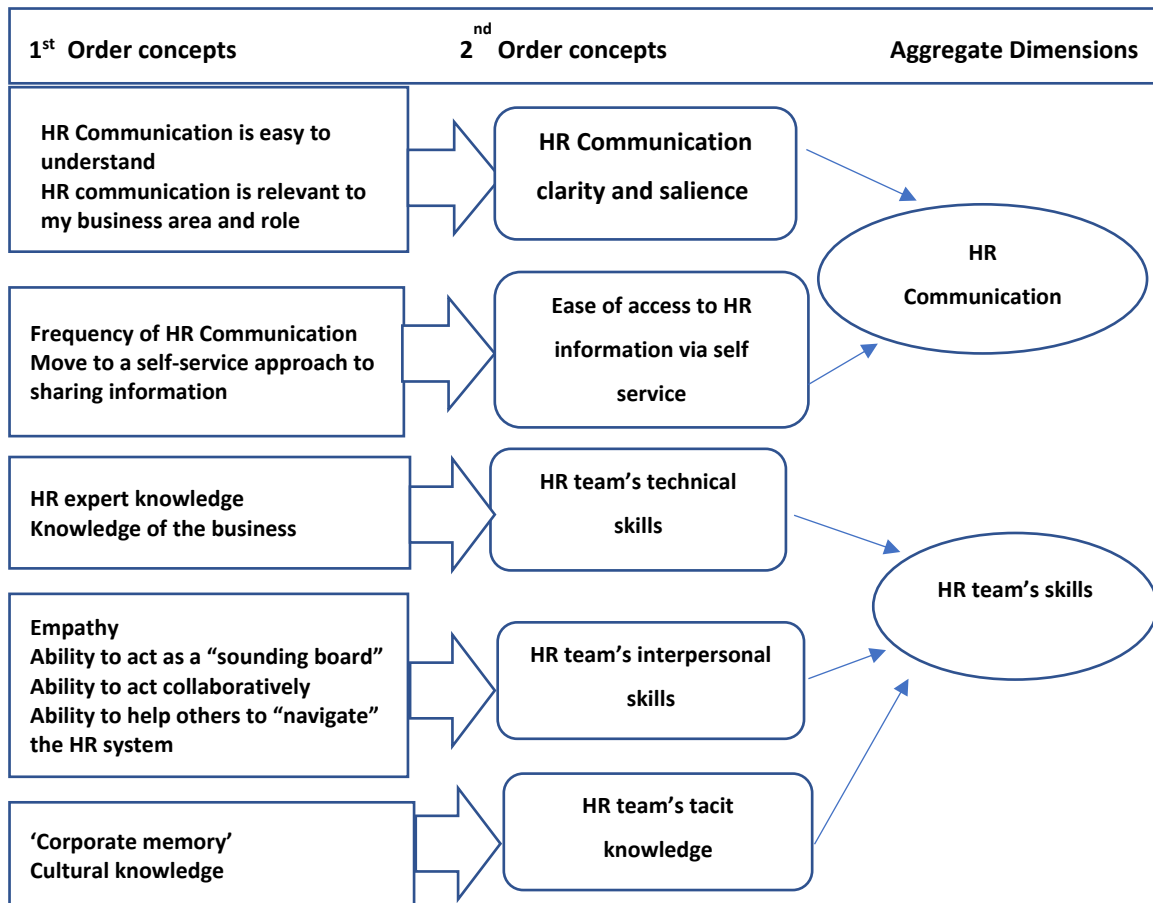


Figure 11 Data structure HR skills and HR Communication including thematic maps showing aggregated dimensions (notation from Gioia et al., 2013, p.21)

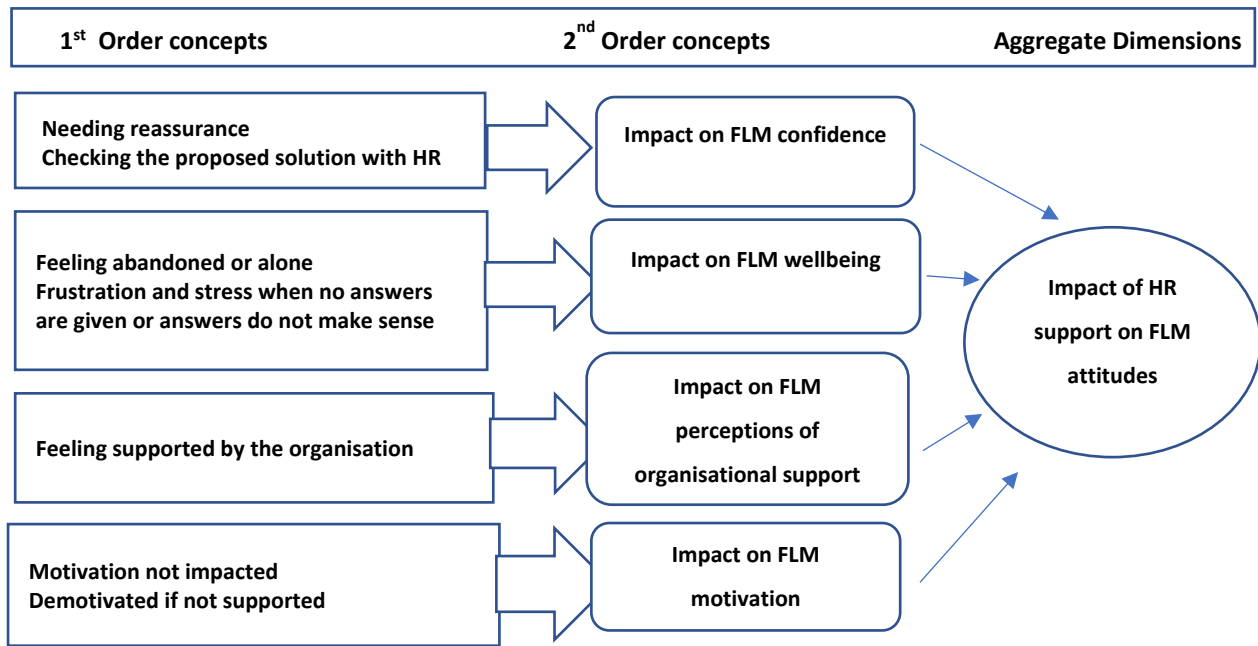


Figure 12 Data structure, impact of HR support on FLM attitudes including thematic maps showing aggregated dimensions (notation from Gioia et al., 2013, p.21)

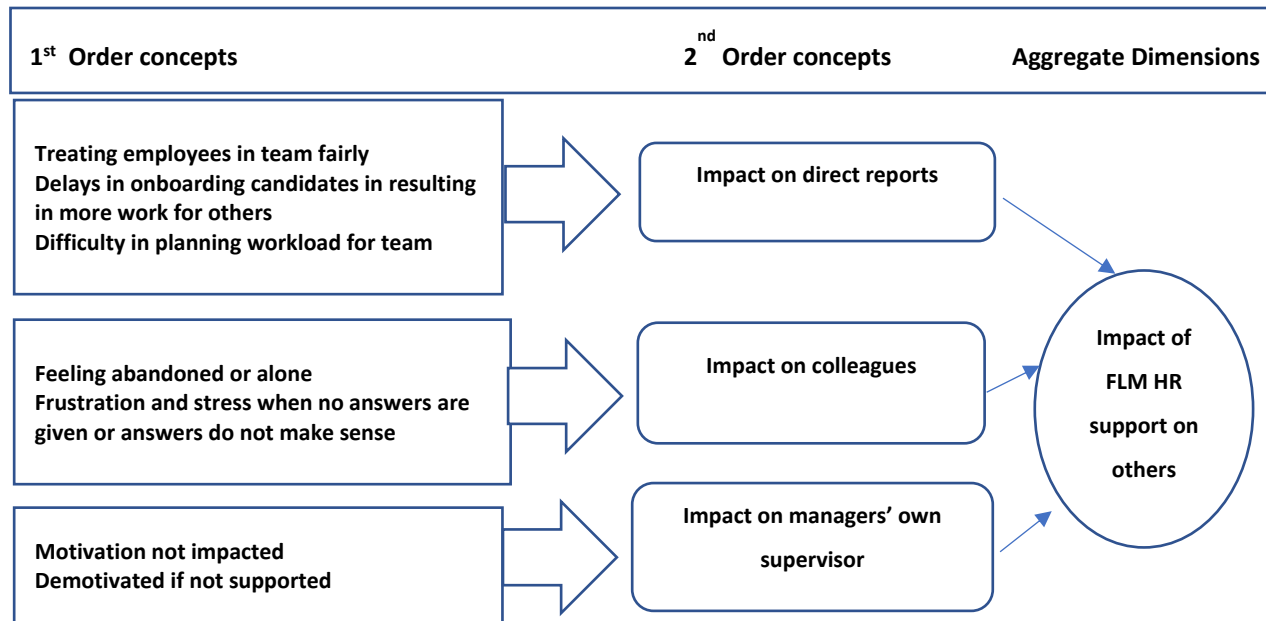


Figure 13 Data structure, impact of HR support on others including thematic maps showing aggregated dimensions (notation from Gioia et al., 2013, p.21)

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the treatment of qualitative data as part of an explanatory mixed method design used to test the validity of the findings and to help interpret the quantitative results (Chapter 4). Analysis of the qualitative data at each phase of the thematic analysis

identified one-hundred and four codes leading to four key themes – summarised in the thematic maps. The next chapter (Chapter 6) will focus on how the key elements highlighted in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), the Quantitative Results chapter (Chapter 4) and the Treatment of Qualitative Data chapter (Chapter 5) combine to allow the researcher to present the findings and contributions of this research.

Chapter 6 Findings and analysis

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 the researcher presented the quantitative data gathered via the manager survey at the two organisations in response to Research Question I. The quantitative findings pointed to significant differences in the perceptions of FLMs regarding the HR service quality and HR advice provided at each of the two organisations. Following on from this, in the qualitative phase of this study, by using narrative accounts from managers, the researcher examined what could account for the differences between managers' perceptions and tested the hypothesis that the HR SSC delivery model could be responsible for this disconnect. Section 6.3 and 6.4 outline the key findings from this study regarding the elements of HR support which FLMs value most and considers how the HR SSC delivery model influences FLMs' perceptions of HR support including the effect of the HR SSC delivery model on the skills and knowledge required of the HR teams. Section 6.5 outlines the effect of the HR support that FLMs receive on their attitudes when implementing HR practices and discusses the findings regarding the ways in which issues with the support provided by the HR SSC impact FLMs and the colleagues around them.

The study findings are organised into four dimensions, with each dimension including a set of themes which are summarised and presented along with excerpts from the interviews to illustrate the findings. The most significant quotes from the interviews are presented relating to each of the key themes, and further examples of relevant quotes for each theme can be found in Appendix P. The participant characteristics for the FLMs included in the qualitative phase can be found in Appendix L.

6.2 Thematic maps by dimension

6.3 Dimension 1: HR Communication

The findings from dimensions one and two shed light on the specific elements of HR support which FLMs value most; but they also provide evidence to allow us to answer Research Question II, relating to the location of the HR SSC delivery model on how FLMs implement HR practices.

6.3.1 Dimension 1: HR Communication and associated themes: An aspect of HR support which is important to FLMs

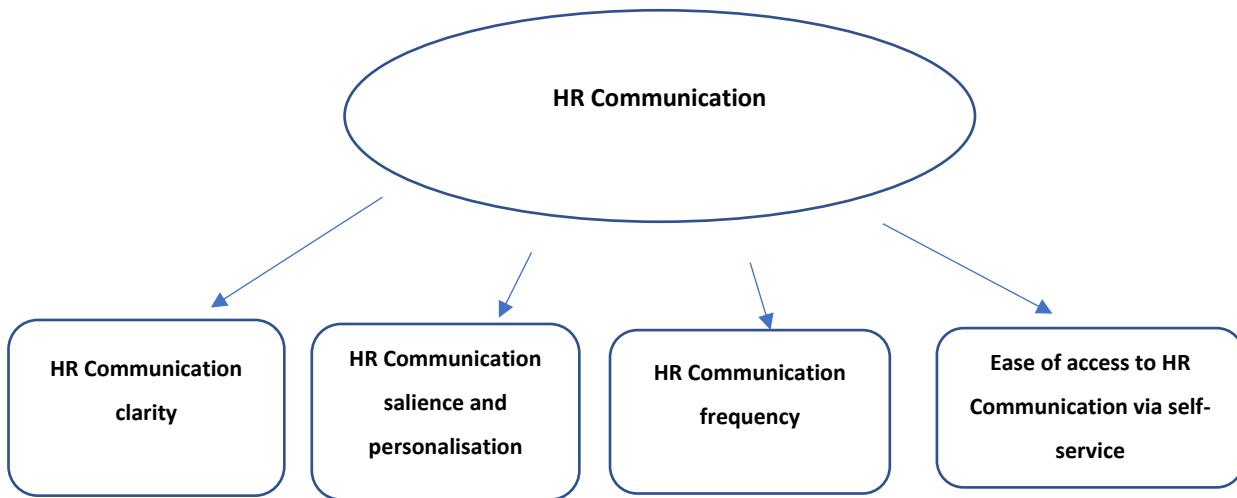


Figure 14 HR Communication dimension and associated themes

A key finding which emerged early in the interview phase of this study was that the quality of communication appeared to play a crucial role in influencing FLMs' satisfaction with the HR service and was affected by the HR SSC delivery structure. Communication was mentioned over one hundred and forty times in the interviews and was referred to in discussions, without prompting, with the FLMs interviewed from both organisations. Communication was also a key theme mentioned by HR professionals at both organisations. Whilst the importance of communication is referenced in the HR implementation literature, no studies to date – to this researcher's knowledge – have examined the communication process or whether the mode of HR delivery influences communications from the HR department or the implementation of HR practices by FLMs. Further analysis of the data relating to communication was therefore undertaken by the researcher to gain a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of why communication seemed to be so important to FLMs' perceptions of HR support at both organisations, and to examine how the HR delivery model was influencing communication with FLMs.

As the interviews progressed, the researcher explored why there appeared to be such a disconnect between the HR messages which the HR department wished to convey to the organisation and the messages actually received by the FLMs who were required to explain them to their teams. The responses shared by the FLMs suggested that there was a link between FLMs' perceptions of the support they received from the HR department and their perceptions of HR communication. Conversely, when FLMs perceived HR communication to be poor then their perceptions of the HR support which they received were also poor. Furthermore, there appeared

to be a tension between the communication needs of the FLMs and the communication strategies that the HR departments adopted at both case study organisations. This tension ran throughout the interview phase of this study and was a theme that the researcher explored further by comparing the responses from FLMs at each of the organisations.

In the one-to-one interviews that were carried out, FLMs at both case study organisations spoke about the different characteristics of communication that were important to them and which they valued when it came to HR support. They expressed the need for clarity, consistency, and personalised information tailored to their specific queries or business area. They also spoke of the need for proactive, regular communication tailored to their business area.

Section 6.3.2 below explores the feedback shared by FLMs under each theme, responding to Research Question I (RQI): Which elements of support do FLMs value when implementing HR practices?

- i. Clarity of communication
- ii. Communication tailored to the business area or user
- iii. Frequency of communication
- iv. Ease of access, e.g., through the use of self-service portals

6.3.2 Theme 1: HR Communication clarity: A key element of HR support which is important to FLMs

The theme of clarity of communication was raised frequently by the FLMs working at Organisation Offshore and was clearly indicated by FLMs as being a key factor influencing FLMs' perceptions of HR support (RQI). For the FLMs who worked at Organisation Offshore there was a feeling that the information from their offshore HR team was at times unclear, and this resulted in frustration as they needed to allocate time to the work and participate in multiple exchanges to resolve issues of understanding or overcome a lack of clarity. There were occasionally also issues due to language differences.

Participant C24 noted:

The questions are sent by email, so they can be misinterpreted, and you go back and forth.

(Participant C24)

FLMs at both organisations, however, expressed the opinion that clarity of HR communication was important to their perceptions of the service they received from the HR department, and this was one of the key themes which became apparent during the interviews – particularly in the interviews with Organisation Offshore. FLMs at Organisation Onshore confirmed that they knew where to find information, and they spoke of being able to contact HR advisors to discuss specific questions they had regarding policies.

6.3.3 Theme 1: Impact of the HR SSC model on clarity of communication

When considering the HR communication dimension, the researcher explored in the data the impact which the HR SSC delivery model was having on HR communication. The findings of this analysis were that in the case of Organisation Offshore, the establishment of an offshore HR SSC delivery model had added a layer of complexity to the communication process. The challenges of language barriers and a lack of cultural and business understanding were areas that frequently resulted in miscommunication at Organisation Offshore. The influence of the model of HR delivery on clarity of information was apparent at Organisation Offshore, when FLMs spoke of the impact of the language barrier that they sometimes encountered with the HR offshore team who were a key part of the HR delivery model:

It can be a bit difficult managing stuff online with speaking with [the offshore team] or wherever we're talking to, because with the language barrier it's very hard to make yourself understood. Likewise, for them... it's one of those awkward conversations where everything's got to be repeated a lot to try to understand each other. So that's one of the issues (Participant C13)

The researcher noted that the FLMs at Organisation Onshore also mentioned clarity of communication less frequently than Organisation Offshore, suggesting that for FLMs at Organisation Onshore a lack of clarity in their communications with its HR services team was less frequently an issue.. FLMs at Organisation Onshore spoke of the fact that they had access to HR staff who were based in the same office location and that they could rely on these colleagues to provide clear information. The delivery model at Organisation Onshore, with its HR services team based at the UK headquarters office, was one which, from the evidence of this study, appeared to support clear information being shared with FLMs. This clarity of information from the HR team (even when FLMs sometimes disagreed with the content of the policy) had a positive influence on how FLMs perceived the service they received from the HR department.

6.3.4 Theme 2: Salient/personalised or tailored information: a key element of HR support which is important to FLMs

In addition to expecting clear information, FLMs who worked in our two case study organisations also had an implicit expectation that the information they received was relevant to their business area or business unit. The findings from this qualitative phase of the study underlined the importance of HR messaging to FLMs. The frustration of some FLMs at Organisation Offshore was evident when they spoke about the lack of information tailored to their business unit and their personal situation. Participant C18 described the interactions as follows:

I mean, I'll be honest, what we find ourselves doing is having to take the information we get from the [offshore] HR central team and then constantly re-amend it and send

it back and have it back again and back again and back again, multiple times, to get to the contractual terms that are required for, say, a recruitment process of a new employee. Because [the offshore HR team is] sitting [offshore] they don't necessarily understand the individual peculiarities of our employees, many of whom are on different company terms... it can be very frustrating, particularly with FLMs getting repeat exchanges of letters with the offshore HR team before they can issue a given letter. Actually, it's just easier to have done the letter yourself in the first place because you know the individual – you know the exact terms and conditions (Participant C18)

FLMs at this organisation felt that the communication they received from the HR team was also sometimes impersonal. This was particularly a concern for them when it came to redundancy programmes, where the lack of a personal approach suggested to the employees that they were not valued. FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke of their disappointment that their employees were not considered as individuals or communicated with as individuals. FLMs at Organisation Offshore felt that the HR team members frequently did not have a good understanding of their business area.

The FLMs at Organisation Offshore also spoke about the issues in cases where the HR department did not provide the correct information in training sessions, such as sharing information which was not relevant to their business area. In contrast, at Organisation Onshore the FLMs viewed the ability of the HR department to provide salient and personalised information more positively and mentioned that key HR team members attended business meetings on a regular basis with FLMs and shared their impression that the HR department had a good understanding of the business areas they supported.

This finding evidences the importance to FLMs of HR communication being tailored and personalised rather than generic and impersonal. Van Waeyenburg and Decramer (2018), amongst others, discuss the need for FLMs to have the information and ability to make HR practices pertinent to employees; a delivery model which provides accurate information which is relevant to the FLMs' business unit or department is therefore key. The evidence from this present study supports the need for the HR department to have a strong understanding of the business area if they are to effectively support FLMs and if they are to ensure that implementation is successful.

6.3.5 Theme 2: Impact of the HR SSC model on the provision of salient/personalised or tailored information

Salience of messaging was particularly an issue for FLMs at Organisation Offshore who felt that the messaging was sometimes generic and not tailored to their business area. When HR messaging was not relevant to the FLMs' specific questions, this led to stress and frustration (the

resultant stress and its impact on wellbeing is explored further in Section 6.5); this influenced FLMs' perceptions of the service they received from HR.

FLMs at Organisation Offshore felt that the HR SSC offshore team was not always familiar with their business area and requirements. This meant that FLMs sometimes avoided contacting the offshore team as they knew that communication was likely to be difficult. FLMs at Organisation Offshore also spoke about the frustration they felt on occasion when their query resulted in a lengthy email exchange about the issue, whereas a conversation could have resolved the query in minutes. Consequently, they felt that the communication process was not efficient. Participant C18 said:

We find, then, the constant frustration, not because they're not all well-intentioned, good people, but because they don't know the ins and outs of our particular arrangements. So, we end up having to send... an offer letter might come out then you would go back and say, no, that paragraph about holidays is wrong.... It comes back, you come back, that paragraph about pensions is wrong, it goes back, it comes back. So, you end up with a lot of interchange, that's not efficient (Participant C18)

FLMs at Organisation Offshore were often worried that the offshore team did not have the correct knowledge to be able to answer the questions they were asking, and FLMs spoke about long-term implications for their team members when contracts or pension contributions were incorrectly set up.

Turning to the FLMs at Organisation Onshore, FLMs at that organisation in general viewed the skills and knowledge of their HR department much more favourably than FLMs at Organisation Offshore. FLMs spoke of the HR team attending monthly business meetings, which allowed them the opportunity to hear first-hand what was going on in the business. As a result of this interaction with business managers, the HR team at Organisation Onshore showed a much stronger understanding of the business area and could use this to tailor their communication to FLMs.

In the two case study organisations, business knowledge emerged from the analysis as a key differentiating factor between the support provided by HR. The knowledge levels at Organisation Onshore were higher than those shown at Organisation Offshore. The delivery model at Organisation Offshore meant that the HR department was now based in a remote location. The delivery model implemented by Organisation Offshore had created a physical distance between the SSC HR teams and FLMs and had led to a loss of key business knowledge from the HR teams. The need to ensure a strong understanding of local business requirements irrespective of the physical distance from FLMs appeared to have been overlooked in the transition to an offshore delivery model. This transition of key business knowledge had led to

more negative perceptions of HR support. The location of the SSC at Organisation Offshore was not specifically the issue, the lack of transition of key business knowledge was more important.

6.3.6 Theme 3: Frequency of communication: A key aspect of HR support which is important to FLMs

FLMs at the two organisations felt that it was important that the HR function was proactive in updating them in relation to the queries they had raised or about any changes to HR policies or processes. FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke of the importance of proactive communication from the HR department when it came to HR initiatives.

Participant C16 felt that proactive blog posts helped to ensure that information was shared efficiently.

The recent example I can think of [proactive HR communication] is regarding the 'name' programme for mini secondments. The HR lead for that area is very proactive in publicising blogs etc and we can talk with him regarding the roles (Participant C16)

For FLMs at both case study organisations it was important for the HR department to communicate proactively, regularly, but not excessively. The FLMs at both organisations had in common the fact that they felt that ensuring appropriate frequency of messaging influenced how they perceived the service provided by the HR function. Frequency of communication was not a theme which was particularly prevalent in the implementation literature, so this was an interesting finding and could be an intriguing area for further research. Previous literature has looked at the content of HR policies but not the frequency and channels used to share this content.

6.3.7 Theme 3: Impact of the HR SSC model on the frequency of information

In contrast to the negative effect of the HR delivery model at HR Offshore on the clarity and salience of HR communication, frequency of information was one area where the model of HR delivery at Organisation Offshore resulted in a positive effect. The delivery model in place at Organisation Offshore included an approach to messaging which was structured and measured, with the result that communication from the offshore team was frequent. The existence of a HR delivery model with SLAs and metrics for the offshore team therefore had the effect of ensuring that there were periodic updates from the HR team, which FLMs appreciated. This focus on metrics and service level agreements at Organisation Offshore, which had a HR SSC as part of its delivery model, did have the effect of ensuring *regular* communication from the HR teams. There was thus a clear difference noted between the perceptions of the FLMs at both organisations when speaking of the frequency of communication. The FLMs at Organisation Offshore appeared to find their offshore delivery team to be proactive in terms of the frequency of communication.

This was due both to the service level agreements in place and to the service delivery metrics which are likely to accompany a remotely located HR SSC.

In contrast, the HR service delivery model at Organisation Onshore appeared to lack a structured approach to the frequency of communication. The HR services team did not have a set of structured SLAs they were working to. As a result, FLMs at Organisation Onshore felt that sometimes the frequency of communication was not at the right level, Participant D13 being one of many. What constitutes the 'right' frequency of communication is likely to be a subjective judgement, however.

There's a lot of stuff come – maybe it's gone almost like to the point where there's too much stuff coming out at times. The timing of it as well (Participant D13)

At both case study organisations, the frequency of communication appeared to be influenced by the HR delivery model management system which had been established, leading to either a structured and measured approach to HR communication (Organisation Offshore) or a more informal and ad-hoc approach to communication (Organisation Onshore). In the case of Organisation Offshore, it was apparent from the qualitative data gathered that the HR delivery model had the effect of monitoring and regulating the communication from the HR department (due to, e.g., SLAs and the metrics gathered and reviewed at the HRSSC). FLMs at Organisation Offshore appeared to value this approach and it was commented on favourably by the FLMs interviewed. The location of the HR SSC was not decisive in this case, in fact it was the existence of service-level metrics which ensured that there was a regular flow of information and updates. This finding suggests that one benefit of the offshore HR SSC delivery model was that it could lead to a more structured approach to managing information and communication with FLMs, leading to more proactive and regular communication from the HR department.

6.3.8 Theme 4: Ease of access to information via self-service: A key element of HR support which is important to FLMs'

Both case study organisations had implemented a version of the Ulrich model (Ulrich, 1997) and both had implemented a new self-service HR IT system in the years prior to the interviews taking place. FLMs were required to access HR information by searching for it themselves either by raising a ticket (at Organisation Offshore) or by sending an email (at Organisation Onshore). Even though FLMs were asked to speak generally about their experience of working with HR, many of them mentioned the IT system which they used to access HR advice. During the interviews, the researcher therefore explored what the FLMs' expectations were concerning the channels they

used to communicate with HR, in an effort to understand whether the use of the HR IT system as a channel in the HR delivery model had any influence on their perceptions of HR support.

FLMs at Organisation Offshore used a ticketing system to access HR and referenced the ticketing system frequently in the interviews, with 19 of the 25 FLMs referring to the ticketing portal. Whilst FLMs at Organisation Offshore generally had a good experience with using the ticketing portal for their queries, some found that raising a ticket was sometimes difficult, as the system required them to choose a specific category for their question.

Participant C10 summarised this issue, saying:

Sometimes if you know what you're trying to achieve, it works well. Other times, because the question that you have doesn't necessarily fit into the boxes that they've predefined, it can be, I suppose, more complex or more complicated than it actually needs to be (Participant C10)

FLMs at Organisation Onshore were encouraged to email HR queries to a HR mailbox as their main channel for contacting HR and felt that the mailbox worked efficiently and was a useful channel to access information for general HR queries. The comment from Participant D9 below reflected the views of many other FLMs who also spoke of the efficiency of using the HR mailbox to get answers to their questions:

At times it can be a little bit – things can be a little bit buried, but normally, if I get really stuck, I just contact someone in HR and say I'm looking for this and they would normally point me towards it; but most things you can find yourself (Participant D9)

In contrast, the FLMs at Organisation Offshore were at times confused by the different channels that could be used to contact HR and were unsure which channel to choose according to the type of information they needed from HR.

Participant C13 summed up this sentiment, saying:

I think the issue is also that there are multiple – if I'm honest – there are multiple channels to get hold of HR so you can raise a ticket. You could get in touch on Teams. You could get in touch on email. I think that it helps to know which one is the best one for which kind of circumstance.... I think this needs to be very clear – clarity about the channels we use (Participant C13)

FLMs at both organisations were comfortable with the requirement to log queries via an IT system, whether that was via raising a formal 'ticket' or by emailing a shared inbox. Here, the only difference noted by the researcher was frustration expressed by FLMs at Organisation Offshore regarding the complexity of the ticketing form which they needed to complete. These FLMs were unsure which subject to choose on the form and expressed the opinion that this was a cause of frustration and stress for them, as they worried that if they logged the ticket incorrectly it would not be handled in a timely manner. Ease of access to HR information was clearly identified by FLMs at both organisations as being an important influence on their perceptions of the service they received. The difference noted between them was that FLMs at Organisation Onshore were able to navigate the information sources more easily while FLMs at Organisation Offshore were faced with multiple channels (raising a ticket, calling the HR SSC, sending an instant message).

6.3.9 Theme 4: Impact on the HR SSC model on ease of access to information

. The finding that the FLMs who used an offshore delivery model were confused about how to access HR support provides support for the literature (see e.g., Cooke, 2006) which highlights the need for careful change management and collaboration with end users to ensure that the establishment of a HR SSC is successful. The location of the HR SSC was less important in this case than the structure which was put in place to contact the HR SSC teams. When considering HR communication in the case study organisation the researcher noted the tensions which existed between the support that FLMs expected and the value and the support which the HR department was resourced and tasked to implement. The researcher discusses in section 6.5.1 how the HR delivery model may have contradictory and unintended consequences for implementation, leading to tensions between FLMs and their HR teams as well as frustration and stress for both HR and FLMs.

Figure 15 in this section summarises the key elements of HR communication which FLMs considered to be important influencers of how they viewed the service from the HR department. The findings from the interviews highlighted that FLMs at both organisations appeared to hold a set of implicit expectations of the communication they should receive from the HR function – an expectation of clarity, salience of messaging and frequent but not excessive volume of communication. These expectations had never been explicitly discussed with either HR department, but the failure of the HR departments to meet FLMs' implicit expectations was having a significant impact on the satisfaction of FLMs with the service provided.

Turning now to consider how the qualitative findings are linked to the initial quantitative findings, the researcher noted that the quantitative data highlighted that there were significant differences between the perceptions of FLMs in Organisation Onshore and Organisation Offshore regarding the HR service quality provided. FLMs at Organisation Onshore viewed service quality more positively than FLMs at Organisation Onshore. Issues with the quality of communication at

Organisation Offshore (outlined in section 6.3.1) appear to have influenced the level of satisfaction with the service provided by the HR department. The quantitative data phase had also pointed to significant differences in FLMs' perceptions of HR advice. In the case of HR advice, FLMs at Organisation Offshore also viewed the service they received less positively than FLMs at Organisation Onshore. The researcher concluded that issues regarding the clarity, frequency, salience, and ease of access to HR information may all have all had a negative influence on FLMs' perceptions of the advice they received from the HR department.

As the study aimed to understand the differences which may be attributable to the HR SSC delivery model, the researcher examined how the location of the HR SSC appeared to have influenced the qualitative findings relating to HR communication. Table 17 summarises the effect of the HR SSC on dimension 1, HR communication, highlighting the effect of the location of the HR SSC on this dimension.

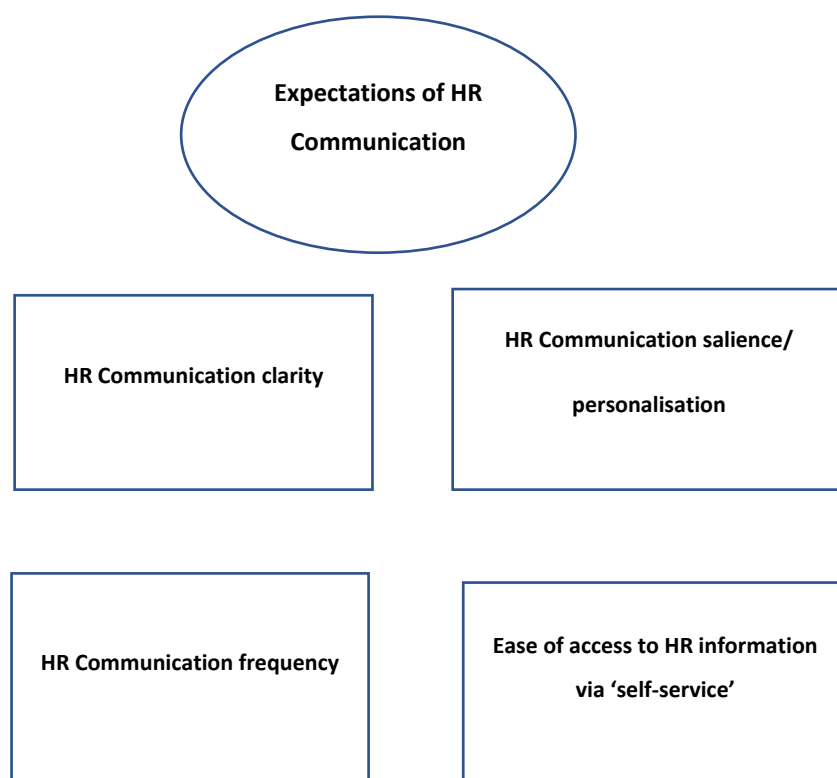


Figure 15 Dimension 1: Communication - Thematic map summarising FLMs expectations of HR Communication

Table 17 Summary of the effect of the HR SSC model on dimension 1: HR Communication

Dimension 1: HR Communication	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being located offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being located onshore /closer to the FLMs supported
Clarity	<p>. At Organisation Offshore, the implementation of a remote, offshore delivery model had added complexity to the communication process resulting in specific challenges to communication, which included language barriers.</p> <p>Due to language barriers and misunderstandings regarding requests, FLMs felt that the information from their offshore HR team was at times unclear, and this resulted in frustration. FLMs needed to allocate time and participate in multiple exchanges to resolve issues of understanding or overcome a lack of clarity.</p> <p>The offshore location itself was not the issue, but the fact that English was not the first language of the HR teams at this HR SSC led to problems regarding the clarity of the information provided to FLMs and in turn their perception of the quality of the HR support offered to them.</p>	<p>FLMs at Organisation Onshore confirmed that they knew where to find information, and they spoke of being able to contact HR advisors via their HR SSC to discuss specific questions they had regarding policies.</p> <p>Language barriers were not an issue for the FLMs working with this onshore HR SSC. FLMs at Organisation Onshore expressed the fact that they were comfortable that they knew how to access clear information, suggesting that the onshore HR SSC was effective in general and provided FLMs with clear HR information in response to the queries raised.</p> <p>The location of the HR SSC, which was based in the headquarters of the UK office, may have helped clarity of communication. However, clarity of communication may also have been influenced by the quality of staff hired and the quality of the training of HR SSC staff at that location.</p>

Dimension 1: HR Communication	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
<p>Salience/personalisation of information to respond to a specific query</p>	<p>FLMs at Organisation Offshore felt that the communication they received from the HR team was sometimes impersonal and that the HR team members frequently did not have a good understanding of their business area. The information provided via the delivery model was not always salient to their business area which caused frustration for FLMs.</p> <p>The move to an offshore location had led to ongoing issues regarding relevant business knowledge. This appeared to be due to a lack of handover of key business knowledge to the offshore HR SSC teams when the offshore centre was set up and the distance from end users in the different UK businesses they supported.</p>	<p>Salience of information was also described by the FLMs at Organisation Onshore as being important to their perception of HR Support. FLMs at Organisation Onshore viewed the ability of the HR department to provide salient and personalised information positively in general and mentioned that key HR team members attended business meetings on a regular basis. FLMs suggested that as a result the HR department had a good understanding of the business areas they supported.</p> <p>The fact that the HR SSC was based onshore meant that HR team members had the possibility of meeting with key business leaders and attending meetings which helped to build their knowledge of the business areas they supported. In turn this led FLMs to view the HR support they received via the HR delivery model as being effective and aligned to their business requirements.</p>

Dimension 1: HR Communication	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
<p>Frequency</p>	<p>The delivery model in place at Organisation Offshore included an approach to messaging which was structured and measured. It included service level metrics which dictated how often communication was to be issued to FLMs; as a result, communication from the offshore team was frequent.</p> <p>The existence of an offshore HR delivery model with SLAs and metrics had the effect of ensuring that there were periodic updates from the HR team, which FLMs appreciated. However, in this case it was the existence of service-level metrics rather than the location of the HR SSC which made a difference to the user experience.</p>	<p>The HR service delivery model at Organisation Onshore appeared to lack a structured approach to the frequency of communication. Consequently, communication to FLMs was more informal and carried out in an ad-hoc manner.</p> <p>FLMs at Organisation Onshore felt as a result that sometimes communication was not shared at the 'right' frequency (sometimes too often and sometimes not often enough). The location of the HR SSC in this case, regarding this aspect of communication, was not a decisive factor; more important was the fact that a structured approach to communication had not been agreed with the HR SSC teams.</p>

Dimension 1: HR Communication	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
Ease of accessing information	<p>FLMs at both organisations were comfortable with the requirement to log queries via an IT system – at Organisation Offshore this was done by raising a formal ‘ticket’. FLMs at Organisation Offshore were faced with multiple channels (raising a ticket, calling the HR SSC, sending an instant message). Some FLMs found the complexity of the ticketing form that they needed to complete frustrating.</p> <p>Whilst complexity of channels of communication could also arise with an onshore-based HR SSC, in this case the offshore HR SSC delivery model offered so many different ways to contact the HR teams that it resulted in confusion for FLMs. This confusion led to the support provided by the HR SSC being perceived as less effective. In the case of this aspect of communication it was not the fact that the HR SSC was offshore per se which influenced FLMs’ perceptions of the ease of access to information but more that the channel strategy had not been communicated effectively to them.</p>	<p>FLMs at both organisations were comfortable with the requirement to log queries via an IT system – at Organisation Onshore this was done by emailing a shared inbox.</p> <p>FLMs at Organisation Onshore were required to use few channels and appeared to be able to navigate the information sources easily. This meant that FLMs did not feel the need to discuss the channel they used to contact HR as it was clear that there was one channel to access support.</p> <p>Whilst this was not linked to the fact that the HR SSC was based onshore, it is interesting to note that the onshore HR SSC, which offered one key method to contact HR with queries, was viewed as more effective than the HR SSC that offered multiple channels to access HR support (Organisation Offshore’s delivery model).</p>

6.4 Dimension 2: HR skills and knowledge

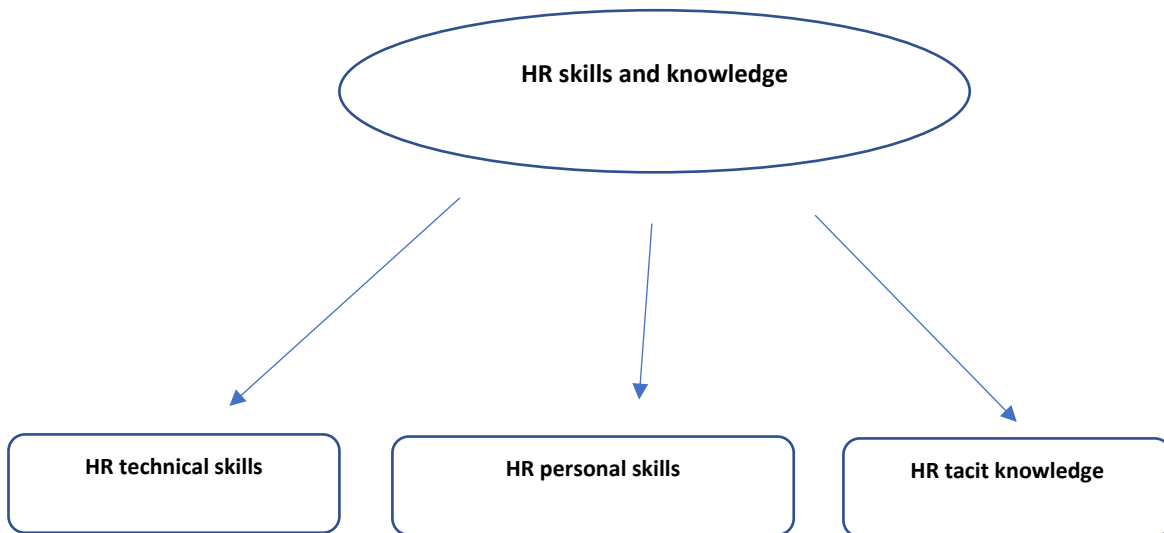


Figure 16 Dimension 2: HR skills and knowledge and associated themes

6.4.1 Dimension 2: HR skills and knowledge and associated themes: An aspect of HR support which is important to FLMs perceptions of HR support

The second dimension which FLMs highlighted in the interviews was HR skills and competencies. FLMs had a set of implicit expectations about the technical and personal skills and competencies of the HR professionals with whom they interacted. Dimension two therefore focuses on FLMs' expectations of the HR department that relate not just to technical knowledge – for example of employment law – but also to personal skills, including empathy, listening skills, and a willingness to partner with the FLMs. **Figure 16** summarises the evidence gathered in the qualitative phase of this study. It emerged that FLMs expected their key HR contacts to possess a tacit knowledge of the organisational culture and ways of working as well as technical and personal skills.

Section 6.4.1 explores the feedback shared by FLMs in relation to each theme:

- i. HR technical skills
- ii. HR personal skills
- iii. HR tacit knowledge of the organisation

6.4.1.1 Theme 1: HR Technical skills – a key element of HR support which is important to FLMs

FLMs at both case study organisations expected HR professionals to have a deep knowledge of HR. The requirement of having deep technical expertise was a fundamental expectation of HR expressed by the FLMs at both organisations. The FLMs expected to work with HR professionals who displayed strong HR knowledge when dealing with complex HR cases. FLMs at both

organisations spoke about the importance of having an experienced HR contact, with the FLMs at Organisation Offshore feeling that when it came to complex HR issues and programmes such as re-structuring, having a HR professional who had been through that process and had experience of it was extremely important. The comments expressed by Participant C20 summed up the feelings of many of the FLMs interviewed at Organisation Offshore, who spoke of issues that arose when the information they received from the HR shared-services team was inaccurate, or when HR did not seem to have the required knowledge to answer the FLMs' questions.

There's a multitude of things that we need to remember as a management team, and HR is an area that we really have to be completely tight, make sure we get everything absolutely as it needs to be. So, to have somebody that does have that sort of view, and that expertise, and who is so open to supporting that is really helpful (Participant C20)

FLMs clearly valued the HR knowledge of employment law shared by their HR team.

Participant C10 summed it up well, saying:

We don't know all the ins and outs of the law... I think it's their understanding of the legal aspects of things that we need to comply with. Because as a line manager, we don't know all those legal requirements and things. So, they cover all that off (Participant C10)

Participant D5 from Organisation Onshore highlighted the importance of the HR department's knowledge when it came to more complex cases:

It's when you get that tricky case that really, their knowledge, expertise, needs to kick in (Participant D5)

FLMs at both companies appeared to expect and value working with HR professionals who displayed experience in dealing with complex and sensitive issues, and it was clear that this element of support was an area which FLMs had in common – it was valued by FLMs across both organisations. The ability of HR contacts to take the whole situation into account and then choose the right approach for the situation was a skill that FLMs both recognised and valued.

6.4.1.2 Theme 1: Impact of the mode of HR delivery on HR technical skills and knowledge

Based on the evidence from this study, the delivery model did not appear to have had a significant impact on the technical skills of the HR department in terms of them being able to respond to technical HR queries, e.g., relating to employment law. The researcher found no evidence at the two case study organisations that the HR delivery model (either including an onshore or an

offshore team) had had a negative effect on the technical knowledge of the HR teams. The findings in relation to technical knowledge were that both organisations appeared to place emphasis on ensuring that their HR SSC staff had the technical knowledge to carry out the role they were hired to do. In contrast, other skills, e.g., personal skills, such as demonstrating empathy in their role, appear to have been overlooked in the hiring and training process for HR SSC staff at Organisation Offshore. This had a significant influence on how FLMs perceived the support they received. The importance of personal skills is described in the following section.

6.4.1.3 Theme 2: HR Personal skills- a key element of HR support which is important to FLMs

FLMs also spoke of the personal skills which they expected the HR department to possess. FLMs at Organisation Offshore, which had been going through several recent re-structuring programmes, felt that their HR contacts were, at times, lacking in empathy. Some FLMs spoke of going through a redundancy exercise where they themselves were at risk; others spoke of their experiences of managing a team that was put at risk as part of a redundancy programme. FLMs felt that the HR team was simply following a script and not adapting to the individual or responding to the individual's questions. Participant C13 described their experience of working with a HR contact who appeared to lack the human touch:

I just think there needs to be a bit more humanity put into it without overdoing it, if that makes sense. Yeah, I think they followed a script. I've had that before. I think that when we're asking questions it was very much a robotic kind of answer rather than looking at individual circumstance (Participant C13)

Participant C13 supported this view and explained it in this way:

We went through a redundancy phase and I just think... I thought that it was more a paper-based exercise and the humanity was completely taken out of it... I think HR probably need to learn a little bit from that. I understand it's a very impersonal process, but actually it can't be because it is people's livelihoods and futures that are being at stake. I just think there needs to be a bit more humanity put into it without overdoing it (Participant C13)

Empathy from their HR contacts was one of the personal skills which FLMs expected, and which appeared to be lacking at Organisation Offshore. This could be linked to the hiring or training of HR staff at Organisation Offshore, but the researcher was not able to establish a clear link between the empathy shown by the HR teams and the delivery structure.

In contrast, FLMs at Organisation Onshore generally felt that their HR team did possess and demonstrate strong personal skills and an empathetic approach, with one FLM suggesting that they pitched the tone just right:

The human intention, I think, came through, or I felt it came through (Participant D15)

The findings relating to the influence of the HR SSC location on the personal skills of staff are outlined in the following section (6.4.1.4).

6.4.1.4 Theme 2: Impact of the mode of HR delivery on HR personal skills

Many of the FLMs at both organisations spoke of how much they valued having a HR contact with whom they could speak informally and who could act as a sounding board when they were unsure how to deal with a particular HR issue. FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke of the benefits of talking through different scenarios informally with their HR contact. Participant C25 described how beneficial it was to have a sparring partner in HR with whom they could discuss scenarios:

I talked to her about scenarios and talked through the scenarios, and quite often she'll say, you're thinking on the right lines (Participant C25)

FLMs at Organisation Onshore felt that could use their HR contacts as a sounding board if they needed this type of support. FLMs used HR in this way to 'test their thinking'. FLMs at Organisation Onshore spoke of their appreciation at having someone in HR to challenge their thinking. Participant D15 was one of the many FLMs who mentioned the benefits of working alongside a HR contact who could question their thinking:

Then the lady I worked with on the investigation was excellent, really, really good, an excellent sounding board and very even-handed and non-biased. She questioned me about some of the things I was proposing and some of the things I was suggesting, so there was that kind of good interplay, which was very useful because it exposed different lines of thinking and different lines of questioning. It made the thing more rounded and full (Participant D15)

Personal skills which FLMs at Organisation Onshore also valued were, e.g., an objective approach which the HR function could bring to discussions. FLMs at Organisation Onshore spoke about the benefit of having an objective HR person at meetings when the situation was heated and felt that the role of HR at times was to be impartial. FLMs at Organisation Onshore spoke about the importance of HR in keeping information confidential. Participant D10

was one of many FLMs who described the relationship of trust between FLMs and the HR department and the importance of confidentiality:

It's nice to know that you've got someone there, who you can go and ask anything, and it's treated completely confidentially. I trust them. If I say, I've got this problem, can you give me some advice? I know that it's not going to get tittle tattled or shared. I trust their professionalism (Participant D10)

The findings from this study suggest, however, that the implementation of an offshore HR SSC may result in removing 'the face of HR', which can influence FLMs' perceptions of the HR department. The topic of HR being remote was raised by FLMs at Organisation Offshore because much of the support they received was delivered by remote HR colleagues. Participant C10 described it eloquently in this way:

I think it's just a case of – that the face of HR has disappeared (Participant C10)

Another FLM from Organisation Offshore, Participant C15, also shared similar comments and agreed with the sentiment:

From my point of view, it has kind of disappeared completely (Participant C15)

Participant C17 from Organisation Offshore felt that the HR department was missed, highlighting the gap which they felt now:

So, for many people the loss of that face-to-face position of a dedicated team specific to your own areas has proved to be – that loss has been felt (Participant C17)

Similarly, Participant C14 suggested that the HR department appeared to be mainly notable by its 'absence', with the FLM realising that the HR department had not been visible in recent times:

But I have to say that in all other respects I have – I really have absolutely zero exposure to HR or any sort of help. I don't find they have the slightest relevance. In fact, when I think about it, it's like, where have they been? (Participant C14)

In contrast to the issues of visibility at Organisation Offshore, at Organisation Onshore FLMs spoke about seeing the HR team when they were in the office. FLMs at Organisation Onshore spoke of the importance of having a personal relationship with the HR contacts they worked with and felt a gap if they didn't have a personal contact. This personal

relationship appeared to be valued by FLMs particularly when it came to queries which were not yet urgent, or formal queries where FLMs needed some informal guidance in areas where they had had official company information but wanted to be clear on what this information meant for them as FLMs and for their teams. They spoke about their concerns that when they did have a personal contact in HR with whom they could work, they would lose the personal relationship they had built up; they also spoke about how important it was for them to have this contact. Some FLMs at Organisation Onshore felt that this personal working relationship was the best thing about working with the HR department; other FLMs were more pragmatic about the lack of personal contact and felt that they didn't necessarily need this to be able to carry out their role as a FLM. However, they believed that it was extremely helpful if this personal relationship could be built up.

This desire for and appreciation of having a personal contact within the HR function was expressed by FLMs at both organisations, with the FLMs at Organisation Onshore sharing their appreciation when they had a personal relationship with colleagues in the HR department. It appears, therefore, that the lack of personal contact also influenced FLMs' perceptions of HR support, and that the location of the HR delivery model supported or negatively impacted this factor. The location of the HR SSC made the HR contacts more or less visible and the establishment of a personal relationship between the FLM and the HR department more or less difficult.

Given the importance that FLMs placed on the personal skills of their HR colleagues and access to their HR colleagues when they needed a '*sounding board*', it was interesting to note that the head of HR services at Organisation Onshore wished to '*wean*' FLMs off this need to have a sounding board. In fact, HR professionals from the HR department at both case study organisations spoke about the evolution of the HR delivery structure at their organisation and their desire as a HR function to reduce FLMs' reliance on the HR department, which they felt was being used at times '*as a crutch*' when it came to interpreting HR policies and procedures (HR professional, Organisation Onshore). There appeared to be tensions between the intent and strategy of the HR department and the elements of the support which FLMs appeared to value. These emergent tensions between the expectations of the FLMs and those of the HR department did not seem to have been addressed in an open manner, leading to some conflicting opinions between the FLM groups and the HR professionals interviewed at each organisation.

6.4.1.5 Theme 3: The HR department has tacit knowledge of the organisation—A key aspect of HR support which is important to FLMs

The importance of tacit knowledge of the organisation was a further theme which emerged from the qualitative phase of the study. FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke during the interviews about tacit knowledge of the organisation and about the importance of the continuity of HR

contact. FLMs at Organisation Offshore perceived that there were frequent changes in their HR contacts and spoke about the impact which these frequent changes had on their time.

Participant C17 explained the impact that these changes had on her:

Yes. I've had to deal with several different people because at one point there was a lot of turnover of our HR representative person. I never knew which one I was dealing with at the time. Every time I sent an e-mail, it was someone different... Well, it was just having to explain things to different people and get them up to speed with the situation, really
(Participant C17)

Similarly, FLMs at Organisation Onshore were also clear that there were benefits to be gained from having a continuous contact in HR in terms of having access to that 'corporate memory', and the fact that they could see conversations through to resolution.

FLMs felt that the service was impacted by having a continuous HR contact assigned to work with them on complex cases, and they noticed a difference in the service even if the usual HR contact was only temporarily out of the office. Participant D13 summed this up by observing the following:

Yeah, I've known them for a couple of years. That's the person I go to when there's people to speak to. So it's like a one-to-one relationship in that respect, as opposed to just a faceless person (Participant D13)

The need for tacit knowledge of the organisation was apparent, and participants at both case study organisations spoke of the benefits they derived from having a personal contact who had a tacit knowledge of the organisation as well as of their specific business area. From the evidence gathered in the interview phase of this study, this tacit knowledge of the organisation and its culture had a positive effect on FLMs' perceptions of HR support at Organisation Onshore. **Figure 17** summarises the skills and knowledge expected of the HR department at both case study organisations.

6.4.1.6 Theme 3: Impact of the mode of HR delivery on HR tacit knowledge

The delivery model at each organisation was an important factor when it came to tacit knowledge, e.g., in the case of Organisation Offshore, moving HR work to an offshore centre meant hiring new staff in a new location, leading to a significant loss of tacit knowledge of the organisation. This was keenly felt by FLMs, who noted the impact of a lack of continuity of contact

and a lack of '*corporate memory*' on the service provided. One FLM at Organisation Offshore, Participant C10, summed it up in this way:

There used to be a lot of, I suppose, informal transfer of knowledge because you'd have a conversation with somebody, you'd pick hints and tips and bits and pieces like that and therefore you could use that with the next person that came along with a similar question in that area [that no longer happens] (Participant C10)

The area of '*tacit knowledge*' has not been addressed in the HR shared services literature and is one worthy of further consideration, as the evidence from this present study suggests that a lack of knowledge of corporate culture and history had a negative effect on FLMs' perceptions of the HR support they received. The researcher was interested to discover whether a lack of HR support influenced how FLMs implemented HR practices and, e.g., whether it had a '*ripple*' effect on others within the organisation. To this end, data was gathered which responded to research question III: 'How does the HR support received by FLMs influence their implementation of HR practices?' This is discussed further in section 6.5.

The evidence from this present study does, therefore, suggest that the HR delivery model influences multiple aspects of the HR department's skills and competencies, such as the tacit knowledge of the HR department, when significant elements of the HR department are offshored. A further effect of offshoring the HR service, based on the evidence of this study, is that it can make building a personal relationship with the HR team more difficult, and this has a negative influence on how the service is perceived by FLMs. Physical distance from the business area that the HR team supports also makes building up knowledge of that business area more difficult, as HR colleagues will not come across knowledge of the business area through their day-to-day interactions. Increasing the knowledge of the HR SSC which is based offshore therefore needs to be done through focused initiatives targeted at sharing knowledge of the business area, perhaps by considering targeted or scheduled interactions to ensure the transfer of business and corporate knowledge.

Furthermore, FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke about the need for the HR contact to have the skills and knowledge to help FLMs navigate the system and understand which teams to go to. At Organisation Onshore, which has an on-site HR team, this issue was not raised by FLMs, suggesting that FLMs at that organisation felt more able to '*navigate*' the HR delivery model and did not need this support from the HR department. The finding that a FLM who is faced with a new HR delivery model may struggle to access HR support and may need help to navigate the system is new and is not referenced in the HR SSC literature. This finding highlights the need for HR departments to focus on the change aspect to ensure both that users of the service are clear on how to access support and that interactions between FLMs and the HR department are carried

out smoothly, thereby minimising the time needed for FLMs to access HR support. **Figure 17** summarises visually the key themes relating to HR skills and knowledge.

We now turn to consider how the findings regarding the HR skills and knowledge of the HR department compare to the findings in the quantitative phase of the main study. The quantitative results show that FLMs at Organisation Offshore viewed the HR service quality and HR advice more negatively than FLMs at Organisation Onshore. These findings may partly be explained by the difference in the HR skills and knowledge displayed by HR SSC teams at Organisation Onshore (outlined in section 6.4.1).

The approach taken by the researcher to examine how the location of the HR SSC influenced HR skills and knowledge is similar to the approach taken to analyse dimension 1- HR communication Table 18 summarises the analysis regarding the influence of the HR SSC on each of the themes in dimension 2- HR skills and knowledge.

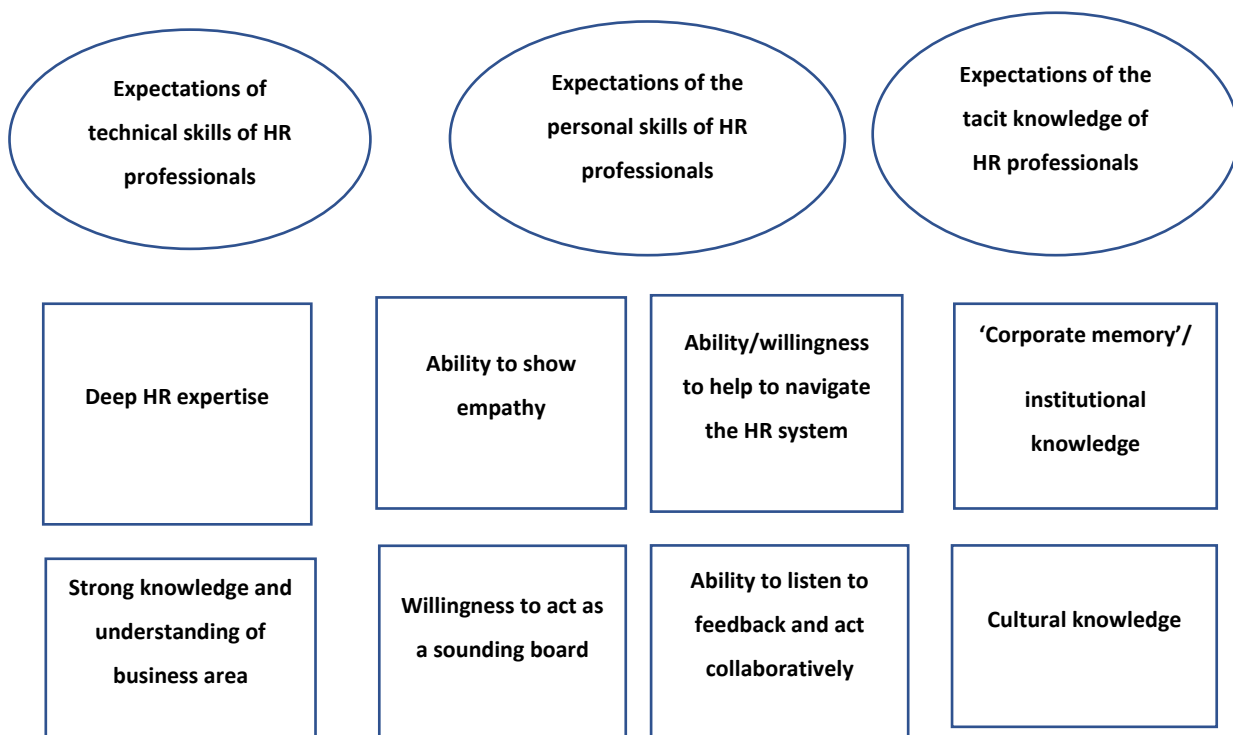


Figure 17 Dimension 2: thematic map summarising FLMs expectations of HR skills and knowledge

Table 18 Summary of the effect of the HR SSC model on dimension 2: HR skills and knowledge

Dimension 2: HR skills and knowledge	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
HR technical skills	<p>FLMs at both case study organisations expected HR professionals to have a deep knowledge of HR and FLMs at both companies expected to work with HR professionals who displayed experience in dealing with complex and sensitive issues.</p> <p>FLMs at Organisation Offshore suggested that the HR SSC team may have been displaying a lack of experience at times. However, based on the evidence from this study, the delivery model did not appear to have had a significant impact on the technical skills of the HR department in terms of being able to respond to technical HR queries, e.g., relating to employment law.</p> <p>The researcher found no evidence in the two case study organisations that the HR delivery model (either including an onshore or offshore team) had had a significant effect negatively or positively on the technical knowledge of the HR teams.</p>	<p>FLMs at Organisation Onshore clearly valued the HR knowledge shared by their HR team and did not appear to have an issue with the level of HR technical knowledge demonstrated by the HR department.</p> <p>Based on the evidence from this study, the delivery model did not appear to have had a significant impact on the technical skills of the HR department in terms of being able to respond to technical HR queries, e.g., relating to employment law.</p>

Dimension 2: HR skills and knowledge	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
HR personal skills	<p>The ability to display strong personal skills such as empathy was described by the FLMs at both case study organisations as being important to their perception of HR support. FLMs at both organisations appeared to value having a ‘sounding board’ with whom they could discuss sensitive cases.</p> <p>FLMs at Organisation Offshore felt that the HR team sometimes displayed a lack of empathy in dealing with employees who were, e.g., going through a restructuring programme. It was not clear from the findings whether this was as a result of the remote nature of the HR SSC HR teams or had resulted from a lack of training or inappropriate screening and selection of HR SSC staff.</p> <p>More research is required to explore this finding further and to examine potential remedies to address the issue.</p>	<p>FLMs at Organisation Onshore expressed that they felt that their HR team did generally demonstrate strong personal skills and an empathetic approach. However, with this case study organisation again it was not clear whether this was a result of the selection process for HR staff, training, or the fact that the HR teams felt physically nearby and close to the staff they were supporting and therefore were more empathetic to the FLMs they supported.</p>

Dimension 2: HR skills and knowledge	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
HR tacit knowledge	<p>FLMs at the two organisations spoke of the importance of ‘tacit knowledge’ of the business and ‘corporate memory’ on their perceptions of HR support.</p> <p>FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke of the importance of continuity of staffing and the ability of the HR team to understand the background to specific HR cases. FLMs highlighted the effect of issues with frequent staffing changes which resulted in repeating the same information to different HR contacts and so resulted in a loss of time.</p> <p>The researcher was unable to determine the effect of the location of the HR SSC model on this area of skills and knowledge. Similar to the area of personal skills, the lack of continuity and ‘tacit knowledge’ may have resulted from a variety of factors, such as poor retention and training strategies and a lack of robust transition of knowledge to the new HR SSC team, rather than arising from the HR SSC model itself and its remote offshore location.</p>	<p>FLMs at Organisation Onshore spoke of the benefits of having ‘tacit knowledge’ of the business area and of a continuous contact to deal with cases rather than handling them between multiple contacts. The fact that the HR SSC was based onshore did not necessarily appear to have an effect on the ‘tacit knowledge’ of the HR teams, however, FLMs felt a negative impact when there was not a smooth handover of case handling and information and case knowledge between team members.</p> <p>The fact that team members were based closer to the business teams they supported may have had a positive effect on their levels of tacit knowledge, however the study was unable to determine conclusively whether this was the case. Further research is required to explore this aspect and to be able to draw evidence-based conclusions.</p>

6.5 Findings responding to Research Question III: How does the HR support received by FLMs influence their implementation of HR practices?

Research Question III therefore focused on the impact of the HR support provided to FLMs on the ways in which they implemented HR practices and their own attitudes towards implementing HR practices, as well as the effects on others around them in the organisation. The interviews with the FLMs at these two organisations highlighted the impact that HR Service delivery can have on FLMs' attitudes as they implement HR practices with their team members.

6.5.1 Dimension 1: The impact of HR support on FLMs' attitudes

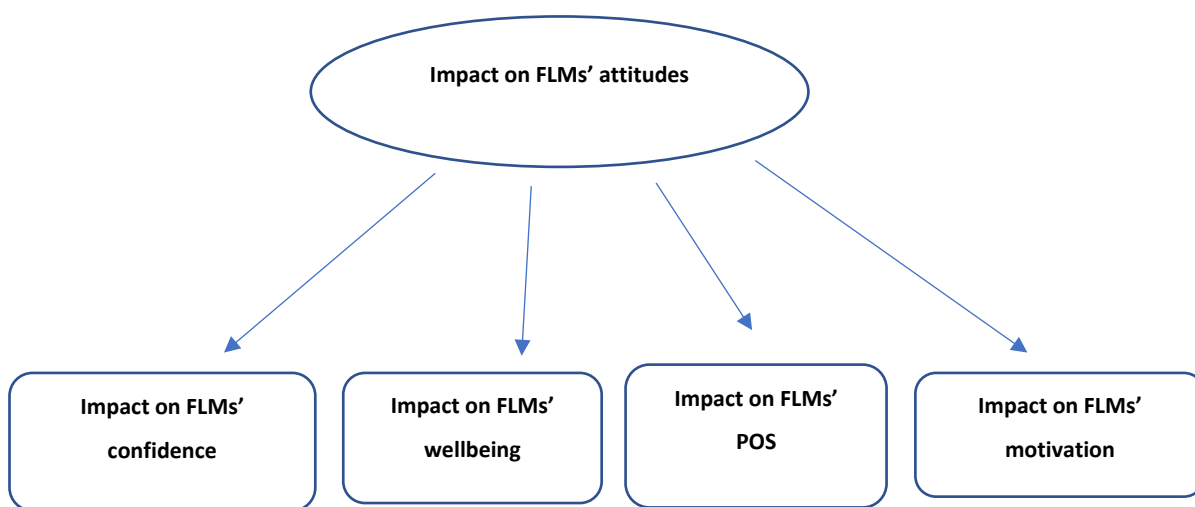


Figure 18 The impact of HR support on FLMs' attitudes and associated themes

The data gathered in this study suggested that the HR support received by FLMs impacted them in the following ways as they implemented HR practices:

- I. Impact on FLMs' confidence
- II. Impact on FLMs' wellbeing
- III. Impact on FLMs' perceptions of the level of support from their organisation
- IV. Impact on FLMs' motivation

6.5.1.1 The impact of HR support on FLMs' confidence as they implement HR practices (responding to RQIII)

FLMs' confidence was a dominant theme in the interviews at the two case study organisations. The term 'confidence' was mentioned frequently over the course of the interviews with FLMs. The FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke of the fact that when they received support and advice from

HR this resulted in them feeling more confident about their role as a FLM; in contrast, when they did not have access to HR support they felt '*hesitant*' about their decisions when implementing HR practices. Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) would support this finding in terms of FLMs feeling more able to make decisions when they have a suitable level of support available to them. Self-efficacy has been shown to develop as a function of knowledge, skills, and abilities because these attributes provide confidence and a belief in one's ability to perform (Meijerinck *et al.*, 2016).

When asked about how the HR support they had received had affected them, FLMs at both organisations described, unprompted, the link between the HR support they had received with how confident they felt in making HR decisions. FLMs at Organisation Offshore appeared to mention confidence more frequently than FLMs at Organisation Onshore, however. FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke often about the effect of HR support or lack of HR support on their confidence. Participant C2 reflected on this as they spoke of the effect on their behaviour when they were unsure and didn't have access to HR support to check how to proceed:

Yeah, I would say that [lack of HR support] makes me hesitant sometimes and not necessarily always 100 per cent sure that I'm going in the right direction in my decisions and the way I lead the team (Participant C2)

Contrary to the view from McGovern *et al.*, (1997), who concluded that FLMs do not feel strong institutional pressure to take their HR role seriously, FLMs at both organisations who participated in this study appeared to take their HR tasks very seriously. FLMs at Organisation Onshore also spoke of the effect on their confidence when they had access to HR support. Participant C4 described a situation they had been dealing with:

I did have an issue with a poor performing member of staff, which in the end didn't come to anything, but I had the conversation with HR that I needed just to give me the confidence to go ahead and do what I thought I needed to do. That was good (Participant C4)

When the support provided by the HR department was viewed positively by FLMs they felt more confident in implementing HR practices. Conversely when FLMs felt unsupported by the HR department they were hesitant in their implementation of the HR practices with their teams. We might intuitively expect that one implicit objective of the HR support provided to FLMs is to ensure that FLMs feel confident when implementing HR practices. The findings from the interview phase of this study suggest that HR support affects FLM confidence. The area of confidence in FLM implementation is therefore an interesting avenue for further exploration and research.

6.5.1.2 The impact of HR support on FLMs' wellbeing as they implement HR practices

(responding to RQIII)

A further aspect which emerged from the conversation with FLMs was the extent to which FLMs spoke about how the HR support they received affected their wellbeing. FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke of feeling alone and being left to cope without dedicated HR support and the stress and frustration they felt when their HR team did not have the skills to help them. Participant C2 described it in this way:

I do think at the moment it feels very lonely. I do feel that I have – I don't have that pillar, that person who could advise me on things very quickly that would relate to my direct reports. I do think that having an HR person [available] in person would just improve the way I interact with my team as well (Participant C2)

FLMs were not convinced that the support was there for them to access. As Participant C2 noted:

No, I just think that if I'm in a situation where I feel like I need support from HR, I just don't believe at this point in time that it's there to be gained (Participant C2)

FLMs shared their feelings of stress which they felt when they did not know what action needed to be taken or if they could not access the right level of HR support. They experienced heightened levels of stress if they were not confident in their HR role, as described by Participant C10:

If you don't feel that you're confident in that subject, again, it can be a stressful time for all parties involved (Participant C10)

A lack of support was experienced as an issue particularly during times of high stress while the business was going through change and turbulence, such as when the organisation was going through a round of redundancies. Participant C12 highlighted this gap:

So, going through restructuring and potential redundancy is high stress and you need – you look to your HR for support. It wasn't there (Participant C12)

At times, FLMs even felt that they knew more than their HR counterparts, on whom they were relying for expert knowledge and coaching. Participant C2 described their experience as follows:

Yes, very much so. It does make me feel a bit lonely as a people's manager... that just added to the level of stress and frustration when I was doing that. I was hoping that HR

would be the people who would help me understand the new reality and I ended up actually explaining it to them (Participant C2)

When FLMs *did* feel that they had access to a strong level of support from a HR team member, they talked about how much easier it made their role as a people manager. FLMs spoke of the support from HR freeing up their mental space to be able to complete other tasks instead of worrying that they were not taking the right action regarding an issue affecting one of their team members. At Organisation Offshore, Participant C21 explained how HR issues would play on their mind and how it impacted their stress level:

The (HR) issue is at the back of your mind and you are thinking about it and it impacts on your (overall) stress level as a manager (Participant C21)

FLMs at Organisation Onshore spoke of the effect that the HR support, which was available to them had on their wellbeing, and of the importance of not feeling that '*you are alone*'. Participant D4 highlighted the impact of HR support on how they felt about their role:

I think it's just nice to know that you're not totally alone (Participant D4)

Participant D15 summed it up in this way:

I never felt like I was out on a limb or abandoned. I knew that of the three people from HR that I had contact with, I would have been able to contact any one of them and been given advice, information or offered up the correct way to proceed on something. So, I did feel quite supported (Participant D15)

The findings of this study highlight the effects that HR support can have on FLMs' wellbeing. When the HR support model works well this not only frees up managers' time but also has a positive impact on FLMs' wellbeing. We might expect that the provision of HR support results in FLMs feeling encouraged that they have the information and skills to implement HR practices. However, the findings from this study illustrate that when FLMs feel unsupported this has a negative impact on their wellbeing. Irrespective of the location of the HR SSC delivery model, the evidence from this study is that the HR department influences FLMs' wellbeing as result of how they interact and provide HR advice.

6.5.1.3 The impact of HR support on perceptions of organisational support as they implement HR practices

During the interviews with the FLMs at these companies, FLMs were also asked whether the support they received from the HR function had an influence on how supported they felt overall by the organisation. FLMs at Organisation Onshore did feel that the support they received from HR was a key element in terms of their perceptions of the support they received from the company and that it was part of the overall offering from the company. Participant D1 summarised the key role that he felt HR played in the organisation:

For me, HR is part of the offer [of the organisation]. It's part of the overall environment and setting of a reason to work [at the organisation]. I wouldn't say it was the driving factor.... No, but it is certainly part of the picture... (Participant D1)

In contrast, FLMs at Organisation Offshore *did not* consider HR support as being an important element of their experience of working at the organisation. Participant C22's views reflected those of many of the FLMs at Organisation Offshore, that HR was just a small part of their working life, saying:

No, not especially. It just makes it harder to do stuff. But on a day-to-day basis I don't engage with HR, I only have to engage with HR sometimes, and it is an arduous process and it can be difficult but it doesn't impact on my general working life (Participant C22)

This is interesting, as in this study there was evidence that the FLMs at Organisation Offshore received less support. The finding that FLMs at Organisation Offshore did not view HR support as key to how supported they felt by their organisation could be because of their low expectations of HR support, and this could link back to findings by Piening, (2014) that when FLMs have experience of poorer HR support then they reduce their expectations regarding the HR support they believe they will receive. The mixed findings regarding the contribution of HR support to the FLMs' overall view of the support by the organisation was noteworthy. Further research is required to understand the extent to which FLMs' perceptions of HR support influence FLMs' perceived organisational support (POS).

6.5.1.4 Impact of HR support on FLMs' motivation as they implement HR practices

There is some evidence in the literature to date to suggest that when FLMs feel supported by the organisation this results in increased levels of motivation to execute HR practices (Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2018). When FLMs perceive the organisation to be investing in supporting them through its HR departments then they are more likely to be motivated to engage in active implementation. In the

present study, when asked if the support from the HR function had impacted their motivation to perform their management roles, many of the FLMs interviewed felt that the support they received from HR was only a small part of their overall experience at work, and so other factors had more of an impact on their motivation.

Participant C6 was one of many FLMs at Organisation Offshore who felt that the HR support they received did not affect their motivation.

No, I don't think it does. I think that the motivation comes from the job itself and wanting to help my team achieve (Participant C6)

FLMs felt that their line manager or the role itself had more of an impact on their job motivation. It appeared that HR processes which did not work efficiently did however lead to frustration, and some FLMs found this to be demotivating. One of these FLMs was Participant C7, who spoke of delays in the recruitment process leading to loss of good quality candidates or to additional workload for existing team members:

I think it can [affect my motivation], I think definitely, like during that time when I was recruiting someone into my team and I didn't feel like I was getting very helpful support from the talent team. I found that, yeah, pretty frustrating and a bit demotivating because you're sort of being asked to do most of the process yourself, but there's this person who's sort of presumably meant to be helping you, but actually is slowing things down (Participant C7)

At Organisation Onshore, FLMs were more mixed in terms of their responses in this area, with some FLMs feeling that if the support were not there from HR, it would be demotivating for them, but that if HR support was not at the right level this would be more of an annoyance or frustration than a significant demotivator. Participant D8 voiced the thoughts of many FLMs at Organisation Onshore, saying:

No, I think I'm pretty self-motivated. No, I wouldn't say [the HR support I receive affects my motivation as a line manager] (Participant D8)

The majority of FLMs at both organisations did not feel that the support they received from the HR department had a negative effect on their motivation to carry out their people management tasks; however, we have seen in the previous section that the support they received *did* have an effect on their wellbeing. This finding suggests that FLMs at both case study organisations were not in agreement regarding the effect of HR support on their motivation, with many FLMs at

Organisation Offshore concluding that, despite poor HR support, they still felt motivated to implement HR practices and carry out their HR managerial duties. This is in contrast to findings from other studies, such as Bos-Nehles *et al.*, (2013), which suggest that HR support is positively correlated with FLM motivation. Table 19 summarises the effect of the HR SSC on FLM attitudes. **Figure 19** Summarises the effect of HR support on FLMs' attitudes. The effect of the HR support on others around the FLM is explored in the following section (section 6.5.2).

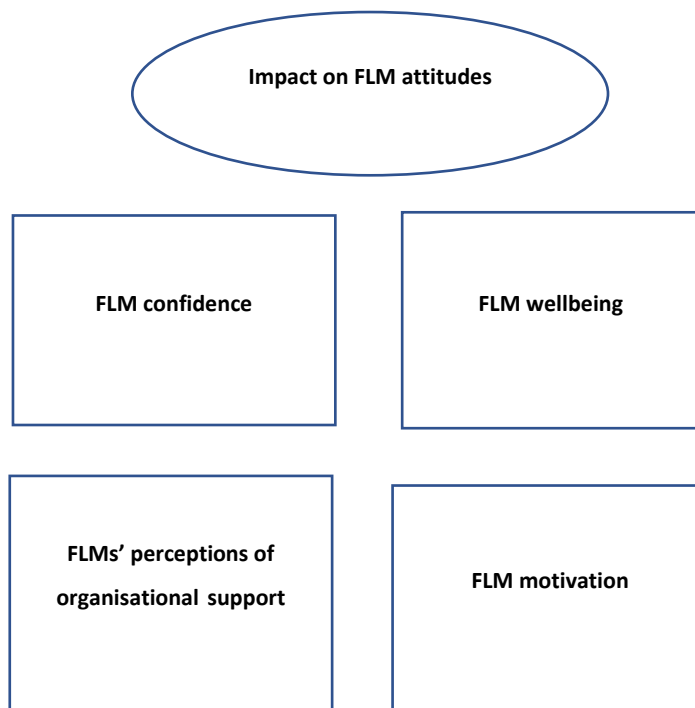


Figure 19 Thematic map summarising the impact of the HR support structure on FLMs' attitudes

Table 19 Dimension 1: Summary of the effect of the HR SSC structure on FLMs' attitudes

Dimension 1: Effect of HR support on FLMs attitudes	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
FLM confidence	<p>FLMs at both organisations described, unprompted, the link between the HR support they had received and how confident they felt in making HR decisions.</p> <p>FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke often about the effect of HR support or lack of HR support on their confidence.</p> <p>FLMs at Organisation Offshore mentioned confidence more frequently than FLMs at Organisation Onshore, suggesting that deficiencies in the support provided by Organisation Offshore led to confidence issues amongst FLMs. Issues with the support provided by the offshore HR SSC model appeared to have a negative effect on FLM confidence in their role.</p>	<p>FLMs at both organisations described the link between the HR support they had received and how confident they felt in making HR decisions.</p> <p>For FLMs at Organisation Onshore the fact that they could access effective HR support via their onshore HR shared service centre meant that, in turn, they felt more confident in carrying out their managerial tasks.</p>

Dimension 1: Effect of HR support on FLMs attitudes	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
<p>FLM wellbeing</p>	<p>FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke of feeling alone and left to cope without dedicated HR support, and the stress and frustration they felt when their HR team did not have the skills to help them.</p> <p>FLMs spoke of feeling '<i>lonely</i>' and of the fact that deficiencies in HR support were having a negative effect on their stress levels at work.</p> <p>Issues with the HR SSC delivery model appeared to be contributing to issues with stress and wellbeing amongst the FLMs in this organisation. The offshore location of the HR SSC may well have contributed to this feeling of being alone and the fact that this was the '<i>face of HR</i>'. This is an area which would need to be explored further in future research.</p>	<p>In contrast, FLMs at Organisation Onshore spoke of the effect that the HR support which was available to them had on their wellbeing and of the importance of not feeling that '<i>you are not alone</i>'.</p> <p>The HR support available to these FLMs via the HR shared services delivery model was having a positive influence on their wellbeing at work.</p> <p>The feedback gathered from FLMs at Organisation Onshore suggests that an effective HR SSC model can in fact have a positive effect on FLM wellbeing.</p>

Dimension 1: Effect of HR support on FLMs attitudes	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
<p>FLM perceived organisational support (POS)</p>	<p>FLMs at Organisation Offshore <i>did not</i> consider HR support as being an important element of their experience of working at the organisation, suggesting, e.g., that HR was just a small part of their working life.</p> <p>For FLMs at Organisation Offshore, other factors, such as the role itself and the mission of the organisation, had a greater impact on POS than the HR support they received from the HR department.</p> <p>This was an interesting finding, suggesting that for FLMs at this organisation they valued other parts of the employee value proposition offered by the organisation more highly than the effectiveness of the HR support offered via the HR shared service centre. These FLMs viewed HR support as just one part of the employee proposition.</p>	<p>Some FLMs at Organisation Onshore <i>did</i> however feel that the support they received from HR was a key element in terms of their perceptions of the support they received from the company and saw the support from HR as being part of the overall offering from the company.</p> <p>This finding suggests that for some FLMs, the HR support they received <i>did have a positive effect</i> on how supported they felt overall by their organisation; however, for others this was not the case. The mixed feedback regarding the linkage between POS and HR support made it difficult to draw any firm conclusions regarding the HR SSC delivery location and FLM POS.</p>

Dimension 1: Effect of HR support on FLMs attitudes	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
FLM motivation	<p>FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke about the fact that in certain situations the lack of HR support could be demotivating. However, in general, FLMs did not feel that the support they received from HR had a significant impact on their motivation.</p> <p>This finding regarding FLM motivation and the finding concerning the effect of HR support on FLM POS is interesting as it contrasts with the strong views from FLMs that issues with the HR support they received via the HR shared service centre had a negative effect on their levels of confidence and wellbeing. This could be linked to FLMs expectations of the service and the fact that they have found ways to access information from other sources.</p> <p>Further exploration is required however to be able to draw evidence based conclusions.</p>	<p>FLMs at Organisation Onshore were similarly mixed in terms of their responses regarding the effect of the HR support on their overall motivation to carry out managerial tasks, with some FLMs feeling that if the support were not there from HR, this would be demotivating for them, but that if HR support were not at the right level this would be more of an annoyance or frustration than a significant demotivator.</p> <p>The evidence from this study was not conclusive regarding the effect of the HR SSC delivery model on FLM motivation.</p>

6.5.2 Dimension 2: Impact of HR support provided to FLMs on others at the organisation

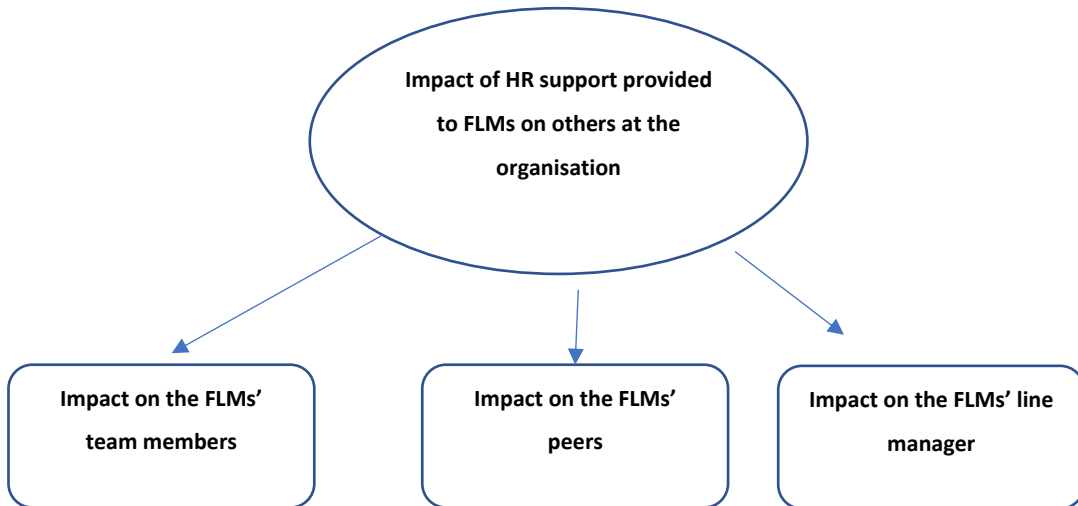


Figure 20 Impact of the HR support provided to FLMs on others and associated themes

6.5.2.1 Impact of HR support provided to FLMs on how they implement HR practices with their team members

The findings from this study also highlighted the effect of deficits in HR support on others around the FLM at the organisation. The interviews with FLMs included a discussion with FLMs about how much of an impact the HR support they received had, e.g., on their team members. This is an area that the implementation literature has not considered, and the researcher wished therefore to explore it in this phase of the study. FLMs at both organisations were keen to provide accurate information to their team members; they spoke of issues that emerged when they were not aware that a policy had been changed, and therefore felt that they had been dealt with unfairly by team members. FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke about the effect of not being clear about a HR policy on both the team member involved and the FLM's credibility.

Participant C25 discussed the issue of feeling that they had not supported their team or had given them incorrect information.

Yeah. Because you – especially dependent on the scenario, you don't want any repercussions coming back to you as a manager, and you don't want to feel that you've

*not supported your team or you've given them misleading or inaccurate information
(Participant C25)*

This concern was also echoed in comments from other FLMs at Organisation Offshore, such as Participants C25 and C9:

Yeah, you need to make sure what's going back to them is right, because there's nothing worse than giving them an answer and then going back a day later and saying, actually, I got that one wrong (Participant C25)

FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke of the embarrassment they felt when a process such as the new starter process was not handled smoothly by the HR team and their new starter did not then have a smooth introduction to the company, or when delays in the recruitment process meant that other team members had to take on additional workload.

This issue was highlighted by Participant C22 in the following comment:

It took 6-8 weeks to get a new person on board, which meant that by the time we got the new person on board we had lost the handover and KT period. This has a business impact when we can't get people in quickly as everyone is so over-stretched (Participant C22)

FLMs at Organisation Onshore also spoke about the impact that HR support had on their credibility as a FLM and their desire to ensure that the information they provided to team members was accurate and complete. They felt that any issues with the HR support resulted in disgruntled employees and delays in recruitment, or negatively impacted on their capacity to set up new starters, resulting in additional stress for their team members and wasted time for the new starters and the organisation. This in turn also reflected badly on the organisation and impacted its reputation. They felt that because of such issues they ended up stepping in to smooth over problems.

Participant D11 voiced their concern that this was something they felt that they should not have to do:

Yeah, and we can smooth that over because we've got a good relationship, but I don't think that's the way it should be (Participant D11)

The negative effects of misinformation or issues with the HR process were keenly felt by the FLMs at both organisations who discussed the effect on their credibility with team members. FLMs at both organisations described in detail how their team members were negatively affected when the FLM did not receive accurate information from the HR department or when a HR process was not executed as expected. They talked of issues with team members being paid incorrectly, new starters not having the correct logins, or equipment or team members being overloaded as a result, e.g., of the recruitment process not working efficiently.

Data from this study confirms that FLMs at both organisations had experienced the need to resolve issues created when the HR system did not work efficiently, irrespective of whether HR support was provided by an offshore or onshore shared service team. However, when the delivery model worked effectively it reduced the need for FLMs to step in to avoid negative effects being experienced by their team members. The location of the HR SSC, such as an offshore model resulting in issues with, e.g., the clarity of communication or lack of tacit knowledge, in turn had an effect not only on FLMs themselves but also on their team members.

6.5.2.2 Impact on their peers of a lack of HR support provided to FLMs as they implemented HR practices with their team members

This study also found that FLMs frequently turned to their peers when the HR delivery model was not working efficiently. FLMs at Organisation Offshore felt that, depending on their query, it was often easier to approach a peer first, especially if they knew that their peer had recently had to work on a similar query or process. They would also refer to a peer if they needed the name of a person in the HR function who had been a good one to deal with on a specific topic. The comment from Participant C13 summed up the views of many FLMs from both organisations:

I (would) attempt to do it more with other line managers than my business partner, just because if one of us has been through it we've all been through it and it's useful to get that (Participant C13)

Participant C3 concurred with this view:

Yeah, there are a few peers that, you know, I know they've had some interesting situations in the past, so I'll probably go to them and say, I've got this issue, what should we do about it (Participant C3).

FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke about creating their own informal management networks to share ideas and best practices within their business unit. Some FLMs mentioned that colleagues would come to them for advice as they had been with the company for a long time. FLMs

mentioned that if they did not have a strong relationship with their colleagues, or if they were based in a different country where the same policies were not applicable, then they would not go to their peers first to discuss a HR issue. FLMs at Organisation Onshore also spoke of going to their peers if there was a HR query that they were dealing with and if they felt that a colleague might have had a similar issue in the past. Participant D21 talked about the fact that it is often easier to check first with colleagues if they had had experience of a particular HR issue, explaining it in this way:

I would go to colleagues if I knew someone had experience of a particular issue, yeah, I would. I think it's natural to try and equip yourself with as much as information as possible before you start a conversation (Participant D21)

This was explained by Participant D1 as follows:

Yeah. Invariably somebody in the team, one of the other managers, has had to do this before and so has found the information, and so it will be somewhere in the back of their brain. Ah yes, that wasn't where I expected it to be, it was here. You rely on your colleagues, actually, who've been in [company name] a lot longer than I have, to guide you through the process (Participant D1)

The evidence from this study is, therefore, that when the HR delivery model is ineffective FLMs will refer to peers for advice (Organisation Offshore), but even when the HR delivery model is functioning well FLMs will still refer to colleagues for advice as an additional source of information (Organisation Offshore). Although the location of the HR SSC was not key in the case of this finding, the finding may nevertheless be useful to HR departments when considering their HR SSC delivery model and how they can make use of informal peer-to-peer networks to share information, rather than rely on the use of more formal channels.

6.5.2.3 Impact on their own supervisor's time of a deficit of HR support provided to FLMs

The study found some evidence that FLMs consulted their own line managers if they were unsure and needed advice regarding a HR issue that concerned one of their employees. This was the case for FLMs at both organisations and so did not appear to be linked to the delivery model in place. Some FLMs at Organisation Offshore would go to their own line manager first as their default approach even before they contacted HR about the issue. Participant C7 suggested that their FLM would be the first person they would go to for any HR issues:

Yeah, well I mean I would normally go to my own manager first... I think it would always be my preference and my first port of call (Participant C7)

Other FLMs at Organisation Offshore mentioned they would go to their line manager with HR queries, but that it would depend on the relationship with them or the skills and experience of their line manager.

Participant C23 talked about the fact that whilst they would normally go to their line manager, they would not be able to help with all types of queries:

You know, for a lot of things, I just go to my direct line manager. That's basically what I do, and then occasionally he'll direct me to the HR person. Yeah, that's why I do it, really, because it does work very well... But obviously he can't help with everything, because... yeah, some things are beyond his remit, or he doesn't know, so he passes me on (Participant C23)

Figure 21 summarises the effect of HR support on others around the FLM, and Table 20 summarises the effect of the HR SSC delivery model on others around the FLM. The study findings highlight that the formal delivery model in organisations could be an outdated way of considering HR support, as FLMs access HR advice from multiple sources, e.g., from peers, other colleagues in the organisation or their own line managers. The delivery model therefore could be expanded to take this fact into account, ensuring that, e.g., the approach to HR communications considers the many ways in which FLMs access HR support in the organisation.

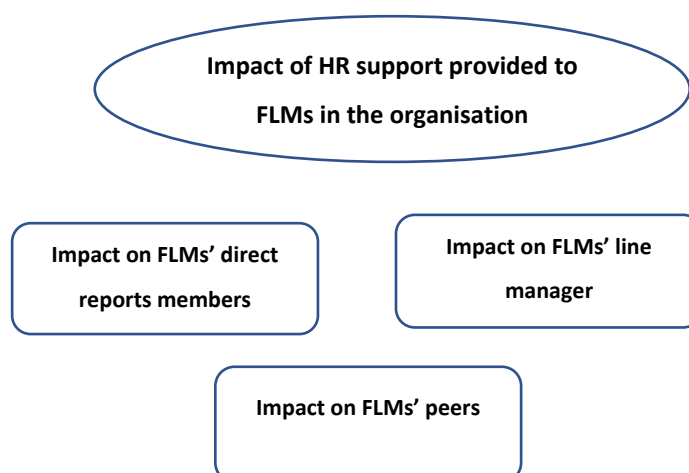


Figure 21 Thematic map summarising the impact of FLMs' HR support on others in the organisation

Table 20 Dimension 2: Summary of the effect of the HR SSC structure on those around the FLM

Dimension 2: Effect of HR support on others around the FLM	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
<p>FLM's team members</p>	<p>When asked about how the issues with the support they received from the HR SSC had impacted their team members, FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke about the effect that not being clear on a HR policy had on the team member involved and on the FLM's credibility. FLMs at Organisation Offshore also spoke of the embarrassment they felt when a process such as the new starter process was not handled smoothly by the HR team, with the consequence that their new starter did not then have a smooth introduction to the company.</p> <p>Deficiencies in the support provided by the offshore HR shared services teams had negative effects not just on the FLM themselves and their workload and stress levels, but also on the FLMs' team members. The fact that the HR SSC was based offshore was less important than the fact that the service it offered did not meet the expectations of the FLMs.</p>	<p>FLMs at both organisations described how deficiencies in the support they received from the HR SSC teams also resulted in issues for their team members. FLMs at Organisation Onshore spoke about the impact of issues with the HR support they received on their credibility as a FLM and their desire to ensure that the information they provided to team members was accurate and complete. They felt that any issues with the HR support resulted in disgruntled employees and delays in recruitment, or negatively impacted setting up new starters, resulting in additional stress for their team members and wasted time for the new starters and the organisation. This in turn reflected badly on the organisation and impacted its reputation.</p> <p>Irrespective of whether the HR SSC was offshore or onshore, issues with the service provided led in turn to issues for FLMs' team members.</p>

Dimension 2: Effect of HR support on others around the FLM	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
<p>FLM's peers</p>	<p>FLMs at Organisation Offshore experienced issues at times with the service provided by the offshore HR shared service team and felt that, depending on their query, it was often easier to approach a peer first, especially if they knew that their peer had recently worked on a similar query or process.</p> <p>FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke about creating their own informal management networks to share ideas and best practices within their business unit. This appeared to be an information channel which FLMs frequently leveraged first before going to the HR SSC.</p> <p>The finding reflects the fact that deficiencies in the HR SSC service resulted in time spent by others in the organisation ensuring that HR queries were dealt with. However, turning to peers may also be a result of the personal preferences of the FLM. Furthermore, the location of the HR SSC offshore was not the material factor in this finding.</p>	<p>Even though they were more likely to be happy with the service offered by the HR shared service team than FLMs at Organisation Offshore, FLMs at Organisation Onshore also spoke of going to their peers if there was a HR query which they were dealing with and if they felt that a colleague may have had a similar issue in the past.</p> <p>This finding suggests that informal networks will need to be leveraged by HR departments as well as the formal HR delivery model even when the HR SSC is working effectively.</p>

Dimension 2: Effect of HR support on others around the FLM	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being offshore	Effect on this dimension of the HR SSC structure being onshore
FLM's line manager	The study found some evidence that FLMs consulted their own line managers if they were unsure and needed advice regarding a HR issue with one of their employees. This was the case for FLMs at both organisations and so did not appear to be linked to the delivery model in place or the location of the HR SSC.	FLMs from both organisations confirmed that they would refer to their own line managers before accessing HR support via the HR SSC delivery model, depending on the query. This finding suggests that irrespective of the location of the HR SSC some FLMs may prefer to access HR support from their own managers.

6.6 Chapter summary

The qualitative phase of this study set out to examine the differences which the HR SC delivery location may have on FLMS. This chapter outlined the key differences between the two case study organisations with HR SSC teams based either onshore or offshore. The study findings reflected the fact that when the HR SSC team is based offshore this can have a negative influence on clarity of communication, salience of the information shared, frequency of communication, ease of accessing HR information and the tacit knowledge of the HR team. The chapter highlighted that the service quality provided by the HR SSC can have a negative effect on the confidence and wellbeing of FLMS and can also affect those around the FLM such as team members, peers, and the FLMS' line managers.

Chapter 6 offered the findings and analysis for the research questions, building on the quantitative results (Chapter 4) and the treatment of qualitative data (Chapter 5), which are linked to the literature review (Chapter 2). Section 6.3 and 6.4 focused on the findings in response to Research Question I and Research Question II. Section 6.5 outlined the findings relating to Research Question III. The next chapter provides a discussion of the contribution of the findings, how these findings fit in with the current literature, the theoretical contributions, and the practical implications.

Chapter 7 Discussion and Contribution

7.1 Introduction

This study gathered evidence to explore which aspects of HR support First Line Managers (FLMs) value most and examined the effects of the HR SSC delivery model, based either offshore or onshore, to contribute to our understanding of the HR implementation process. The findings from this study illustrate key areas which are important to FLMs when it comes to their perceptions of HR support. This chapter is set out as follows. Section 7.2 provides a discussion of findings relating to Research Questions I and II: ‘Which elements of HR support do FLMs value most when implementing HR practices?’ and ‘to what extent does the location of the HR SSC influence FLMs’ perceptions of the elements of HR support which they value most?’ Section 7.3 outlines the influence of FLM HR support on others in the organisation in response to research question III: ‘How does the HR support received by FLMs influence managers’ behaviours when implementing HR practices?’. The theoretical contribution of this study is outlined in section 7.4 and the practical contribution of the study is set out in section 7.5.

7.2 Discussion findings relating to research questions I and II: ‘Which elements of HR support do FLMs value most when implementing HR practices?’ and ‘To what extent does the location of the HR SSC influence FLMs’ perceptions of the elements of HR support which they value most?’

The findings from this study illustrate key areas which are important to FLMs when it comes to their perceptions of HR support. FLMs shared the opinion that the following aspects of the service they received were significant in affecting how they see the HR service; these areas were effectiveness of communication and the quality of HR skills and knowledge – in particular, tacit knowledge and knowledge of their business area. The researcher explored each area in turn with participants to determine the effect of the HR SSC delivery model and its location. The following section discusses the implications of the findings.

7.2.1 The importance to FLMs of the quality of HR communication

The findings from the qualitative phase of the study (outlined in chapter 6) illustrate the importance of HR communication as well as serve to highlight the effect which the HR SSC can have on communication between the HR department and FLMs. FLMs are required to take ownership in sharing key HR messages with their team members, ‘*translating*’ these messages for team members if they are unclear and shaping their understanding of these messages (Purcell and Hutchison, 2007; Woodrow and Guest, 2014; Sikora and Ferris, 2014). The HR literature positions clarity of message as a key element of a ‘*strong*’ HR system (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004);

avoiding variability in messaging has been highlighted previously as an important issue for organisations wishing to create a ‘strong’ HR system to avoid the same message being interpreted differently across the organisation, subject to individual interpretation by employees (Sikora and Ferris, 2015; Dello Russo *et al.*, 2018). The degree to which FLMs deliver unambiguous HR messages to employees during implementation has been linked in previous studies to outcomes such as the intensity of HR practices at team level and has been linked to team performance (Pak and Kim, 2018). In addition, Chow (2012) and Chuang and Liao (2010) suggest that a positive work environment will increase employee competence and motivation and, in turn, organisational performance. However, to be able to efficiently transmit the goals of HR practices, FLMs must perceive messages from the HR department as being consistent and unambiguous (Canet and Ginar, 2020). When effective communication is not in place, implementation gaps are more likely to occur, e.g., when HR policies are outlined only on paper (Khilji and Wang, 2006) and are not implemented consistently by managers. An efficient communication process established between the HR department and line FLMs is therefore required so that information about the expected goals and results of a HR practice is provided (Canet-Ginar, 2020). This study expands on these findings regarding the importance of communication by examining communication in more depth.

The findings of this study go further than previous studies by explicitly showing the individual aspects of effective communication between the HR department and FLMs from the FLMs’ perspective. The findings highlight the characteristics of communication which can either contribute to or hinder effective implementation by FLMs, providing evidence of the specific attributes which are important to an effective HR implementation process.

Whilst communication has been highlighted in the literature as being important to implementation (e.g., Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Den Hartog *et al.*, 2013; Garcia-Carbonell *et al.*, 2016), limited attention has been devoted to the specific elements of HR communication which make a difference to FLMs’ implementation of HR practices. The findings from this present study bridge this gap by highlighting that communication from the HR department needs to have four key characteristics to be seen as effective by FLMs it needs to be:

- i) Clear
- ii) Salient
- iii) Offered frequently (timing of the communication)
- iv) Easy for FLMs to access.

The FLMs in this study suggested that the extent to which these characteristics are present in the communication from the HR department influenced not only their perceptions of the HR service but also their willingness to engage with colleagues in the HR department. These factors should therefore be seen as significant by HR departments and should be prioritised to

facilitate effective HR implementation by FLMs. Successful implementation of HR practices leads to improved organisational performance (Chow, 2012) and this study helps to build a more nuanced view of the elements of communication which are important to FLMs in their implementation of HR practices. This study highlights that a lack of clarity of information, a lack of messaging at the appropriate time, a lack of salient messaging from the HR department, or the presence of information, which is not easy to access, all impacted FLMs' implementation. Each contributed to FLMs having to take time away from other managerial tasks to confirm the accuracy of the information received. Issues with any of these four characteristics of HR communication had a negative influence on the time FLMs took to implement HR practices and the time available to FLMs to handle other operational tasks. Expanding on Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) theory of a '*strong HR system*', the evidence from the qualitative phase of this study contributes to the existing implementation knowledge by confirming the importance to FLMs of the implementation of these four key characteristics of HR communication.

The findings also demonstrate that when the information FLMs received from the HR department was unclear, FLMs felt stressed and spent time communicating further with the HR department to confirm that the information they had received was accurate. One further effect of the lack of clarity regarding channels and HR messaging was that when information from the HR department was unclear FLMs would turn instead to their peers for information. This ripple effect of poor communication on other organisational actors is discussed further in section 7.5.

Turning to consider the effect of the HR SSC structure in providing support to FLMs, previous literature has suggested that the effectiveness of HRM depends on more than the presence of good HRM practices; the context in which the practices are applied is also important (Bos-Nehles, 2013). This study considered the consequences of the HR SSC location on clarity of information and looked at the context in which the interactions between the HR department and FLM take place. The study aimed to delve into the organisational context in which FLMs were operating and being supported, focusing on the HR SSC element. In doing so, the study sought to contribute to knowledge by looking at the implications of the reality of how HR support is provided (Tyskbo, 2020).

The Ulrich HR delivery model (Ulrich, 1997) contains many areas of overlap and linkages which need to be carried out smoothly if this model is to be successful for the end consumers of the service, adding a layer of complexity to HR communication with FLMs. For the model to be successful it requires a strong relationship to be built between the HR SSC team and the centres of excellence teams such as the Reward and Talent or Recruitment teams. Communication with the HR business partners is also key to its success. There are therefore many potential ways for communication to go wrong. Furthermore, the establishment of a HR SSC may

result in additional complexity as FLMs are encouraged to contact the HR SSC using a ticketing system or shared mailbox. The evidence from this study is that the availability of multiple channels to contact the HR SSC can result in confusion and frustration for FLMs if they are unsure about which channel to use. The study findings expose the multiple effect of HR SSCs not just on the user experience but also on FLMs' work life in terms of time spent trying to access accurate information regarding HR queries.

In addition, many organisations choose not to co-locate HR SSC teams with their business teams, and when the HR SSC is based offshore the effect can be to create a psychological as well as physical distance between the HR SSC and the business area it is supporting, as suggested by Francis *et al.*,(2014). Ulrich (1995) himself suggests that HR SSC workers should be co-located with their business teams rather than physically centralised. In situations when the organisation does not focus on coordination between the different teams in the model, the evidence from this study is that this can lead to inaccurate or misleading information. In addition, when HR SSCs are based remotely from the business teams which they support, e.g., located offshore, there is a risk that the HR SSC team may be seen as separate or '*semi-detached*' from the rest of the HR department (Redman *et al.*, 2007).

This study is unique, to this researcher's knowledge, in contributing to existing implementation knowledge by carrying out a comparison of two HR SSCs, each based in a different location – one offshore and one onshore – which allowed the researcher the chance to test the hypothesis that choosing to locate a HR SSC offshore will result in lower service provision to FLMs. By examining the interactions between FLMs and the HR SSC, this study contributes to our procedural understanding of HRM and suggests that when considering the effect of the location of the HR SSC, the picture is more nuanced than a binary conclusion that onshore is good and offshore is bad for FLM perceptions of HR support and implementation. The study allowed the researcher to explore the communication process in two different delivery models, with HR SSC teams based either remotely or closer to the business headquarters. The findings suggest that the inclusion of an offshore delivery element leads to increased complexity; and, as a result, unless there is a focus on the effectiveness of communication between teams, gaps in communication may occur.

This study also concluded that a HR delivery model which includes an HR SSC element can have a negative influence on the ability of the HR team to provide communication which is tailored to the end user. In the two participating case study organisations the HR SSC is the key interface between the FLM and the HR department, and therefore staff members working in the HR SSC need to be able to clearly explain to FLMs the message to be conveyed and the actions required of the FLM. To avoid issues with communication, practitioners need to be aware of the

possible problems which can occur when the HR SSC is located offshore; to facilitate effective implementation by FLMs, HR departments will need to proactively and systematically address these matters. At Organisation Offshore the HR team had been given training and guidance on the provision of standardised messaging to users of the HR service. However, FLMs expected messages to be tailored to their particular concerns and business areas and so there was a mismatch of expectations.

FLMs at Organisation Offshore shared their concerns that the messaging they received was not always relevant to their teams, leading to a loss of credibility for the FLM or time being wasted checking that the information was correct. The evidence gathered from Organisation Offshore suggested that with an offshore HR delivery team, supporting managers' HR practice implementation issues occurred because of poor communication or a lack of tailored and appropriate messaging. At Organisation Onshore, FLMs spoke of the knowledge which the HR department had regarding their business area and the ability of the HR team to share accurate information tailored to their requests. The findings from this study contributed to the existing HR SSC literature regarding the effects of HR SSCs, demonstrating the impact of the HR delivery models on FLMs and their implementation of HR practices. Furthermore, the findings highlight the need for organisations to consider HR communication as an integral element when establishing an effective HR SSC delivery structure which provides FLMs with the information they require- information which is clear, salient, provided at the right time and easy to access. The implications of providing an effective HR support structure are significant, as FLMs influence the organisational climate surrounding their team members, and so the strength of the HR system, and its effectiveness in providing clear messaging to FLMs are likely to influence the organisational climate of that team in a negative or positive way. The effects on team members reporting to the FLM are discussed further in section 7.3.2.

Salience of messaging has been explored only in a limited way in the implementation literature, with evidence from the study by Garg (2020) finding that HR salience moderates the relationship between HR practice and HR outcome, and findings from Chacko *et al.*, (2019) suggesting that the salience of messaging has an impact on the daily engagement of employees. The findings from this present study contribute to previous evidence by suggesting that FLMs expected that the information shared with them should be relevant to them or to their business unit rather than just generic. This was an issue for FLMs at Organisation Offshore, who felt that the information they received was often not relevant for their business area, which led to frustration and stress for these FLMs. The evidence from this study highlights the importance of providing information to managers which is relevant to their team and business unit and to the specific questions they need responses to. When information provided by the HR department was seen to be '*generic*,' the result was that FLMs felt less supported and more frustrated. This

finding, although intuitive, is not one which has been previously shared in the literature and has enhanced our understanding of the effect of communication on the implementation process. The impact of this finding is discussed further in the contribution to practice (section 7.5).

These study findings reveal that the HR SSC delivery model can have a negative effect on system strength, and this organisational structure can result in the provision of standardised responses rather than of salient responses. As a result, if the information is not tailored to the FLM's business area, the HR SSC model may result in less effective FLM implementation. Whilst consistency of implementation is an integral element of creating a strong HR system, individual FLMs will have their own expectations of the HR support offered. This means that to create a strong system and to provide consistent implementation, information which is tailored to each FLM will need to be offered.

The frequency and timing of communication was a further element which FLMs confirmed was important to them. This finding contributes to existing knowledge, as the frequency and timing of HR communication are not characteristics of communication which have been highlighted as being important in the implementation literature to date. Makhecha *et al.*, (2018) describe disablers of HR communication, suggesting that '*experiential disablers*' of HR communication include the low communication of HR practices and that infrequent communication prevents effective implementation. Frequency of communication is referenced by Den Hartog *et al.*, (2013); however, the focus of the study by these authors is not on how the HR department communicate with managers but instead on how managers communicated with their team members. The present study therefore extends the existing literature by putting a spotlight on how FLMs expect to receive responses to their questions in a timely manner from the HR department and to be kept updated. This finding builds on previous findings by McGovern *et al.*, (1997), Cunningham and Hyman (1999) and McConville and Holden (2006) regarding managers' time pressures. The study illustrates that the way in which the HR department structures support for FLMs can also add to FLMs' time pressures. As FLMs may need to access specific HR policies relatively infrequently, the lack of proactive or timely updates about HR information or policy changes can be viewed by managers, thereby negatively affecting their perceptions of HR support.

Finally, ease of access to key HR information was frequently mentioned by FLMs in this study as being a key aspect of HR communication which influenced their perceptions of the HR support they received. The evidence gathered from FLMs in this study show that when FLMs struggled with the ease of usage of the self-service system this led to negative perceptions of the service they received and to frustration and increased levels of stress. A previous study by Bondarouk *et al.*, (2009) looked at ease of usage of HR technology and found that even if users believe that a given application is useful, they may still believe that the systems are too difficult to

work with and that the performance benefits of usage are outweighed by the effort required. This study found that when managers viewed information as difficult to access, they also developed a more negative view of the quality of support they were receiving from the HR department. This finding highlights the need for HR teams to consider the views of the end user of the service when designing HR information systems.

The implementation of HR shared service structures frequently goes hand in hand with the roll out of self-service technology. This self-service technology results in the creation of a variety of different channels through which FLMs access HR support. Blom *et al.*, (2019) highlighted the importance of considering not just the technical aspects but also '*the people requirement*' when it comes to successful IT system implementation. The findings of this study illustrate the issues which can arise when changes to the HR support structure and the channels used to access support are unclear to FLMs. FLMs at Organisation Offshore felt that the technology implemented with the HR SSC led to a variety of channels which they could use to access HR information, e.g., via raising a ticket, checking information via an online portal, calling, or messaging the HR teams. This resulted in confusion at times regarding which channel was appropriate, and some confusion around how to categorise their request using the ticketing form, which contained drop down categories. The confusion around which channel to use and whether they had completed the ticketing form correctly led to higher stress levels for some FLMs. In contrast, ease of access to information was not a concern for FLMs at Organisation Onshore, where there were fewer channels to access information and just one Sharepoint site, which FLMs concluded was easy to access and use to find information. In alignment with self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977), the study findings suggest that belief in one's ability to perform a task will be positively related to task performance. This theory would suggest that when the delivery model makes accessing the HR department more difficult this has a negative effect on FLMs' ability to access answers to their HR questions and as a result negatively affects FLMs' perceptions of the HR support they receive. In this case, the location of the HR SSC was not the material factor but instead how easy the HR SSC made it for FLMs to access support.

The effectiveness of communication between FLMs and the HR department is critical, as FLMs work closely with team members to support organisational performance as well as employee wellbeing (Hewett *et al.*, 2018). If FLMs are clear on the content and benefits of HR practices, they can strengthen the commitment of employees and encourage positive employee contribution. It makes sense to hear that, from the evidence of this study, if FLMs have the resources and support to be able to structure effective conversations with employees about HR practices this will have a positive effect on organisational desired outcomes. The understanding and ability of each FLM to convey key messages regarding HR practices to team members is vital.

It is difficult to separate the effect of the location of the HR SSC from other factors such as the efficiency of the hiring and training of HR SSC. Previous studies suggest that, in addition to

cost reduction, HR SSCs increase the value of HRM services (Redman et al., 2007; McCracken and McIvor, 2013) and help to free up HR business partners to adopt a more strategic role (Farndale et al., 2009; Meijerink and Bondarouk, 2013). The findings from this study reveal, however, that HR SSCs, irrespective of location, need to place particular focus on the effectiveness of communication, and in particular the clarity, frequency and salience of messaging, and the ease of access to HR information. If HR SSC teams wish to be perceived by FLMs as effective they will need to focus on ensuring that the HR SSC staff have appropriate communication skills as well as the technical skills to have a positive influence on the perceptions of FLMs regarding HR support.

This study also supports the importance of the establishment of a personal relationship between the HR SSC and the business units who are end users of the HR SSC service, to facilitate strong communication. We know about the importance of the quality of the interactions between the employee and the HR service provider (Gilbert *et al.*, 2011), but for HR SSC teams who are employees of the organisation and who are not employed by an external service provider a focus on building a trusting relationship between the HR SSC and the business unit also appears to be important. The existence of a strong relationship results in the HR SSC devoting more of its scarce resources to that business unit, resulting in a higher perceived value of service (Maatman and Meijerink, 2017). Furthermore, Nguyen *et al.*, (2018) suggest that when an organisation values the role of the HR department then managers are likely to involve the HR department in strategic decision making. Bos-Nehles *et al.*, (2018) frame the relationship between the FLM and the HR department as a social process which relies on the social exchange relationship between the organisational actors. This study's findings confirm that the relationship between the manager and HR professionals should continue to be invested in, as this will accordingly allow HR professionals to narrow the gap between intended and actual HR practices (Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2018).

The findings of this study also demonstrate the risk which companies take by moving HR support teams to an offshore or other remote location and points to evidence that, as a result, FLMs feel that the HR department is no longer visible or has '*disappeared*'. The study provides evidence that FLMs' perception that the HR department is now '*absent*' or no longer visible will have a negative impact on how they view the overall service received from the HR department. The findings from this study also emphasise that when the HR SSC team is not physically located in the same country or office as the FLM there is a need for the HR department to place particular focus on the communication between the HR SSC and FLM. Building a personal relationship is likely to require additional organisational focus and effort. The establishment of a strong, trusting relationship was easier for FLMs at Organisation Onshore as they were able to speak with their HR SSC team face to face when they were present in the HQ office. The evidence from this study suggest that HR SSCs need to invest in communication to support the establishment of strong social relationships between the HR SSC and FLMs to ensure more tailored responses, which is the

key to the HR SSC's organisational success and FLMs' perceptions of the HR service.

It has been argued that FLMs will view the level of HR support available to them as showing the extent to which they are valued and supported as employees of the organisation. The establishment of the HR SSC may lead to employees feeling demoralised and disillusioned. They may perceive that the company has '*de-humanised*' them, leaving them with feeling that the company is saying that it does not care anymore (Cooke, 2006). The social exchange nature of the relationship between the FLM and the organisation predicts that when the FLMs as employees themselves feel supported by the organisation, they are more likely to reciprocate with positive behaviour (Katou *et al.*, 2020). Bos-Nehles *et al.*, (2018) describe the relationship between the FLM and the HR department as a social process which relies on the social exchange relationship between the organisational actors. The findings from this study contribute to the implementation literature by underlining the experiences of FLMs who, when they were unable to access appropriate HR support, felt '*alone*' and lacking in confidence. When the social exchange process between the FLM and the HR department (represented by the HR shared service centre) did not work effectively this had a negative impact on the confidence of the FLM and also their wellbeing. The use of social exchange theory as a theoretical lens to consider implementation is therefore a suitable and relevant way to understand implementation. This lack of confidence had an impact not only on their communication with team members but also on their own wellbeing (the effect on FLM wellbeing is discussed in more detail in section 7.3.1).

Previous literature has suggested that the set-up of a HR shared service centre may be seen as an organisational change which has unsettling results for employees (Cooke, 2006). The findings of this study did not, however, suggest that the effectiveness of HR support has a significant effect on perceived organisational support. This is an interesting and unexpected finding. The researcher expected that if FLMs' wellbeing were negatively influenced by issues relating to the efficiency of the HR SSC delivery mechanism, FLMs would view the support they received from the HR department as being indicative of how valued they were by their employer and that this would affect their levels of perceived organisational support (POS). This area warrants further investigation and may be a consequence of how the POS question was presented to FLMs.

Considering the quantitative findings that FLMs at Organisation Offshore viewed the HR service quality and HR advice more negatively than FLMs at Organisation Onshore, the qualitative findings regarding HR communication suggest that issues with the quality of communication has a negative influence on FLMs perceptions of HR support. The findings reveal that the HR SSC structure may influence the development of strong communication between HR teams and FLMs by creating a distance, either physical or psychological, between FLMs and their HR colleagues. These results do not rule out the influence of other factors such as organisational context and individual preferences. However, it could be argued that the findings of this study regarding the

aspects of communication which FLMs value could be applied more widely to HR delivery models and not just to HR delivery models which include a HR SSC element. The findings, this researcher believes, could be used to inform initiatives to develop strong communication in any HR department, with or without a HR SSC element. If system strength relies in part on strong communication, and if it is an aspiration of the function to have HR practices applied consistently throughout organisations, then this research shows the importance to FLMs of effective communication.

7.2.2 The importance of the personal skills of the HR team and tacit knowledge in effective implementation

The findings from this study also demonstrate that the many skills, both personal and HR technical, which FLMs expect the HR department to display, and contribute further rich data regarding the particular personal skills which influence FLMs' perceptions of the support they receive. The implementation literature has highlighted the importance of the relationship between the HR teams and the FLMs for HR practices for effective implementation of HR practices e.g., Kuvaas et al., (2014), Gilbert et al., (2011) and Bos-Nehles et al.,(2013), amongst others. These suggest that HR professionals play a key role in supporting line managers as part of the HR implementation process. Findings from Sikora and Ferris (2015) were that managers who possessed political skill and the ability to create shared meaning and influence were factors which positively influenced successful implementation, finding that social and personal skills were also key from the HR department. While the study from Sikora and Ferris, (2015) focused on the social skills of managers, this study confirmed that the personal skills of the HR department is also key to successful implementation. In this study, FLMs in both organisations expected their HR contacts to display not only a technical knowledge of HR practices but also to demonstrate strong personal skills. The importance of the personal skills of HR professionals is however an area rarely discussed in the implementation literature. FLMs highlighted the personal skills which they expected of the HR department, such as empathy and their willingness to act as 'sounding boards', as well as the importance of having a HR team they could rely on to interpret policy for them.

Empathy and the ability to show compassion were viewed by many FLMs in this study as being important. FLMs at Organisation Offshore spoke of going through redundancy procedures with team members supported by a HR department who appeared to be at times to be 'clinical' and lacking in humanity. This was a surprising finding as the researcher expected that the ability to show empathy in, e.g., a redundancy situation would be an intrinsic part of the skillset of HR professionals. In the case of Organisation Offshore many FLMs found this empathy to be lacking, and this had a negative influence on how they perceived the support from their HR department.

The establishment of a HR SSC also led to the need for HR staff to develop a new mindset: to see former colleagues as their 'customers' (Aalto and Kallio, 2019). However, even with this understanding, it is possible that the ability of the HR department to respond to changing employee

expectations could be restricted by an organisational delivery model which is reliant on a significant HR shared service element and constrained by e.g., a set of service metrics. In the case of the personal skills required of HR staff who are part of a HR SSC delivery model with a variety of channels to contact HR, it is important that they have the communication skills to be able to guide FLMs through the different channels and demonstrate patience and empathy if the HR department wishes to avoid FLMs forming a negative perception of the HR service. HR professionals need to be able not only to communicate the specific content but also to share information regarding the channels to use (Van Riel et al., 2009) and in an empathetic way.

In addition to technical and personal skills, FLMs in both organisations spoke of the importance of their HR department understanding the organisational context and having tacit knowledge of the corporate culture. Meijerinck et al., (2016) highlight that tacit knowledge takes time to develop and is not easily developed through formal training. However, tacit knowledge is a further area which has been largely neglected in the HR SSC literature and implementation literature to date. The literature suggests that the effect of tacit knowledge in an organisation can be significant in terms of supporting group innovation (Leonard and Sensiper, 1998) and competitive advantage (Ambrosini and Bowman., 2001). The findings of this study highlight the fact that tacit knowledge is key to perceptions of the service received, and this area therefore merits further attention. The HR implementation literature has been silent to date on the importance of tacit knowledge. This study highlights the importance of this knowledge and was an interesting finding from this study.

A further thought-provoking finding was that a certain level of experience within the organisational context was expected by FLMs, suggesting that retention of key staff within the HR department has a positive correlation with FLMs' perceptions of the support they receive. The evidence from this study is that having a knowledge of the corporate culture allows the HR department to present HR information in a manner which is more acceptable to FLMs, avoiding unnecessary time to clarify points about how the organisation operates and allowing the HR department to be seen as more professional; this in turn builds FLMs' positive perceptions of the HR support received. The retention of HR SSC, therefore, it appears from this study, more important to the quality of the service offered than the HR SSC location. This study findings reveal that irrespective of the location HR SSCs can be effective in providing high quality HR support to FLMs if they focus on selecting staff who, e.g., possess personal skills and can be empathetic, providing training on the business knowledge and cultural context. Maatman and Meijerinck, (2017) comment on the importance of knowledge exchange between the HR SSC and the business areas they support for capability building, and this study provides evidence to support the theory that closer working relationships between FLMs and the HR SSC will result in the development of stronger capabilities within the HR SSC, meaning that the quality of the HR support provided is viewed more positively by FLMs.

The study findings emphasise the importance of tacit knowledge which is gained by experience and by retaining HR staff in the organisation so that they can build an understanding of how the organisation functions. Literature relating to tacit knowledge suggests that when there is a reliance on tacit knowledge rather than codified knowledge of a new system this can result in more heterogeneous results (Edmondson et al., 2003). The remoteness of the HR team at Organisation Offshore from the FLMs supported by the HR SSC contributed to the lack of tacit knowledge and '*corporate memory*' displayed by team members in the HR SSC. The HR SSC literature to date has not explored the effects which the absence of corporate memory has when work is moved to an offshore location. This study revealed that FLMs felt that a lack of corporate knowledge led to issues with the service offered or to increased time being spent explaining the corporate context to colleagues in the HR SSC. This resulted in frustration amongst FLMs. These findings develop the HR SSC literature by stressing the importance of the tacit knowledge of the HR department to be able to facilitate effective HR implementation by FLMs.

The HR SSC literature does not specifically consider the question of the need for HR SSC staff training to be able to understand the business areas they support so that they can tailor the advice they provide and to produce salient and accurate information. The efficiency of the HR department in delivering HR practices is discussed in the literature as a key factor when it comes to implementation (see e.g., Gratton and Truss, 2003; Bjorkman et al., 2011). Meijerinck et al., (2015) found that HR functional competencies within the HR department remain significantly and positively related to HR service value. The evidence presented in this present study demonstrates that the skills of the HR SSC team members are key to the perceptions of the quality of professional advice.

The study findings underline the need for HR departments not only to train team members in HR policies and procedures but also to spend time training the HR SSC teams to understand the business context in which the FLMs operate. This study expands our existing HR SSC knowledge by demonstrating that investment in providing HR SSC members with information and updates regarding the business environment and the requirements of different business units, and an understanding of different roles in the business units they support, have a positive influence on how the HR department is perceived and on the FLMs' willingness to implement HR practices.

The delivery model which includes a HR SSC element may have the effect of limiting the HR department's ability to be flexible and to offer FLMs a more personalised experience to the '*consumers*' of the service. The case study organisations illustrated the difference between Organisation Onshore, where HR SSC staff had more flexibility in terms of the way in which they responded to queries, and Organisation Offshore, where responses were more standardised and scripted. Delivery models which incorporate a HR shared service centre element often limit the flexibility which the HR department must have to be able to tailor services to employees, due to the standardisation and globalisation of HR processes which is necessary to be cost-efficient. The

skills of the HR SSC team then become key in presenting information in a way which appears to the end users as personalised to their query and not viewed as a 'generic' and standardised. Here again, the case study organisations suggested that the location of the offshore HR SSC was not the issue but arose instead from the guidance from senior managers to the HR SSC teams to use standardised responses and focusing on the adherence to SLAs. In this way, the study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the fact that whilst service level agreements result in more regular communication between the HR department and FLMs, they can also sometimes place pressure on HR SSC staff to respond quickly with generic responses to HR queries, and as a result have a negative effect on the perceived quality of the service.

The results of this study suggest that the personal skills and knowledge which the HR SSC teams display will influence either positively or negatively how FLMs view the support they receive. The skills required of HR staff working in the HR SSC environment include skills in cooperation and conflict management. Steffensen *et al.* (2019) argue that there is limited research examining the roles that HR professionals play in the HRM implementation process. This study contributes to expanding our knowledge of the expectations which FLMs hold regarding the HR roles and of the skills they expect the HR department to possess. The evidence from this study highlights the importance for the HR department of considering the skills which are required for HR SSC staff to be successful in carrying out their role.

7.2.3 The consequences of mismatched expectations of HR support

Critics of the Ulrich HR delivery model suggest that it does not address the complexities of contemporary organisations (Williams, 2019) and that whilst the model looks neat on paper it may be problematic to implement, as HR departments cannot neatly be carved into four square blocks to be delivered from different sources (Cook, 2006). This study confirms that the establishment of an effective HR SSC delivery model requires conversations to take place with FLMs regarding what they can expect from the HR SSC. Mismatched expectations between what FLMs thought they should receive and what the HR SSC was resourced to provide (in the case of Organisation Offshore) led to frustration and increased stress for FLMs.

Previous expectations and experience of the HR service may also shape current perceptions of the service received. Research has found that in organisations which have made low investments in HR in the past, employees have lower expectations of the HR department (Piening *et al.*, 2014). We might expect then that, e.g., if an employee has worked at another organisation where the HR service provided was of a different or higher standard, they are likely to expect the same service and be frustrated if it is not as efficient. However, it is also important that the HR department understands FLMs' expectations. If the HR department does not have a strong understanding of the expectations of its service users, then it is difficult to make sure that these expectations are met. It has also been argued that clear expectations may act as a

psychological resource for employees (e.g., Avey et al., 2010). Furthermore, in cases where the organisation does not respond to mismatched expectations from managers, there is a risk that 'shadow' HR teams are created that are closer to the business but which duplicate the activities carried out by the HR department, thereby leading to cost inefficiencies and the dispersal of control (Cooke, 2006). FLMs in the case study organisations which participated in this research expressed a lack of dedicated personal contact within the HR department.

Understanding the effect of HR SSCs on FLMs matters, as FLMs are key to effective implementation and, in larger organisations, are required to source HR information either by using a self-service system or by raising queries to a HR SSC. McCracken and McIvor (2013) highlight the need for an effective change management approach to establishing successful ways of working between the HR SSC, other HR staff and managers. Francis and Keegan (2006) also suggest that the neglect of people centred roles has a negative effect on firm performance as employees feel increasingly '*estranged*' from the HR department. Sections 7.5.1 and 7.5.2 below outline some of the practical steps which organisations may wish to consider in order to address the issues raised by these research findings.

7.3 Discussion regarding the findings relating to Research question III: 'How does the HR support received by FLMs influence managers' behaviours when implementing HR practices?'

7.3.1 The effect of HR support when implementing HR practices on FLM wellbeing, confidence, and perceptions of organisational support

The discussion now turns to consider the effect of deficits in HR support on managers' attitudes and behaviours as they implement HR practices with their teams. Because FLMs are not HR experts, they rely on support from the HR organisation to clarify information, and if they experience a lack of support this is likely to lead to role stress (Gilbert, 2011). The present study provides evidence to build our understanding of the effect of HR support on FLMs' workload and in turn how a lack of appropriate HR support can contribute to an increase in FLM stress. FLMs in this present study spoke of the stress they felt at not being able to access HR support easily, or when the support they received was not of the quality they expected. FLMs spoke about the frustration they felt when the answers provided were incorrect. The findings of this study serve to highlight that HR departments can support FLM wellbeing not just with the HR policies they develop but also by ensuring that the HR support model is effective.

This study's findings suggest the need for the HR department to understand HR support as a resource which FLMs require to be able to effectively balance the demands on their time and to be able to avoid role overload. This builds on previous findings highlighting the issues when FLMs struggle to balance operational and HR responsibilities which can lead to role overload (Harris *et al.*, 2002; Whittaker and Marchington, 2003; McConville, 2006;). Recent studies, e.g.,

CIPD research (CIPD/Simply Health 2016), has found that workload continues to be a primary cause of workplace stress. Kowalski and Loretto, (2017) suggest that identifying ways to enhance employee wellbeing is arguably a core function of contemporary HR departments. It is ironic and counter-intuitive, therefore, to consider that the way in which HR support is provided could lead to stress for FLMs.

The literature to date has highlighted the effect of HRM tasks on managers' time (McConville, 2006; Harris *et al.*, 2002; Whittaker and Marchington, 2003); however, studies to date have not focused on building an understanding of the effect of poor HR support on managers' wellbeing. The effect of HR support on HR managers' wellbeing can be considered using the job demands-resources model to analyse how HR managers cope with the various pressures on them and to examine the resources which allow them to balance conflicting demands (Metz *et al.*, 2014). This model proposes that wellbeing, seen as the opposite of burnout, will result when the demands of work and the resources available to do the work are balanced. Theories relating to role stressors, such as the job demands-control model (Karasek, 1979) and the job-demands resource model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), link job stressors and control with employee attitudes, such as commitment or turnover intentions (Gilbert *et al.*, 2011). At the heart of these theories is the idea that if sufficient resources, such as adequate and easy to access support, are provided, then this will balance out the demands of the role.

In terms of the evidence from this study, FLMs felt that the HR support model was not providing them with the resources they needed to do their job effectively, and they were therefore experiencing an imbalance in the demands versus the resources available; consequently, they were experiencing an increased level of frustration and stress. As a result of the delivery model, FLMs felt that they were now expected to find information themselves and that this was often a '*lonely*' experience, suggesting that FLMs perceived an imbalance. In this study, effective HR support (such as the support provided to FLMs at Organisation Onshore) could be viewed as a resource for the FLMs. In contrast, deficits in HR support (such as the issues with the HR support provided by the HR SSC at Organisation Offshore) could be seen as a demand on FLMs. In each case, the HR SSC was having an effect, either positive or negative, on the FLMs' experience at work.

The findings from this study clearly highlight the negative effects which deficits in HR support can have on FLM wellbeing. FLMs at Organisation Offshore felt concerned when the channel to contact HR was not clear and when they did not have a personal relationship with any individual in the HR department. They felt a level of anxiety about taking wrong decisions and a level of worry about losing credibility and the trust of their team if the information shared by the HR department proved subsequently to be inaccurate or not relevant to their business area. Lack of support also led to a lack of confidence in tasks where they felt that they required confirmation

about what correct HR policy to implement. This in turn led to FLMs at Organisation Offshore reporting higher levels of stress and frustration with the HR department. The FLMs at Organisation Offshore rated the HR advice and HR service quality more negatively than FLMs at Organisation Onshore.

When there is role ambiguity and a lack of clarity of expectations, this may result in additional role stress for FLMs. Given the role which FLMs occupy between multiple groups of organisational actors, e.g., team members, middle management, and HR professionals, it is logical then to assume that their role, as the linkage across multiple organisational teams, could result in role ambiguity and, in turn, role stress for FLMs. When there is a lack of clear procedures regarding the use of HR practices, FLMs may become confused about the role they are required to play (Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2006). In this study, role ambiguity was a concern for FLMs at Organisation Offshore. Role ambiguity was in fact a significant theme for FLMs at Organisation Offshore, who talked of the lack of FLM inductions and a lack of clarity about what was expected of them. In contrast, FLMs at Organisation Onshore did not feel that the expectations of them were unclear. The location of the HR SSC was not necessarily a contributing factor in the case of role ambiguity; a more important factor was the lack of communication regarding the role which FLMs were expected to play and what they could expect from the HR SSC. The evidence from this study promotes the idea that a lack of support can lead to perceptions of role ambiguity as well as role overload (see quotes from participants shown in Table 16).

Role stress has an influence on managers' confidence when taking decisions, and role ambiguity appears to leave FLMs unsure as to how the organisation wants HR practices to be implemented (Evans, 2017). As a result, FLMs' ability to implement HRM as intended is compromised. In this study, FLMs at both organisations spoke of their fear of '*getting things wrong*' and their desire to ensure that the decisions they were taking were the right ones to avoid issues with, e.g., their organisation, employee tribunals or other claims. Sometimes FLMs just needed reassurance that the course of action they were planning was the right one. The findings from this study provide further evidence that when line FLMs experience a lack of HR support, they are likely to report feelings of uncertainty regarding their HR role (McConville, 2006). HR departments therefore need to offer HR advice in terms of sharing their expert knowledge as well as providing procedural documentation (Bos-Nehles *et al.*, 2008). This study confirmed that when the HR support provided by the HR SSC is seen by the FLM as being ineffective or insufficient (irrespective of the HR SSC location) this will have a negative impact on FLMs' confidence when implementing HR practices. Bos-Nehles *et al.*,(2013) found that FLMs face difficulties when attempting to implement policy, in particular when they lack the confidence to do so. This study presents additional evidence of the significance of the HR support provided by HR SSCs when it comes to FLMs' confidence as they implement HR practices.

To address the issue of mismatched expectations between what FLMs feel they require and what resources are available to FLMs, some organisations have, e.g., now implemented junior HR business partners as part of their HR delivery model. These individuals are tasked with taking the strategic ideas and policies and supporting managers in putting these into operational practice within the organisation (Ulrich *et al.*, 2008).

The findings suggest that confidence may become an issue when FLMs need to deviate from organizations' espoused HR practices and respond to the call from Kehoe and Han, 2020 to understand when deviations from espoused practices may occur. Gilbert *et al.*, (2011) considered the competency of FLMs also and suggested that when devolution of tasks to FLMs was combined with a high level of support from the HR department, FLMs did not experience increased stress levels, they concluded that when HR support was available managers welcomed the variety of HR tasks and considered them an enrichment of their job rather than a burden on their time. HR competence as well as experience has also been found to lead to increased confidence, at least from the evidence of the studies to date. Authors such as Meijerink *et al.* (2016) and Op de Beeck *et al.* (2018) have found that managers with more experience reported higher effectiveness, suggesting that experience led to confidence in-role. Possessing more HR skills appears to be the most obvious route to reducing role overload and stress, and in this way the support from the HR department is key.

The findings also suggest that if FLMs do not have the opportunity to build trust and personal relationships with the HR SSC teams (who may, e.g., be based offshore), this can lead to levels of dissatisfaction with the service. The HR delivery model which includes a HR SSC offshore element also goes hand in hand with a requirement for enhanced skills in the HR department in areas such as the ability to empathise and the ability to cooperate and deal with conflict effectively. But it also necessitates FLMs developing specific skills, such as the ability to navigate the new channels for accessing HR support. FLMs' frustration and dissatisfaction can in turn lead to increased role stress or worse, such as a reluctance to use the service at all and instead to refer to other colleagues. This tendency to access HR information via peers in the organisation rather than via the formal channels of communication is discussed further in section 7.3.2.

Role stressors lead to more negative work attitudes, less wellbeing and reduced individual performance (Gilbert *et al.*, 2011), and so merit further consideration when examining FLMs' implementation of HR practices. The link between HR support and FLM wellbeing is less prevalent in the literature than the findings of this study would suggest, and authors such as Guest (2017) have called for wellbeing to take a more central role in HR research. Kowalski and Loretto (2017) argue that in the contemporary workplace, workload is intensifying and employees are being required to 'do more with less' (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). Guest (2017) argues that HR research and policy need to give greater priority to promoting employees' wellbeing and that the existing focus on the relationship between HRM and performance 'has been pursued at the expense of a

concern for employee well-being' (p. 22). However, little attention has been devoted by researchers to date to the topic of improving the wellbeing of FLMs through the support which is provided to them. The focus of many of the previous implementation research has been on the HR practices rather than the HR support available. Despite the continued interest in HR SSCs from practitioners, the researcher found little evidence of academic studies to date which have set out to consider the impact of this shift in workload or the move to new delivery models on FLMs' wellbeing. This is an area of concern, which underlines the negative effect that the delivery model can have on FLMs' wellbeing. The Covid-19 pandemic has also placed an increased focus on wellbeing at work. This study adds to the wellbeing debate by demonstrating the significant effects that a lack of HR support provided via the HR SSC delivery model can have on FLMs' wellbeing.. This researcher aims to encourage further debate regarding the need for HR departments to consider the different effects of the HR support they provide to FLMs – including on their wellbeing.

The researcher also found some evidence to suggest that a positive perception of HR support was positively linked to FLMs' feelings of organisational belonging, at least for Organisation Onshore. This finding is in alignment with organisational behaviour theory, which was outlined in Chapter 2 and which suggests that HR support affects not just FLMs' ability to complete tasks but also how they feel about the organisation they work for. A lack of perceived organisational support by managers in their own employment relationship around HR and HR technology can have a negative effect on the level of support they offer to employees (Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2007). However, as this finding is based on limited data, and because there were somewhat mixed responses to this question, the suggestion that a positive experience of HR support leads to higher POS would need to be tested further.

This study had mixed findings regarding the impact of HR support on FLM motivation. The study found that for some FLMs, the HR support they received had a positive influence on their motivation, but others felt that it didn't influence their motivation. The findings from this study therefore contrast with previous research which has indicated that the HR support provided to FLMs is important to their motivation (see, e.g., Kellner et al., 2016; Bos-Nehles et al., 2018). The need for organisations to focus on motivating FLMs could be over-estimated, based on the findings from this study. The evidence from this research suggests that FLMs take pride in performing their management role and feel motivated to do so. FLMs felt that the support from the HR department had little effect on their motivation levels. It would be useful to investigate FLMs' motivation and the linkage to HR support with a larger data set to explore this area further.

7.3.2 The 'ripple effect' of deficits in HR support on other organisational actors

This study also demonstrates the '*ripple effect*' of deficits in HR SSC support on other organisational actors, and this is a key area where this study contributes to existing knowledge. Op de Beeck (2017) highlighted the importance of a support network for line FLMs' confidence in their HR role. The findings from this study suggest that when HR support is ineffective FLMs are likely to look to other

sources of support within the organisation, taking up the time and energy of other colleagues and resulting in a '*spillover effect*' whereby the formal channel is inefficient and the FLM therefore refers to more informal sources of information. The study provides evidence of the effect of the HR SSC on managers' time, confirming the suggestion from Cook (2006) that when the unplanned time that managers spend to find HR information has been calculated, the actual cost savings in the adoption of a HR SSC model may be far less than the original business case would suggest.

The implementation literature has not addressed the fact that informal as well as formal channels of information need to be considered to understand the full multi-faceted picture regarding how HR practices are implemented. Kulik, (2021) suggests that HR departments now have a 'window of opportunity' to develop socially connected workforces. Kulik suggests that in the coming months and years, HR departments need to embrace the new normal and to resist the urge to implement formal structures and monitoring systems.

Zupan and Kase (2007) suggest, using social network theory, that there is a need to shift from observing individuals and their particular attributes in an organisation to looking at the actors embedded in a network of relationships with other actors in the organisation (Brass, 1995). This is particularly relevant in the context of the HR implementation role of the FLM, as the FLM is part of a complex interconnected structure whereby the FLM and HR need to work effectively together to fulfil their role in achieving the effective implementation of HR practices.

Zupan and Kase (2007) suggest that the likelihood of relationships between individuals in a network depends on physical and social distance and on the opportunity to interact. Organisational knowledge is embedded in documents and repositories but is also available from other resources, such as the tacit knowledge and experiences of colleagues. In the case of the FLMs in this study, they frequently made use of the skills and experience of their colleagues either for reasons of expediency, or because it was easier, or because they did not have a strong relationship of trust with their HR department. The findings from these case study organisations confirm that when FLMs experience a deficit of HR support they turn to colleagues to bridge the gap, taking up the time of other organisational actors. Furthermore, the tacit knowledge held by employees, and the network of relationships which dynamically solve HR issues, cannot easily be replicated in an Ulrich delivery model.

In the case of the delivery model, organisations need to acknowledge that social networks will be used by FLMs to access HR information. The focus on '*official*' channels to access information may be considered overly formal and even problematic given the evidence of this study regarding the methods which FLMs and other employees use to access the information that they need, when they need it (particularly given the multitude of channels to access HR support at Organisation Offshore). Given the focus on efficiency and cost pressures, instead of investing in the HR delivery model channels, organisations could consider investing in methods which promote interaction and the collaborative design of policies and procedures, and on building a wider network of HR support

to create competitive advantage. This would, however, result in a change in the roles of FLMs and the HR department when it comes to HR implementation, with HR moving from overseeing the implementation process to curating the knowledge required with the support of the organisational leaders (Zupan and Kase, 2007). This might also have the effect of narrowing the distance between FLMs and the HR SSC which is located remotely from the businesses which it supports.

The HR SSC delivery model could be adapted, e.g., to encourage the co-creation of organisational capabilities, such as the ability to respond to market changes and to the creation of artefacts and channels which are suited to the organisational context and culture. It could be argued that this would allow for a more comprehensive approach to HRM, focusing on knowledge-enabling on the social networks best positioned to execute them, such as via communities of practice (Zupan and Kase, 2007). Given the prevalence of the HR SSC delivery model, and the negative effects on FLMs of deficiencies in the support provided by the model, the findings from this study highlight the importance of HR departments, considering not only the formal channels and those via the HR SSC but also the use of more informal social networks to share information.

7.4 Contribution to theory

This thesis offers two original contributions to the literature. The first is to propose a new model to encompass the influence of the HR SSC delivery model on implementation, showing the effects of the HR SSC delivery model on HR communication and HR skills and knowledge and in turn FLM attitudes (see **Figure 22**). The second is to provide a potential measurement instrument which can be used to assess FLMs' perceptions of specific areas of HR support, such as HR advice, HR service quality or HR systems and tools.

7.4.1 A new conceptual model to show the influence of the HR delivery model on FLM implementation

Through this study, the researcher's findings have made a number of important contributions to the HR implementation and HR SSC literature. The study responds to calls by Baluch,(2017), Steffensen et al.,(2019) and Fu et al.,(2018) to focus on the line manager's role in the implementation process. The first original theoretical contribution offered by this study is to build a new model to encompass the influence of the HR delivery model on HR implementation by FLMs showing the effects of the HR delivery model on HR communication and HR skills and knowledge and in turn FLM attitudes (see Figure 22). This model was built from the literature review, which offered areas to be explored in the qualitative phase of the study. The findings from the quantitative data analysis revealed that there were significant differences between FLMs' perceptions of HR support when comparing the feedback from the two case study organisations. The researcher explored in the qualitative phase of the study whether the significant differences could be as a result of the location of the HRSSC teams. The results from the data gathered from

FLMs who have experienced HR support in the qualitative phase of the study suggested that the location of the HRSSC could have an influence on the quality of HR communication and on the need for personal skills amongst the HRSSC teams. This information was then used to build an empirically based model (shown in figure 22). This study is one of the few to bring together the HR SSC literature, the HR implementation literature and the literature relating to the role of HR to examine the contribution which the HR department makes to HR implementation. The study contributes to knowledge of the impact that the role that the HR department, via its HR SSC delivery model, has on implementation.

The findings reveal that certain elements of communication are key. Furthermore, by considering how the HR SSC delivery model can influence not just the FLM themselves when it comes to HR implementation but also others in the organisation, this framework expands upon and articulates the effect of HR support not just on the implementation process but also on other organisational actors around the FLM. The model adds to the literature regarding the implementation process, highlighting the importance of the HR support element of the HR implementation process, confirming that the HR SSC delivery model does in fact have an influence on implementation and that the implementation process is complex for FLMs, as highlighted by authors such as Op de Beeck *et al.*, (2016) and Van Mierlo *et al.*, (2018). Furthermore, the model has been developed based on input not just from HR informants but on feedback from those experiencing the support model. In this way, the study responds to the need to include multiple informants and to counteract a reliance on data predominantly from HR professionals.

The model proposed in this study also advances implementation theory by situating the implementation process within the organisational context and considering not just the process of implementation but also the importance of the FLMs' attributions and attitudes towards the HR support offered. The model therefore incorporates attribution theory by suggesting that the HR delivery model is likely to influence how FLMs view the support they receive from the HR department. The research model proposed as a result of this study highlights the fact that the way in which support is provided to managers influences managers attitudes including how confident they feel implementing HR policies, how supported they feel by the organisation and how they view the HR department. These attitudes and attributions regarding the support they receive will in turn affect those around the FLM such as team members, peers or their own line manager. The model also incorporates therefore the effect of deficits in HR support on others in the organisation. The idea that the HR shared service model has a 'ripple' effect on others across the organisation is not a concept which has been explored in any depth in the research to date which adds originality to this study. The summary of the findings shown in **Figure 22**, provides the evidence of the effects of the HR shared service model on HR communication, and on the skills and knowledge required by the HR team, as well as the impact on FLM attitudes and, e.g., wellbeing.

The findings of this study have revealed that the HR delivery model has an unsettling effect on others in the organisation when it does not work effectively. Deficits in the delivery model have a significant effect on managers attitudes and the need to consult with colleagues or their line manager. The model shows the various impacts which the HR SSC support structure has not just on the FLMs but also on their peers and teams. The model therefore provides a framework for researchers to consider the HR delivery model's effect on implementation by the FLMs, but also considers the effects which the HR delivery model ultimately has on FLMs' attitudes and on their behaviour with colleagues. The model responds to calls in the literature for further research into the role of the HR department in HR implementation (Trullen and Stirpe, 2016) and provides evidence to support the suggestion from Cooke (2006) that although the HR SSC model looks neat on paper it may be '*problematic*' in practice.

. The proposed model adds to the literature underpinned by attribution theory and the idea of a 'strong HR system' by confirming the importance of HR communication to building a 'strong' HR system as perceived by FLMs as users of the service. The findings specify the aspects of communication which are important for FLMs -clarity, ease of usage, frequency and salience/personalisation of messaging.

The model highlights that a lack of personal skill within HRSSC teams can have a negative effect on FLM stress levels and thus also contributes to theory by linking the wellbeing and HRSSC literature streams. The model responds to the call from Op de Beeck *et al.*,(2017) for the need for more qualitative research into why, when and why line managers ask for support from different organisational actors and adds depth to the evidence shared by Trullen and Stirpe (2016) regarding the contribution of the HR department to effective implementation

The model builds on previous work which has examined line managers' involvement in HR work – examining the dynamic interactions between FLMs and the HR department (Evans, 2015; Gilbert *et al.*, 2015; Steffensen *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, it responds to a call for consideration to be given to the ways in which process and context interact (Mirfahkar *et al.*, 2018), using an inductive case study approach to add factors and breadth to the original model proposed. The new empirically derived model offered by this study provides a structure for future research to consider the extent to which the HR delivery model is a key factor influencing effective implementation by FLMs.

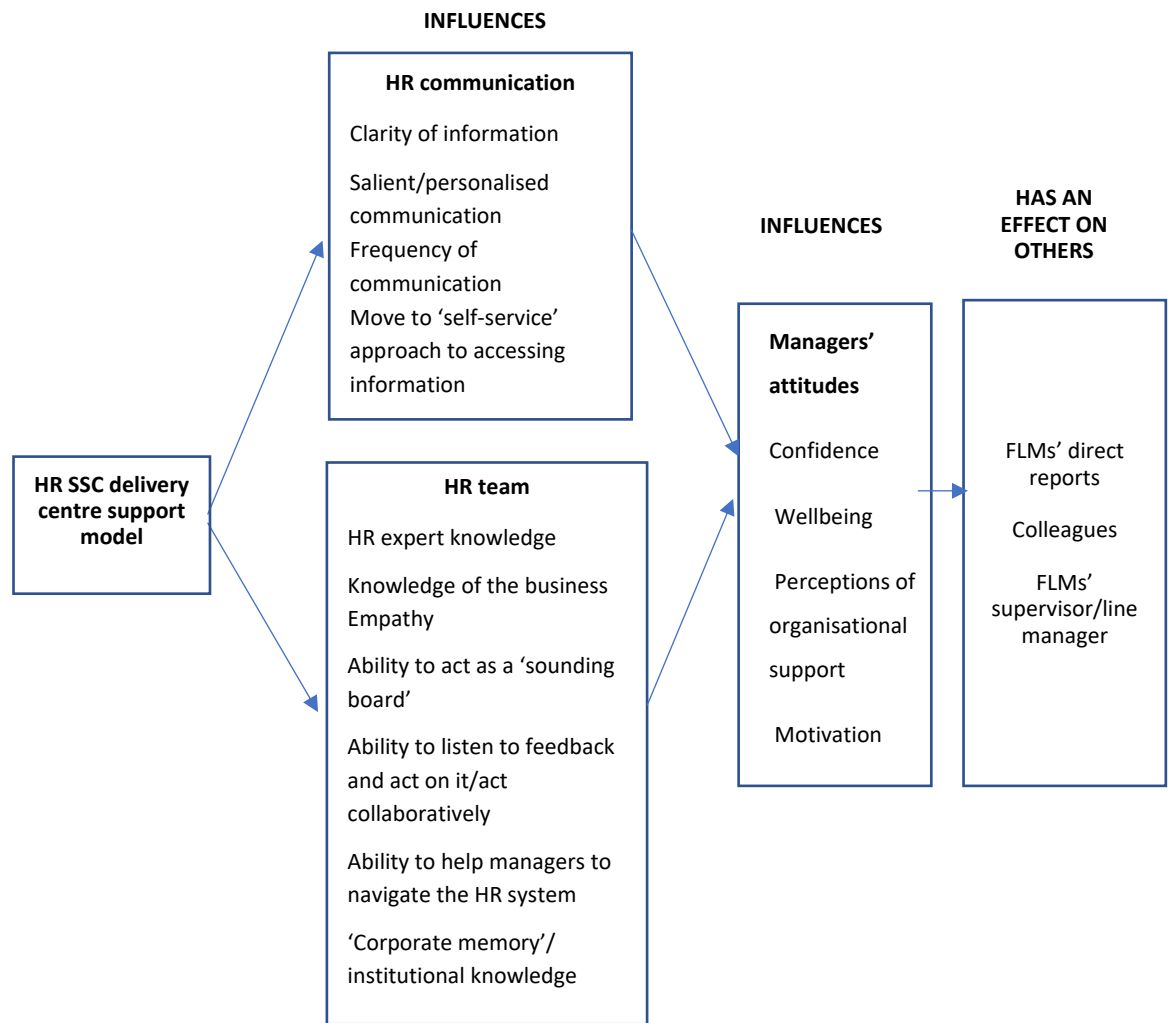


Figure 22 Proposed model showing the effect of the HR SSC delivery model on communication, the HR team and in turn managers' attitudes and on others in the organisation

7.4.2 The development of a new measurement scale for HR support

The initial quantitative phase of this study resulted in the development of a theoretically grounded and empirically validated potential measurement scale which could be tested and developed further and used to measure perceptions of the HR support received. This measurement scale was developed to allow the researcher to understand FLMs' perceptions of HR support and so link specific aspects of HR support to manager behaviours and implementation. This potential measurement instrument contributes to implementation theory by providing a means for researchers to enhance their understanding of the HR implementation process by allowing the differences in FLMs' perceptions of HR advice, HR service quality and HR systems and tools to be measured and analysed. The validation of the instrument based on a pilot survey and then on two samples from very different industry sectors allows us to have a degree of confidence regarding the applicability of the instrument for different research purposes and in different contexts.

The researcher focused on using the instrument with FLMs because they are important agents in implementing and communicating HRM. However, whilst the instrument has been

tested and validated by managers at one hierarchical level (front line managers) it could also be used to understand differences in managers' perceptions of HR support at other hierarchical levels (e.g., middle managers or senior managers). This would provide further insights into the effective implementation of HR practices by allowing researchers to compare the specific elements of HR support which are valued by managers at different levels and so tailor the service accordingly.

Understanding the effects which the HR delivery model, including offshore HR shared service centres, has on the implementation of HR practices by FLMs '*on the ground*' is important. Gaining a better understanding of the effect of the HR SSC delivery model adds emphasis to the need for HR practitioners to consider the importance of HR delivery model on FLMs' implementation of HR practices. If HR practitioners can further improve the effectiveness of HR delivery models, this is likely to have a positive effect on the effectiveness of the implementation process. Adopting a FLM's perspective would furthermore allow HR departments to explore the aspects of HR support which FLMs see as important when implementing HR practices. The evidence gathered in this study suggests that the skills and knowledge of the HR SSC have an influence on how FLMs perceive the support provided by the HR department, but also that there is often a mismatch of expectations between the HR department and FLMs when it comes to what HR support is required and provided. Monitoring the expectations of users of the HR service and developing communications to address any mismatch in communication are likely to lead to higher levels of satisfaction with the service.

7.5 Practical Contribution

This study offers a number of contributions to practice outlined in detail in this section.

7.5.1 The effect of the skills and knowledge of HR SSC teams on FLMs wellbeing

It is not surprising that the findings of this study confirm that the skills and knowledge of the HR department have an influence on FLMs' perceptions of HR support; however, the findings also uncovered evidence of the effect of HR skills and knowledge on FLMs, including on their wellbeing and confidence. Whilst organisations continue to move transactional activity to HR SSCs, the tacit and corporate memory which is lost as a result of the move to a new location – from the evidence of this present study – has a long-lasting effect on FLMs' perceptions of HR support. It has been suggested that organisations should pay more attention to the degree to which it is possible to implement HR practices in a '*user friendly*' way (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Kuvaas, 2010). The HR department needs not only to develop HR practices but also to understand the business both at the strategic level and at the various organisational levels (Gilbert *et al.*, 2011).

Detailed discussions with FLMs regarding the roles and responsibilities of the FLMs and the HR department are likely to help clarify and set expectations appropriately. Scully (2014)

highlights that HR delivery models are not machines and are more like living organisations or ecosystems, and that it is not how each of the parts work but how they work together which is important. The greatest challenge for most organisations is probably to balance the responsibility of the HR specialists and line managers; but research suggests that a closer cooperation between the two would benefit most organisations (Dany *et al.*, 2008). Gilbert *et al.* (2011) suggest that the HR department needs to be empathetic and able to use that emotional awareness to gain insight into line managers' local context.

The findings from this study suggest that, to ensure that the HRSSC team members are effective in their role, the HRSSC hiring process needs to take into account the personal skills of the candidates and not just assess their technical skills. The personal skills of HRSSC team members could later be further improved by agreeing detailed development plans with HRSSC team members which focus on the development of personal skills such as empathy and communication skills. The findings from the study suggest that investment in developing the personal skills of HRSSC team teams is likely to lead to more positive FLM perceptions of the support they receive.

The findings in this area also contribute to the wellbeing literature by illustrating the effect of HR support, and in particular the HR SSC delivery model, on FLMs' stress levels and wellbeing. This is important, as HR delivery models which include a HR SSC continue to be a feature for larger global organisations as well as expanding the traditional scope of the SSC to include additional service such as analytics and reporting (Deloitte, 2021). HR departments wishing to improve how HR support is perceived by FLMs, and wishing to minimise FLM stress, need to be cognizant of the effect of the HR SSC model on FLMs. The findings suggest a need to take steps to monitor more closely the service being offered to FLMs and to focus on the quality of the communication with FLMs. HR departments could consider providing training and guidance to their HRSSC team members to help them to balance efficient service with personalisation of the communication with FLMs. Personalisation of messaging will help to ensure that the HR support model does not create increased work stress for FLMs.

7.5.2 The need for HR departments to consider how FLMs access information

A further practical contribution of this study is to provide evidence of the different ways in which HR information is accessed by FLMs when the official channels are ineffective. This adds to implementation theory on how FLMs access key HR information and emphasises the need for HR departments to understand the ways in which HR information is shared informally in their organisation. The findings of this study emphasise the different means by which HR information is accessed by FLMs when the official channels are ineffective, suggesting the need for HR departments to acknowledge and, importantly, leverage, e.g., social networks within the organisation. The evidence of this study has shown that FLMs refer to colleagues when they

experience deficits in the HR support and avoid using the official channels offered by the HR delivery model. Organisations could prioritise the sharing of HR knowledge, e.g., amongst organisational members, and use existing social networks to publicise and provide supplementary support to the formal HR delivery model. The identification and use of 'influencers' with the business units to communicate key messages could also be an innovative and more practical approach to communicate key HR updates rather than relying on more traditional communication methods.

Malik et al., (2022) explored employee experiences of AI-enabled HRM applications and suggested that the use of chatbots can improve the employee experience of HR support. The authors did *not* consider, however, which 'foundational' communication elements need to be in place to ensure that automation is successful as part of the HR delivery model and is seen as easy to use by employees and managers. The evidence from this study demonstrates that delivery models which are focused on automation and the more '*efficient*' processing of work, but which result in a heavy additional work burden on certain groups such as FLMs, will influence how the HR department is perceived by FLMs and how willing FLMs are to access HR support. HR SSCs need to spend time ensuring that FLMs are clear on which channels should be used to access information and that they feel comfortable searching for information or, e.g., raising a ticket with their queries. If the channels to contact the HR department are not easy to use, this study suggests that the result is that FLMs will feel increased anxiety. FLMs will worry that they have not followed the correct procedure and that there will be a delay in getting answers for their team members' queries as a result. Given the heavy workload of FLMs in both organisations, this issue is one which the HR department could address and which would have a positive effect on FLMs' perceptions both of the service and support that the department offers. HR departments need to be more sensitive to the fact that having more channels to communicate HR queries can result in confusion and increased stress for FLMs. This could, however, be addressed via e.g. regular reminders at manager meetings regarding the best ways to contact the HR teams or via individual coaching with managers. HR departments could also consider offering a few key channels to minimise confusion or promoting the benefits of the different channels which can be used to contact the HR department.

7.5.3 The need for HR departments to understand FLMs' expectations of the HR department

The final contribution of this study to practitioner knowledge is to highlight the mismatch which exists between the expectations of FLMs and the HR department when expectations are not discussed. The '*responsibility of corporate HR does not end once the HR practice is designed and communicated*' (Guest and Bos-Nehles, 2013), and strong communication and regular discussions

with FLMs regarding the intent of the HR practice and any lack of clarity is recommended. Boroughs and Saunders (2007) suggest that in most organisations, once their SSC is up and running it often falls short of expectations, because realistic expectations are not set at the start, and so communication as HR SSCs are being set up is vital. It has been suggested by previous authors that HR departments should regularly examine more closely whether there is a good fit between the current HR systems and employee needs (Garg, 2020). This study confirms the importance of ongoing evaluation of the HR SSC service after it has been established to understand the effectiveness of the model in supporting users and to adapt the delivery model to address significant concerns. HR departments could focus on ensuring that FLMs expectations of HR support are considered via e.g. regular roundtable meetings. Chacko and Conway (2019) suggest that FLMs perceptions may vary over time, and the evidence from this study shows that the HR SSC could change FLMs perceptions of the HR department. This study found some evidence of time being spent by FLMs to understand the intent of HR policies but this researcher argues that it is likely that if the intent and desired outcomes of the HR practice are communicated more clearly to FLMs then their confidence in implementing the policy is likely to increase, resulting in more motivation to implement the policy in question. This could be done in a variety of innovative ways e.g. by selecting key leaders across the business who can act as 'change-makers' and can communicate the intent of the policy in their business area.

In this study, FLMs at both organisations were disappointed about aspects of the service which they felt were not provided whilst their expectations of the service were never discussed. This is an area that practitioners can easily address via regular information sharing and discussions with the FLM group. This will ensure that there is a constant sharing of information regarding what is required by FLMs and what the HR department is resourced to provide. HR communication is frequently overlooked in the delivery model, with HR departments relying on communication expertise from specialists external to the department. By making the messaging regarding HR practices more salient for employees and FLMs, and by gaining a greater understanding of the expectations of employees and by monitoring feedback, HR teams can better understand the areas which need attention. Furthermore, they will be aware of how they are providing support or services to employees and FLMs. Understanding FLMs' expectations and their business unit will also help the HR department to tailor the delivery model.

7.6 Chapter summary

This study confirms that the many linkages required by the Ulrich model (1997) can result in significant gaps in the communication process, leading to dissatisfaction amongst FLMs using the service. Misinformation or confusion can arise, particularly when the HR delivery model includes an offshore HR SSC element and when there is physical or cultural distance between the different HR teams in the delivery model. The establishment of the HR SSC as part of the HR delivery model can make the building of strong personal relationships more difficult due to the physical distance

and lack of personalised approach to communication (highlighted by FLMs at Organisation Offshore). The findings of this study suggest that the establishment of a HR SSC should be considered as one of the more significant factors which influence FLMs' perceptions of HR support and system strength, influencing HR implementation by FLMs and, in turn, impacting desired organisational outcomes. This study also contributes to the debate about wellbeing at work, finding evidence that the wellbeing of FLMs is affected by the HR support they receive from the organisation. By considering the managers' perceptions of support, advances can be made in understanding what resources managers most need to be able to implement HR practices effectively and how these resources can be provided through the delivery model. The effect of HR support on FLMs' wellbeing is indeed likely to be a fruitful area for further research. The study findings confirm that organisations need to consider not just the immediate effects of implementing a new delivery model but also the unintended, ripple effects on other organisational actors.

This chapter has presented a discussion of key findings from the study. The chapter has outlined the theoretical contribution of the study (section 7.4) and the practical contributions (section 7.5). The final chapter of this thesis presents the overall conclusions, limitations, and directions for future research.

Chapter 8 Conclusions, limitations-and directions for future research

8.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to consider the effect of the HR delivery model on FLMs. Through the use of two case study organisations, the researcher considered what aspects of the delivery model were important to FLMs and what evidence was available to highlight the effect that the HR SSC delivery model had on FLMs' implementation of HR practices. This study has contributed to the literature by highlighting the effects that the HR SSC delivery model can have on effective implementation and on FLMs' wellbeing and confidence.

8.2 Research summary and implications

The effect of the HR SSC delivery model and its location on FLMs' implementation of HR practices has not been explored by any other study to date, to the researcher's knowledge. This is noteworthy, given that the inclusion of a HR SSC as part of the HR delivery model continues to be part of HR departments' strategy to evolve and adapt to economic conditions (Deloitte, 2021). The study therefore set out to understand from the FLMs' perspective what factors are important to them when implementing HR practices with team members, and what effects the HR SSC may be having on the implementation process. The study found that for FLMs, a number of factors were key to how they perceived the support they received. These factors included the effectiveness of HR communication and the skills and knowledge of their HR colleagues. These facets of the HR support model were also affected by the establishment of a HR SSC, and impacted FLMs' confidence, wellbeing, and motivation. The study further uncovered that when the HR SSC delivery model does not meet FLMs' expectations, this has a wider effect on the organisation, impacting not just the FLMs but also their teams and their peers as they reach out to others for guidance.

The findings of this study exposed mismatched expectations between FLMs and the HR department: FLMs expected information to be tailored, personalised and proactive whereas the HR department was guiding HR teams to provide uniform information and avoid personalisation. The findings of this research were that whilst the HR SSC teams were provided with HR technical skills, they often lacked knowledge of the business units they supported or of the corporate context. This led to misinformation, or often to significantly lengthy communication exchanges which took up FLMs' time to check that the information they received was accurate and valid for their business area.

This study makes several contributions to the literature on HR implementation, HR delivery models, and the wellbeing literature. The findings allowed the researcher to develop a

new conceptual model to illustrate the effect of the HR SSC delivery model on HR communication and HR skills and competencies, highlighting that HR support has an effect not just on the FLMs themselves but also on others around them in the organisation. This model advances HR implementation theory by proposing that a key factor which is important to implementation by FLMs is the HR SSC model. This research model highlights that for HR departments wishing to continually improve how they are perceived by their colleagues in the organisation, it is important to select a HR SSC team which possesses strong interpersonal skills and can demonstrate empathy; it is also necessary to provide significant training to the HR SSC teams on the importance of empathy and of building a personal rapport with their '*customers*'.

This model can be used as a guide for HR practitioners setting up a new HR SSC delivery model to ensure that it is effective, but also for HR practitioners wishing to assess the effectiveness of an existing HR SSC, pointing to key elements of the service which are viewed as most important by managers. The research model illustrates the many effects which the HR SSC can have in the organisation and demonstrates why it should not be established and then simply monitored via the service level metrics.

The findings demonstrate the importance of ongoing communication between the HR SSC teams and managers regarding the service which FLMs can expect from the HR SSC and how best to access this support. The findings also illustrate that when HR information is not easy to access and when there are deficits in the effectiveness of HR support, this '*bleeds out*' into other levels of the organisation, with FLMs contacting peers or their line managers to access HR information. In this way, the study demonstrates that from a FLM perspective, if the HR delivery model is not managed carefully, with expectations clearly set and discussed on a regular basis, the cost efficiencies gained by moving to a HR SSC are negated by the time taken by other organisational actors, such as peers or line managers, to answer HR queries.

The study also contributes to the wellbeing stream of literature. Written during the current Covid pandemic, a focus on employee wellbeing has necessarily become even more important to HR practitioners. Retaining good FLMs is critical to the success of every organisation, and the evidence from this study is that FLMs' wellbeing is affected by the way HR departments support them on a day-to-day basis. This is an important finding, as it illustrates how HR departments can influence the wellbeing of staff not only through the HR policies which are developed but also by the way in which FLMs are supported to implement these policies with their teams.

8.3 Research limitations

The following limitations of this study must, however, be acknowledged:

The use of two case study organisations based in the UK means that the findings of this study would need to be tested in other cultural contexts to confirm that a similar HR delivery model would have the same results. The research design has chosen two organisations from different commercial sectors, and it would also be interesting to explore these findings in future research studies by including organisations across a variety of other sectors to learn whether any of the findings were a result of the sectors chosen.

Random sampling of participants was used in this study, and participants were recruited on a voluntary basis; this may have resulted in participants who felt most strongly about the service they received coming forward to be part of this research. The researcher's cross-sectional research design, with samples taken over a period of three months at the two organisations, aimed to avoid any bias. Longitudinal research was not possible due to the time constraints; however, longitudinal research is likely to be beneficial to assess any changes over time. It was also not possible due to time constraints to interview FLMS from each organisation who had not responded to the initial survey to compare their views to those of the FLMS who had responded to the initial survey. This would be a further interesting avenue to explore.

It would also be fascinating also to learn the effect of the HR SSC model on managers at other levels of the organisation, such as senior managers and middle managers. The sample chosen was composed of FLMS, as these managers were supported primarily via the HR SSC teams. Senior managers might also use the HR SSC, but we might expect that the HR SSC element of the delivery model would not be as important to managers at these levels, who may have access to dedicated HRBPs. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to discover if the expectations and resulting perceptions of value vary by hierarchical level, and whether the effectiveness of the HR SSC element of the HR delivery model is still likely to have an influence on the implementation of HR practices by these higher-level managerial groups.

The scope of this study did not consider FLMS' personalities and research. Baluch *et al.*, (2017) suggested that individual personalities may be important in determining how the support provided by HR is perceived. It is also possible that the organisational culture may have had an influence on the effectiveness of communication and on individual attributions of the service received. Dewettinck and Vroonen (2017) have suggested that organisational culture is an important determinant of individual attitudes. Organisational culture was not examined in detail to understand its effect on the study findings. This would be an interesting avenue for further research. In addition, this research could examine the influence of how centralised or decentralised decision making is in the organisation, to understand whether the level of centralisation or decentralisation is significant when it comes to FLMS' expectations of the HR SSC.

Finally, the researcher undertook this research using virtual data gather techniques due to the constraints of the Covid- pandemic, gathering data via video call (using MS Teams) and

collecting the qualitative data during the initial 12 months of the Covid pandemic, when FLMs were dealing with many conflicting priorities. This may have influenced some of the responses gathered. Nevertheless, the limitations of this study do not diminish its contribution to the area of the HR SSC and to the HR implementation literature streams and they do open further avenues of research.

8.4 Future research

This study focused on the implementation process and not the content of the HR policies being implemented. Future research could ascertain whether FLMs' perceptions of HR support vary depending on the types of HR policies being implemented. It would be interesting to discover whether the HR SSC delivery model has a more significant effect when FLMs are implementing messages that are more difficult to communicate, such as performance ratings or changes to reward plans. Future work could explore further the ways in which HR departments can support FLMs in more creative ways, such as via social network groups, or create and support informal manager networks. This could allow organisations to piggyback existing social networks with little investment and could lead to more effective and timely communication with FLMs.

A longitudinal study which looks at managers at different stages of their careers and different levels of experience would also allow us to learn the importance of tenure as a manager when it comes to tailoring HR support. Further research could also consider whether different generations, such as, e.g., Gen X and Gen Z, have different expectations of the HR delivery model, allowing the HR department to look at alternative ways of communicating HR messages to correspond to the preferences of managers. This is likely to result in more effective implementation by FLMs and in turn lead to the desired organisational outcomes.

The scope of this study focused on the HR SSC element of the delivery model, but it would be interesting to expand the research to discover the effect on the other elements of the delivery model, e.g., HR business partners and centres of expertise, and to understand the characteristics of these elements of the HR delivery model which managers value most and which have most impact on managers' implementation of HR practices. It would also be interesting to understand the effect of robotics and digital assistants FLMs perceptions of the HR service and any impact on FLM wellbeing. A further avenue for future research would be to understand the maturity of the SSC and whether this has an influence on how it is perceived by FLMs.

It has been suggested that organisations are likely to design and implement HR practices in ways that bring about mixed effects and unintended consequences (Baluch *et al.*, 2017) and this researcher argues that organisations may also implement HR SSC delivery models with mixed and unintended consequences. Baluch *et al.*, (2017) split research on wellbeing into three categories, psychological wellbeing, social wellbeing, and physical wellbeing. It would be

interesting to understand any linkage between psychological wellbeing generated by HR support and social wellbeing at work.

Future work could also further explore the social aspects of implementation for example using social exchange theory to further explore the importance of 'visible' support as a moderator or mediator of effective implementation, Future research could also incorporate social networks with more formal HR communication and examine the effects of establishing a more '*all-encompassing approach*' to communication by HR departments which takes account of both the need for formal communication and the many ways in which employees like to access information, e.g., via trusted colleagues or trusted information sources which they access frequently.

In summary, the conceptual model and measurement instrument proposed by this study offers researchers a theoretical framework and a measurement tool allowing them to continue to explore the implementation process and examine how the HR department can more effectively support implementation. Changing how HR departments communicate with FLMs is likely to have significant effects on the wellbeing of these managers and their ability to effectively implement HR policies with their teams. This study confirms that this is likely to be a fruitful area for further research.

8.5 Chapter summary

The key message from the findings of this study is that the HR support provided to FLMs matters when it comes to HR implementation. The study found that the HR SSC delivery model affects not only the accuracy of information available to FLMs but also how FLMs feel about HR implementation and its role in the implementation process.

The HR implementation stream of literature has gained significant momentum over the past ten years. The researcher hopes that the contribution of this study will help other researchers to advance our knowledge of the implementation process. Understanding the implementation process is key for organisations to be able to support desired organisational outcomes, such as employee engagement and retention of staff. If we are to understand how our FLMs wish to receive messages from the HR department, this can help HR departments to tailor and deliver communication in a more effective manner. Choosing the right skills for our HR SSC teams and ensuring that there is sufficient focus on providing a personalised response, where possible, will lead to FLMs being more comfortable in using the HR SSC structure, as well as feeling well supported and more confident in carrying out their HR duties.

The Covid global pandemic has also highlighted the importance of supporting mental wellbeing, and the findings from this study confirm that the ways in which HR departments offer support to FLMs can, even through their delivery models, help to reduce mental strain and stress

amongst FLMs and lead to increased confidence in carrying out their leadership role. For this reason alone, if we as academics and practitioners in the HR area can identify ways to help FLMs avoid higher stress levels, we must continue to carry out further research in this area – encouraging organisations to become more effective and not just establish a HR SSC delivery model and ignore its effects on FLMs.

Thesis Appendices

Appendix A *Role of HR in implementation - studies from 2000 -2021*

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
Wright et al., (2001)	Qualitative- 14 organisations	US	Resource based view of the enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The study highlights differences between FLMs and HRs views of HR’s contribution and effectiveness and the need for HR departments to involve managers in the design of HR practices. • The paper also discusses the need for HR audits to assess the effectiveness of the department and the HR department to communicate its contributions. • The role of the HR department is described in line with Ulrich’s model and the paper found that managers attributed failure to implement to a failure of the HR system. • The gaps identified in this study include the difference between the HR department’s perceptions and managers’ perceptions of the extent to which the HR function is

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
				adequately fulfilling its role and suggests the importance of the HR department
Lengnick-Hall (2003)	Theoretical paper which analyses the effect of e-HR on the HR department	NA	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The paper predicts that as a result of the introduction of self-service for managers via e-HR the time spent by the HR department on administrative tasks will be replaced by strategic and managerial tasks and the HR department will be able to create new ways to add value to the organisation. • In term of gaps, the authors suggest that HR professionals will need to have more IT skills than they required in the past.
Caldwell (2004)	Mixed method- N=98 surveys and n=24 interviews	UK	Perception mapping, sense making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper examines HR practitioners' perceptions of implementing HR practices and raised questions about the ability of the HR department to implement HR practices. The study suggests that HR practitioners were finding it difficult to break away from the 'traditional role of HR' and found significant gaps between the policy areas viewed as important and the policy areas where HR practitioners felt that significant progress had been made. HR practitioners

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
				<p>felt that this was partly due to fragmentation of implementation and the need for HR to focus on administrative efficiency as a priority. The study also found evidence of the HR departments view of the need for FLMs to possess strong HR competencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper highlights the gap between the theory and practice and implementation and emphasises the importance of employee communication and argues that HR professionals may not be closing the implementation gap as they remain tied to the role of administrative experts.
Khilji and Wang (2006)	Mixed method: n=508 survey responses and n=195 manager interviews	Pakistan		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The study gathers evidence from managers and non-managers inside and outside the HR department to examine the differences between intended and implemented HR practices. • The authors suggest that it is crucial that HR departments remain committed to the development of HR systems by remaining focused on implementation. and also highlight the need to consider employees satisfaction levels with HR practices.

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
Dany et al., (2008)	Quantitative using data from an existing survey with 3442 Cos	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, New Zealand, Spain, Slovenia, the UK and the USA	Resource based theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This study considers the distribution of roles between LMs and HR specialists. The study suggests that HR specialists need to be provided with a prominent role alongside LMs to ensure effective implementation. The paper concluded that effective consultation between line managers and HR specialists is key when it comes to the implementation of HR practices suggesting that a ‘shared approach’ to the implementation of HR practices will help to ensure that they are aligned to the priorities of the company. • The authors argue that nevertheless the role of the HR department should predominate in order to achieve desired organisational outcomes.
Bredin and Soderlund (2011)	Multiple case study comprising six project-based organizations	Sweden and Norway	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper introduces the model of the quadriad in HR implementation as a framework for looking at the interplay between HR specialists, line managers, project managers and project workers. • The authors suggest that the strong focus on the strategic nature of HR has led to a disregard for the operational settings in which HR practices are performed and a lack of

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
				<p>HR specialists who are integrated at an operational level. Line managers appear to want a HR department which is more integrated with the operational setting.</p>
Egan (2011)	Theoretical paper	NA	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This paper discusses the challenge for HR development professionals regarding how to establish an engaged role within the organisation and also considers the professionalisation and importance of the organisational context, alignment with management and the development of shared goals and strong collaboration between managers and the HR department.
Guest and Conway (2011)	Mixed methods- N=237 dyads (HR managers and CEOs)	UK	The study adopts a stakeholder perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The study explores the perceptions of HR managers and CEOs of the HRM-performance relationship. The study confirms a link between HR practices and HR effectiveness. The findings highlighted the need to understand the quality of the HR practice rather than the mere presence of the HR practice but fails to support any impact of consensus between HR and line managers in terms of their perceptions of HR effectiveness.

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An unexpected finding was the low level of agreement between HR managers and CEOs regarding the effectiveness of HR practices.
Guest and Woodrow (2012)	Conceptual paper which considers how HR can adopt a Kantian and ethical approach and how it gains power	NA	Adopts a Kantian framework to consider the role of HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study considered the role of the HR practitioner and the Ulrich model and how HR practitioners can gain power to represent the interests of both management and workers. The paper does consider the issue of worker wellbeing and the effects of e.g., high performance work practices on worker wellbeing. The authors highlight that it is not the presence of a work practice but how it is implemented which is important. The authors argue for HR managers role in promoting worker wellbeing.
Stirpe et al., (2013)	Quantitative- N=298 employees from nine firms in Spain,	Spain	Sense making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study found that HR credibility is one of the factors that influences employees' acceptance of HR practices. The authors also argue that for the HR department to be perceived as competent it needs to demonstrate a technical knowledge of HR practice but also a knowledge of organisational issues -for the department to be perceived as

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
				<p>trustworthy it needs to show that it cares for employees' wellbeing, and if the HR department is perceived as trustworthy and having technical credibility then employees are more likely to accept HR practices. Findings from the study were that HR credibility was an important acceptance enabler irrespective of the organisational climate.</p>
Najeeb (2013)	Qualitative multi case study- n=49 interviews	Maldives	Social capital theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The study found that all HR actors influence the design and implementation of HR practices but the extent of their involvement varies from actor to actor. Execution of HR practices necessitates effective coordination between HR actors. • The paper uses social capital theory to analyse the interplay between actors in the HR process finding that initiatives such as coaching and mentoring and creating a shared vision and language all contributed to building the social capital of the HR department. Social capital helped the HR department to overcome the tensions which existed between line managers and the HR department and to encourage cooperation. The authors suggest that building

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
				relationships between the line managers and HR is key to influencing the sense making process.
Francis et al., (2014)	n=9 plus interviews with HR director and line managers	UK	Critical discourse theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This paper examines how e-HR is framed and the impact of the framing of e-HR on manager enactment of HR practices. The authors suggest that further research is required to examine the juxtaposition between the technical and human elements of HR support and that more guidance is needed to help managers to balance the polarities and it calls for further dialogue between HR practitioners and academics regarding the impact of distancing between managers, HR teams on the performance of organisations.
Woodrow and Guest (2014)	Mixed method - 2006 sample: n=491 and 2007 survey n= 404	UK	Intended versus experienced HR practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The study examined the HR implementation process using bullying policy and found that even the best HR practices are unsuccessful unless they are implemented effectively. The study suggested the need for further research into the implementation process and that the use of a case study is a suitable way to examine the issues around implementation

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
				because it allows researcher to explore the cause and consequences of actions as well as the context.
García-Carbonell et al., (2015)	Conceptual paper which examines HR implementation from a process perspective	NA	Attribution theory and a strong HR system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The paper highlights the role of organisational communication in creating and managing shared HR messages. The authors consider the importance of vertical fit and horizontal fit and the need for both to be in place as well as the importance of communication in ensuring that HR practices are effective. • The paper suggests that HR departments should be trained in communication competencies.
Chen et al (2016)	42 organisations, 42 managers and 355 employees of which 5 to 10 would report to a manager depending on the organisation	Taiwan	Attribution theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This study examines the significance of HR practice consistency finding that it positively correlates with employees' perceptions of procedural justice and role performance. • The paper highlights the link between consistency of HRM implementation and in-role performance.
Stirpe et al., (2016)	Qualitative: n=19	Spain	AMO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper examines the role of the HR department in contributing to effective implementation. The authors found

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
				<p>that HR departments can support HR implementation by taking initiatives which support managers such as providing supporting materials and having an ‘open door’, framing HR practices in appealing ways and recognising good work. The authors suggest that when HR is not proactive HR implementation efforts are more likely to fail.</p>
Meijerink et al., (2016)	Quantitative: 2,002 employees in 19 companies in the Netherlands,	Netherlands	Attribution theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study examines employee co-creation as users of the service and also found a link between HRM competencies and their perception of HRM service value. The authors suggest that self-efficacy theory supports the idea that employees with higher levels of HR competence are more likely to lead to confidence and belief in one’s abilities. They argue that increased levels of HR competence leads to employees being more efficient in what they consume as they need to invest less time in searching for information.
Baluch (2017)	Qualitative: n=27	UK	Sense-giving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study suggests that decreasing HR support from organisations shapes employees’ perceptions of HR practices and it discusses the system strength created in selected non-profit organisations.

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
Khatri et al., (2017)	Quantitative: n=421	US	Resource based view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper found that there was a positive relationship between HR capabilities and patient care highlighting the importance of HR skills. The authors argue that the HR department needs to be proactive and adept at building a rapport and adapting to the concerns of employees. • This study examined HR capabilities and the role of HR as employee champion finding that building HR capabilities will have the effect of helping organisations to improve the quality of the services they are able to offer.
Brown et al., (2017)	Quantitative: N=1831 employees in 70 organisations	Australia	Social information processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper compares two HR roles that of administrative expert and of strategic change agent and concluded that in periods of organisational change when HR takes the role of administrative expert, there is more likely to be change cynicism whereas when HR takes on the role of strategic change agent. • HR needs to build trust and provide a rationale for the changes and the change is then more likely to be successful.

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
Steyn et al., (2017)	Quantitative: n=3180 from 52 companies	South Africa	Universalistic HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper found a positive link between effective HR practices and organisational commitment but found that this was sector specific. The paper suggests that the effectiveness of the HR department may depend on whether the department is tasked with being transactional or transformational. • The authors urge HR departments to act in a transformational way.
Oh et al., (2017)	Quantitative: N=146 from 146 organisations	Korea	Socio-cognitive, human capital, and signalling theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This study examines HR managers with higher levels of human capital finding that they had higher levels of commitment to HR -the study explored the practical implications of this finding including the need for CHROs to develop human capital, as this in turn will result in signalling to HR managers that the HR department is seen as an important asset. The authors consider the human capital of the CHRO in terms of skills, experience, and board membership.

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
López-Cotarelo (2018)	Qualitative: n=44 managers and 5 HR managers	UK	Managerial discretion Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The study looks at the effects when HR departments designs HR practices which allow scope for managerial discretion and suggests that the engagement of the HR department in working closely with the line manager to guide, educate and facilitate the contribution of managers is key to implementation.
Nguyen and Teo (2018)	Study 1 consisted of n=405 line managers Study 2 comprising of 192-line managers,	Vietnam	Attribution theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study looks at how HR managers could leverage their relationships with managers to enhance HR effectiveness in the context of a developing country. The study found that an organisation's HR philosophy and organisational commitment to employees affects HR implementation. The study also suggests that the extent to which the HR department is considered central to the organisation will determine the extent to which the department can contribute to the organisation.
Williams (2019)	Qualitative N=47 of which n=16 senior managers, n=19 supervisors and n=12	Australia	Systems theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study looks at how HR departments support managers to implement HR policies finding that a HR system which supports managers to implement HR practices effectively requires the alignment of HR practices, the provision of

Authors/year	Focus of the paper/Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings regarding the role of the HR department in implementation
				<p>supportive technology, a HR structure that facilitates proactive advice from HR, influential HR business partners and the provision of managerial training on the policies. The authors suggest that each of the mechanisms of HR support described in this study either enabled a strong HR system, that creates an environment supportive of HR practices, or contributes to weak spots within the HR system that limited how and when HR practices are implemented.</p>

Appendix B**Review of the literature: HR SSC delivery models**

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Findings regarding HR SSCs as part of the HR delivery model
Horan and Vernon (2003)	Qualitative: 3 group interviews (15-17 per group), 2 interviews with the management team of the shared service centre and interviews with 5 HR professionals	UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The author of this paper discusses the benefits and challenges of setting up HRSSCs including differences between HR SSCs in different regions and the need for integrating the HRSSC to the business structure and governance structure.• The author suggests that whilst the benefits to the organisation are potentially large the 'deep effect it has on the organisation' is less understood.
Cooke (2006)	Qualitative: 3 group interviews (15-17 per group), 2 interviews with the management team of the shared service centre and interviews with 5 HR professionals	UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This paper uses a case study to examine the difference between the theoretical benefits of HR SSCs and the reality of whether the model is successful suggesting that separating the HR department into strategic operational and administrative components may be too simplistic an approach.
Redman et al (2007)	HRSSC implementation in 4 organisations in the UK- semi structured interviews were used	UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This paper considers the HR SSC structure in four NHS organisations finding that whilst the HR SSC structure has some advantages for organisations it has difficulty addressing the transformation agenda.

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Findings regarding HR SSCs as part of the HR delivery model
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The authors also suggest that the existing literature is superficial in its analysis of the experience of the shared service employee and yet this may be critical to its overall success. The authors suggest that more research is required to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the HR SSC approach to managing the HR function as well as to understand the HR employees experience of being part of a HRSSC.
Boroughs and Saunders (2007)	Conceptual paper proposing critical success factors in HR SSC implementation	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This paper examines the issues with HR SSC implementation and identifies critical success factors which differentiate between successful HR SSCs and less successful HR SSCs. The authors suggest that involvement of the line managers who are end users of the service is essential to building a business focused delivery programme.
Constance (2008)	Case study of the prison service and consulting experiences	UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This paper examines how one organisation transformed its HR department to become more efficient and examines the implementation of a HR SSC. The author highlights the need for HR business partners to be change managers for the new HR delivery model.

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Findings regarding HR SSCs as part of the HR delivery model
Ulrich and Brockbank (2008)	HR as a value-add producer	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To deliver value to end users the HR organisation should be structurally aligned with the organization structure of the business and the roles and responsibilities of the different elements of HR should be clearly set out. • The authors highlight the importance of the need to maintain business focus and to get the operational support structure right.
Farndale et al., (2009)	15 organisations using a questionnaire and follow up interviews with managers of the SSCs	Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper uses the experiences of 15 organisations in the Netherlands to consider the differences between the theory of implementing HR SSCs and the reality including the challenges of measuring performance and the new skills required by the HR department operating in this new delivery model. • The authors suggest that a professional logic will require the consideration of expectations of all the different HR roles in the model.
Scully and Levin, (2010)	Conceptual paper focusing on the evolution of the HR shared services model	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this article the authors explore the evolution of HR shared services and discusses the different ways in which organisations have implemented the HR SSC

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Findings regarding HR SSCs as part of the HR delivery model
			<p>model and in-house shared services versus outsourced shared services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The authors argue that managing to achieve low cost through compromised levels of service makes no sense.
Boglund et al., (2011)	Qualitative, n=192 interviews with HR professionals, LMs and other stakeholders	Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study considered the HRSSC establishment and found that to achieve a desirable HR organisation requires the translation and interpretation of concepts in local context
Pritchard and Symon (2011)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This paper looks at the need for the HR professionals working in HR SSCs to create a new professional identity and suggests that the move to a HR SSC structure necessitates consideration of how HR SSC staff are perceived and perceive themselves vis-a-vis other HR professionals in the organisation
Meijerink et al., (2013a)	Conceptual paper in which a measure of the performance of Human resource SSC providers was developed	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The authors argue that both transactional and transformational HR value provided by the SSC needs to be considered when evaluating the value provided.
Meijerink and Bondarouk (2013b)	Qualitative: 24 interviews plus 8 hours of observations plus document analysis	Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The authors found that knowledge sharing only occurred within small functional groups and that merely centralising Hr SSC resources does not result in value for end users.

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Findings regarding HR SSCs as part of the HR delivery model
McCracken and McIvor (2013)	Sample relating to the HRSSC set up with 21 interviews from 30000 end users of service in a public sector organisation in the UK	UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study found that to be able to make a strategic contribution to the organisation HR key internal stakeholders needed to be fully engaged during the process of making outsourcing arrangements
Scully (2014)	Conceptual paper considering the need for SSC to be able to respond to changing business requirements	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author discusses the need for HRSSCs to be agile and / or SSC employees to be generalists who are part transaction processor, part customer service representative, part generalist and part coach.
Francis et al., (2014)	Survey plus n=9 interviews with HR director and line managers	UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The study examines the impact of e-HR on the people involved and suggests that e-HR results in a need to re-structure the relationships between HR departments and LMs
Scully (2016)	Conceptual paper which argues that SSCs can do less by encouraging users to use self-service	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The paper suggests different measures which can be used to measure the return on investment of SSCs.
Maatman and Meijerinck (2017)	91 business units in 19 Dutch organisations	Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This paper examines the control mechanisms used in SSCs finding that the dynamic capabilities of the SSC relate positively to HR shared service value.
Wallo and Kock (2018)	Qualitative case studies of three Swedish HRIs and 12 of their SME clients	Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This paper examines the success factors which are important when HR services are outsourced finding that

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Findings regarding HR SSCs as part of the HR delivery model
			<p>social aspects such as trust, shared values, communication, and commitment were crucial characteristics of the cooperation between the outsourced provider and the small companies.</p>
Aalto and Kallio (2019)	Qualitative 11 SSC managers in the public sector in Finland	Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper examines the implementation of an SSC providing HR and finance services finding that this new SSC form is a key catalyst for a more customer focused approach. • The paper argues that when new organisation approaches are introduced it is key for the critical cognitions and professional identities to be recognised in order to promote more customer-oriented thinking.
McMackin and Heffernan (2020)	Conceptual paper which proposes a definition of agile HR	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The paper highlights the neglect of HR operating models in the strategic HRM proposing a research agenda which will mitigate the limitations of the research to date. This paper highlights the neglect of operating models in SHRM research and proposes a research agenda.

Appendix C**Review of the literature: Role of the FLM in implementation**

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings
Guest (2011)	Quantitative: N=237 dyads	UK		This paper discusses the challenges in understanding the linkage between HRM and performance due to the lack of longitudinal studies.
Guest and Conway (2011)	Quantitative: N=237 dyads	UK	Stakeholder perspective, Attribution Theory	The paper, based on Bowen and Ostroff's 2004 concept of system strength, suggests that shared perceptions of the effectiveness of HR practices will be associated with higher performance. The paper highlights the lack of agreement which may exist between the HR department and line managers regarding HR effectiveness,
Runhaar (2012)	Qualitative: 3 teacher teams including managers and teachers	Netherlands	Discourse theory	The authors examine the implementation gap considering the extent to which the implementation gap can be explained by differences in the way the actors involved in implementation talk about it. The authors suggest that despite differences between the

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings
				line managers and teachers view of HR policy the teachers did not resist it
Bos-Nehles et al., (2013)	Quantitative: n=174 line managers and 1065 employees	Netherlands	AMO theory	This study uses AMO theory to understand whether motivation moderates the link between ability and performance but did not find evidence to support this hypothesis suggesting that further work is needed to understand motivation. The study finds that opportunity enhances the effect of ability on performance. The authors suggest that line managers who are provided with clearer role definition will be more effective in implementing HR practices. They also argue that the organisational context has a significant effect on their results -influencing the competencies of the line managers.
Xie et al., (2013)	Quantitative: n=300	China	Horizontal and vertical implementation by middle managers	This paper examined the effectiveness of MBA educated middle managers in China finding that longer tenured managers felt that they had more knowledge of HRM, more participation in HRM and autonomy and assistance from the HR

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings
				department. The authors found differences by regional area studied also and that middle managers appeared to have significant access to HR support.
Den Hartog et al., (2013)	Quantitative: n=2,063 employees and 449 in one firm	Netherlands	High performance work practices -combining the resource-based perspective and control-based view and signalling theory	The authors found that managers' communication was the moderator between employees' perceptions and managers perceptions of HR practices. Using signalling theory, the authors suggest that managers play an important role in providing clear signals to employees. The authors suggest that variability in HR communication between managers in the same department or unit needs further research.
Kuvaas et al., (2014)	Quantitative: n=89 line managers and n=631 employees	Norway	Social exchange theory and motivation theory	This paper finds that line managers perceptions of enabling HR plays an important role in explaining how HR practices lead to employee performance. The authors suggest that in order to be able to do their job well line managers need to believe that they have the autonomy and freedom to do so although the study does

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings
				not provide an answer regarding where to draw the line between consistency and autonomy.
Sikora and Ferris (2014)	Theoretical paper	NA	Social context theory	This paper uses social context theory to suggest implementation is affected by organisational culture, climate and political considerations. Social considerations it suggests will influence managers implementation and in turn subordinate performance, satisfaction and perceptions of justice.
Knies and Leisink (2014)	Quantitative: n=3668	Netherlands	AMO	This study explores the employees' perceptions of supervisor activities linked to ability motivation and opportunity studies and the influence of this on employees' extra role behaviour. The study found that leadership behaviour had an effect on employee commitment suggesting that it is not only important to focus on the content of HR practices but also on the role of supervisors in implementation.

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings
Piening et al., (2014)	Qualitative: 11 organisations n=3 executive directors, n8 board directors, and n=3 HR managers were carried out	Germany	Attribution theory and Resource based view of the firm	The paper highlights the variety of factors such as centralisation of the HR function and employees' expectations and managers' implementation approach, which influence the effectiveness of implementation supporting the assumption that system strength affects employees' perceptions of HRM. The paper found that the effect of HR practices varies depending on employees' attributions about that practice.
Trullen et al., (2016)	Qualitative: n=19	Spain	AMO	This article considers the role of the HR department in line managers effective implementation, finding that HR departments can support manager implementation by taking initiatives to foster managers abilities motivation and opportunities to implement HR practices. The paper provides a model to indicate how HR departments can have a positive influence on manager implementation

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings
Mahmood and Qadeer (2017)	Quantitative: 200 permanent employees and 82 supervisors/line managers	Pakistan	Social exchange theory	The findings of this study are that line managers implementation behaviour increases work performance.
Evans (2017)	Qualitative: n=75 managers (n=41 FLMSs)	UK	Organisational-role theory framework	This paper explores the factors preventing line managers from effectively implementing HR practices finding that a lack of institutional support, monitoring or incentives influenced effective implementation.
Dewettinck and Vroonen (2017)	Quantitative: n = 711 front-line managers (SURVEY 1) and 425 employees (SECOND WAVE SURVEY)	Belgium	Signalling theory, theory of planned behaviour and social exchange theory	This study found that line managers beliefs mediate the relationship between HR support and HR practice enactment and that line managers' enactment of HR practices is positively related to employee engagement and satisfaction.
Straub et al (2018)	Quantitative: n=434	Netherlands	Signalling theory	This study found that supervisor support for policy use influenced employees' perceptions of the policy and in turn engagement.
Russell et al., (2018)	Theoretical paper	NA	Impression forming theory	This study describes the process by which line manager implementation influences employees' perceptions of manager leadership styles

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings
Mirfakhar et al., (2018)	Theoretical paper	NA	Intended versus implemented HR practices	This study reviews the implementation literature and provides an overview of the antecedents affecting implementation providing a conceptual model for future research which includes content, context, and process elements
López-Cotarelo (2018)	Qualitative: n=44 managers and 5 HR managers	UK	Managerial discretion theory	This paper proposes three ways in which managers engage with HR policies and procedures and proposes that managers contribute to effective implementation by using their cognitive and political capabilities. The paper also considers how HR specialists can support effective implementation
Van Waeyenberg and Decramer (2018)	Quantitative: n=71 mgrs, n= 318 employees	Belgium	AMO	This paper found that line managers AMO to implement HR practices is positively related to employees' satisfaction with the system.
Bos-Nehles and Meijerink (2018)	Quantitative: n=75 employees and 20 matched managers	Netherlands	Social exchange theory	This study found that when employees have a good relationship with their manager and when their manager is motivated to implement HR

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings
				practices, they are more aware of HR practices suggesting that when employees perceive more HR practices then they will reciprocate with affective commitment.
Budjanovcanin (2018)	Qualitative: n= 21 interviews	UK	Social power theory	This paper considers how individuals have agency in how HR practices are implemented with them and examines how employee draw on power sources such as professional networks to influence how HR practices are implemented.
Pak and Kim (2018)	Quantitative: n=183 dyads from 51 teams	Korea	Social exchange theory	This study considers the visible role of team members in the process of implementation and suggests that when HR policies are viewed as an exchange agreement between the organisation and employee then the manager may positively increase the contract fulfilment and OCB of team members.
Makhecha et al., (2018)	Qualitative: n=128 employees, 10 HR employees, 31 managers	India	Intended HRM actual HRM and perceived HRM	This paper examines implementation gaps finding that gaps occurred because of implementors adaption of policies - the authors propose a model which depicts the process

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings
				elements which can disable or enable implementation creating gaps.
Hewett et al., (2018)	Conceptual paper which reviews the HR attribution literature	NA	Attribution theory and HR system strength theory	This paper reviews attribution theory in HR papers and the differences in approaches taken as well as directions for future research.
van Mierlo et al., (2018)	Theoretical paper		Structuration theory	This paper shows that rather than following a linear implementation process, HR practices are influenced by the different organisational actors and need to gain legitimacy to be successfully implemented
Williams (2019)	Qualitative: n=47 of which n=16 senior managers, n=19 supervisors and n=12	Australia	Systems theory	This paper considers how HR supports managers in implementing flexible work arrangements finding that to enable managers HR departments need to have 5 elements in place alignment of HR policies, provision of supportive technology, an HR structure which provides proactive advice and support, HR business partners who have influence and the provision of managerial training in the policy

Authors/year	Methodology used Sample size	Country	Theoretical framing	Findings
Chacko and Conway (2019)	Qualitative diary completion N=173	UK	Attribution theory	This paper examines the extent to which regular events signalled HR system strength to employees finding that positive HR events are associated with more positive perceptions of HR strength.
Hewett and Shantz (2020)	Theoretical paper	NA		This paper highlights the importance of the co-creation of policies to allow HR practices to respond to different stakeholder needs
Tyskbo (2020)	Qualitative: N= 23 in-depth interviews (10 HR managers, 8 line managers and 5 non-managerial employees)	Sweden		This paper examines how line manager implementation is affected by different complexities, such as dilemmas understandings and local adaptations, highlighting the complexities faced by line managers in practice.
Bos-Nehles et al., (2020)	Quantitative: Pilot study n=30 interviews with line managers N=471 managers in 6 organisations	Attribution theory	Causal attribution theory	This paper proposes a measurement scale for the assessment of managers' attributions for effective HR implementation

Appendix D **FLM demographics focus group phase (n=21)**

Participant	Part time or full time	Gender	Level of qualification	Age	Tenure at the organisation
A1	Full time	Male	Post-graduate	39	10 years
A2	Full time	Male	Post-graduate	44	14 years
A3	Full time	Male	Post-graduate	39	11 years
A4	Full time	Male	Post-graduate	39	3 years
A5	Full time	Male	Degree	33	12 years
A6	Part time	Female	Degree	39	5.5 years
A7	Full time	Male	Degree	34	12 years
A8	Full time	Male	Masters	30	2 years
A9	Full time	Female	Degree	30	5 years
A10	Full time	Female	Degree	28	7 years
A11	Full time	Male	Degree	54	35 years
A12	Full time	Male	Post-graduate	53	2 years
A13	Full time	Male	Post-graduate	46	5 years
A14	Full time	Female	A-Level	27	2 years
A15	Full time	Male	Degree	53	22 years
B1	Full time	Female	not provided	not provided	not provided
B2	Full time	Female	not provided	not provided	not provided
B3	Full time	Male	Post-graduate	50	23 years
B4	Full time	Male	A level	48	13 years
B5	Full time	Female	Degree	45	21 years
B6	Full time	Male	Post-graduate	41	15 years

Appendix E **Demographics for the pilot phase Highest education level (n=137)**

<i>Highest education level</i>	N	%
GCSE	10	7.3
A level	24	17.5
Bachelors Degree	60	43.8
Professional Qualification	40	29.2
Masters Degree	3	2.2

Appendix F **Tenure at current organisation (n=137)**

<i>Tenure at current organisation</i>	N	%
0–5 years	24	17.5
5–10 years	58	42.3
10 years +	55	40.2

Appendix G **Participant characteristics main sample(n=262)**

<i>Gender</i>	N	%
Male	147	56.1
Female	115	43.9

Appendix H **Employment contract type main sample (n=262)**

<i>Employment contract type</i>	N	%
Full time	258	98.5
Part time	4	1.5

Appendix I Highest education level main sample (n=262)

<i>Employment contract type</i>	N	%
GCSE	10	3.8
A level	33	12.6
Bachelors Degree	98	37.4
Professional Qualification	66	25.2
Masters Degree	55	21

Appendix J **Tenure at current organisation main sample (n=262)**

<i>Tenure at current organisation</i>	N	%
0–5 years	90	34.4
5–10 years	44	16.7
10 years +	128	48.9

Appendix K Tenure as a manager main sample, (n=262)

Note that this data was not captured for the pilot sample but was felt to be a useful data point due to findings in the literature that experience as a manager impacts perceptions of HR support

<i>Length of tenure as a manager</i>	N	%
0–1 year	8	3.0
1–3 years	36	13.8
3–10 years	83	31.7
10 years +	135	51.5

Appendix L *FLM demographics-qualitative phase (n=46 FLMs and n=10 HR professionals)*

Participant	Part time or full time	Gender	Level of qualification	Age	Tenure as a FLM	Tenure at the organisation
OFFSHORE 1	Full time	Female	Masters	45-54	10+years	0-5 years
OFFSHORE 2	Full time	Female	Masters	25-34	3-10years	5-10 years
OFFSHORE 3	Full time	Male	Masters	35-44	10+years	5-10 years
OFFSHORE 4	Full time	Female	Masters	45-54	10+years	0-5 years
OFFSHORE 5	Full time	Female	A Level	45-54	10+years	5-10 years
OFFSHORE 6	Full time	Female	Masters	35-44	3-10years	10+years
OFFSHORE 7	Full time	Female	Degree	35-44	3-10years	10+years
OFFSHORE 8	Full time	Male	Degree	25-34	1-3years	5-10years
OFFSHORE 9	Full time	Male	Professional	55+	10+years	5-10 years
OFFSHORE 10	Full time	Female	Degree	35-44	10+years	10+years
OFFSHORE 11	Full time	Male	Degree	55+	10+years	10+ years
OFFSHORE 12	Full time	Female	Masters	45-54	10+years	10+ years
OFFSHORE 13	Full time	Male	Professional	45-54	10+years	0-5 years
OFFSHORE 14	Full time	Female	Professional	45-54	0-1 year	10+years
OFFSHORE 15	Full time	Female	Professional	45-54	3-10 years	10+years
OFFSHORE 16	Full time	Female	Professional	45-54	10+years	10+ years
OFFSHORE 17	Full time	Female	Degree	35-44	1-3 years	10+years
OFFSHORE 18	Full time	Male	Professional	55+	10+years	0-5 years
OFFSHORE 19	Full time	Female	Professional	35-44	10+years	0-5 years
OFFSHORE 20	Full time	Female	A Level	45-54	3-10years	0-5 years
OFFSHORE 21	Full time	Male	Masters	45-54	10+years	10+ years
OFFSHORE 22	Full time	Female	Degree	25-34	1-3 years	0-5 years
OFFSHORE 23	Full time	Female	Degree	35-44	1-3 years	0-5 years
OFFSHORE 24	Part time	Female	Degree	35-44	10+years	5-10 years
OFFSHORE 25	Full time	Female	A Level	35-44	3-10years	5-10 years
ONSHORE 1	Full-time	Male	GCSE	45-54	3-10 years	10+ years
ONSHORE 2	Full-time	Male	A-Level	45-54	3-10 years	10+ years

Participant	Part time or full time	Gender	Level of qualification	Age	Tenure as a FLM	Tenure at the organisation
ONSHORE 3	Full time	Male	Masters	45-54	10+years	10+ years
ONSHORE 4	Full time	Female	A level	55+	10+ years	10+ years
ONSHORE 5	Full time	Male	Masters	45-54	10+ years	10+ years
ONSHORE 6	Full time	Male	Bachelors	55+	10+ years	5-10 years
ONSHORE 7	Full time	Male	Bachelors	55+	10+ years	10+ years
ONSHORE 8	Full time	Female	Professional	45-54	3-10 years	10+ years
ONSHORE 9	Full time	Male	Professional	45-54	1-3 years	0-5 years
ONSHORE 10	Full time	Male	GCSE	55+	10+ years	10+ years
ONSHORE 11	Full time	Female	Professional	35-44	3-10 years	0-5 years
ONSHORE 12	Full time	Male	Bachelors	35-44	1-3 years	10+ years
ONSHORE 13	Full time	Male	A-level	55+	10+ years	10+ years
ONSHORE 14	Full time	Male	Bachelors	45-54	3-10 years	5-10 years
ONSHORE 15	Full time	Male	Bachelors	55+	10+ years	10+ years
ONSHORE 16	Full time	Male	Masters	23-34	0-1 years	0-5 years
ONSHORE 17	Full time	Male	Professional	45-54	10+ years	10+ years
ONSHORE 18	Full time	Female	A-level	55+	10+ years	10+ years
ONSHORE 19	Full time	Male	A-level	35-44	3-10 years	0-5 years
ONSHORE 20	Full time	Female	Bachelors	45-54	1-3 years	0-5 years
ONSHORE 21	Full time	Male	Bachelors	55+	3-10 years	10+ years

Appendix M **Codebook used for the 137 pilot test cases**

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
ID	ID	Identification number	Number assigned to each survey	Scale
Manager	CONTR1	Are you a manager	1=Yes 2=No	Nominal
Org	CONTR 2 OrgSize	Confirm the organisation size	1=250-1000 2=1000+ employees	Ordinal
Gender	CONTR3 Gender	Gender	1= Males 2= Females	Nominal
Contract	CONTR4 Contract	Employment Contract type	1= Full-time 2=Part-time	Nominal
Education	CONTR5 Education	Highest level of education completed	1= GCSE level 2= A level or equivalent 3= Bachelors degree 4= professional qualification 5= Masters degree	Ordinal

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
			6=Other	
Tenure	CONTR6 Tenure	Length of tenure at current organisation	1= 0-5 years 2= 5-10 years 3=10 years +	Ordinal
NEW PANEL VERSUS ATKINS	CONTR7 Data source	Are you part of Panel data or Atkins data	1=Panel data 2=Atkins data	Nominal
	PEOHR1	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides its services at the time it promises to do so.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PEOHR3	The employees working in the Human Resources department tell me exactly when	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
Perceived effectiveness of HR Dept		their services will be performed.	5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PEOHR4	The Human Resources department is always willing to help me.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PEOHR5	The Human Resources department has the necessary knowledge to answer my questions	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
	PEOHR6	The Human Resources department has my best interests at heart.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PEOHR7	The Human Resources department understands the specific needs of line management.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PEOA1	It is easy to access advice from the	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
Perceived ease of access		Human Resources department in my organisation.	4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PEOA3	I can independently locate Human Resource policy information via the self-service system in my organisation.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	TOI1	The Human Resources team members in my organisation share information effectively between them to resolve issues.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
Taking Ownership of issue			7=Strongly Agree	
	TOI3	The Human Resources department in my organisation takes ownership to ensure that any HR issues I raise are resolved.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	TOI4	I only have to explain my question to the Human Resources department once and they make sure that it is resolved.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PAHRTT1	I have access to training regarding	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
Perceived access to HR training		HR policies and procedures.	4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PAHRT2	The Human Resources department at my organisation provides practical training which helps me in my role as line manager.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PAHRT3	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides guidance on how to effectively implement an HR policy	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
		when it comes to my team.	7=Strongly Agree	
	PAHRT4	I am aware of what is expected of me as a line manager.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PAHRT5	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides training for new line managers.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PAHRT6	The Human Resources department in my	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
		organisation provides a guide to HR policies for new line managers.	3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PAHRT7	The communication regarding the training on how to use our HR tools and HR systems has been clear and easy to understand.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PAHRT8	The quality of the content and the way my organisation structures the training activities on how to use our HR	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
		tools and HR systems are satisfactory.	6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
Perceived Nominated HR contact	PNC1	I have access to face-to-face support at my office for Human Resource questions.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PNC2	I know who my Human Resources contact is.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PNC3	I know who to contact in the Human	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
		Resources department in my organisation to get answers to my questions.	3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PNC4	I have access to a named Human Resources contact	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PTA1	I receive personalised advice from my Human Resources contact.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
Perceived Tailored advice			6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PTA2	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides coaching to support me in having difficult conversations with my team members.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PTA3	The Human Resources department in my organisation tailors the support they provide to meet the needs of the line manager.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PTA4	The Human Resources department in my	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
		organisation is available to answer questions informally.	3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
Perceived Visibility of HR	PVHR1	I am clear on the services provided by the Human Resources department in my organisation.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PVHR2	The Human Resources department in my organisation is visible.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
			6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PVHR3	The Human Resources department at my organisation is easily accessible.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PVHR4	The Human Resources department in my organisation actions feedback regarding how policies or procedures could be improved.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PEHR1	The HR tools and HR	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
Flexibility of the HR tools and systems to adapt to mgr requirements		systems in my organisation are adjusted to the specific needs I have as a leader when it comes to getting the best out of my employees.	3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PEHR2	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are flexible enough to be adapted to my personal leadership style.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PEHR3	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are flexible enough to be adapted to the individual	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
		needs of my employees.	5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PEHR5	All in all, the HR tools and systems in my organisation help me perform my leadership duties in a successful way.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PEHR6	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation have increased my satisfaction with my managerial responsibilities.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
Perceived Trust in HR	PTHR1	If I had my way , I wouldn't let the Human Resources department in my organisation have any influence over issues that are important to me	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PTHR2	I would be willing to let the Human Resources department in my organisation have complete control over my future in this organisation.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PTHR3	I really wish I had a good way to keep an eye on the Human Resources department	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree	

Overall Categories	SPSS Name	Variable	Coding Instructions	Measurement scale
		in my organisation.	4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	
	PTHR4	I would be comfortable giving the Human Resources department in this organisation a task or problem which was critical to me, even if I could not monitor their actions.	1=Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree 4= Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 =Slightly Agree 6=Agree 7=Strongly Agree	

Appendix N **Initial 40 scale items capturing HR Support**

No.	Item
1.	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides its services at the time it promises to do so.
2	The employees working in the Human Resources department tell me exactly when their services will be performed.
3	The Human Resources department is always willing to help me.
4	The Human Resources department has the necessary knowledge to answer my questions
5	The Human Resources department has my best interests at heart.
6	The Human Resources department understands the specific needs of line management.
7	It is easy to access advice from the Human Resources department in my organisation.
8	I can independently locate Human Resource policy information via the self-service system in my organisation.
9	I have access to face-to-face support at my office for Human Resource questions.
10	The Human Resources team members in my organisation share information effectively between them to resolve issues.
11	I only have to explain my question to the Human Resources department once and they make sure that it is resolved.
12	I have access to training regarding HR policies and procedures.
13	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides guidance on how to effectively implement an HR policy when it comes to my team.
14	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides training for new line managers.
15	The communication regarding the training on how to use our HR tools and HR systems has been clear and easy to understand.

No.	Item
16	I know who to contact in the Human Resources department in my organisation to get answers to my questions.
17	The quality of the content and the way my organisation structures the training activities on how to use our HR tools and HR systems are satisfactory.
18	I know who my Human Resources contact is.
19	I receive personalised advice from my Human Resources contact.
20	The Human Resources department in my organisation takes ownership to ensure that any HR issues I raise are resolved.
21	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides coaching to support me in having difficult conversations with my team members.
22	The Human Resources department in my organisation tailors the support they provide to meet the needs of the line manager.
23	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides a guide to HR policies for new line managers.
24	The Human Resources department in my organisation is available to answer questions informally.
25	I am clear on the services provided by the Human Resources department in my organisation.
26	The Human Resources department in my organisation is visible.
27	I have access to a named Human Resources contact
28	I am aware of what is expected of me as a line manager.
29	The Human Resources department at my organisation is easily accessible.
30	The Human Resources department at my organisation provides practical training which helps me in my role as line manager.
31	The Human Resources department in my organisation actions feedback regarding how policies or procedures could be improved.

No.	Item
32	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are adjusted to the specific needs I have as a leader when it comes to getting the 'best' out of my employees.
33	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are flexible enough to be adapted to my personal leadership style.
34	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are flexible enough to be adapted to the individual needs of my employees.
35	All in all, the HR tools and systems in my organisation help me perform my leadership duties in a successful way.
36	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation have increased my satisfaction with my managerial responsibilities.
37	If I had my way, I wouldn't let the Human Resources department in my organisation have any influence over issues that are important to me
38	I would be willing to let the Human Resources department in my organisation have complete control over my future in this organisation.
39	I really wish I had a good way to keep an eye on the Human Resources department in my organisation.
40	I would be comfortable giving the Human Resources department in this organisation a task or problem which was critical to me, even if I could not monitor their actions.

Appendix N***The final 23 items which were retained following the principal components rounds of analysis (rounded up to two decimal points)***

Item No.		Factor loading	Mean	SD
1	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation have increased my satisfaction with my managerial responsibilities.	0.85	5.19	1.37
2	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are adjusted to the specific needs I have as a leader when it comes to getting the best out of my employees.	0.84	5.21	1.52
3	The Human Resources department at my organisation provides practical training which helps me in my role as line manager.	0.84	5.13	1.50
4	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are flexible enough to be adapted to the individual needs of my employees.	0.84	5.27	1.37
5	The Human Resources department is always willing to help me.	0.84	5.59	1.56
6	All in all, the HR tools and HR systems in my organisation are flexible enough to be adapted to my personal leadership style.	0.84	5.03	1.54
7	The Human Resources department in my organisation is available to answer questions informally.	0.82	5.29	1.35
8	It is easy to access advice from the Human Resources department in my organisation.	0.82	5.35	1.43
9	The communication regarding the training on how to use our HR tools and HR systems has been clear and easy to understand.	0.82	5.05	1.42
10	All in all, the HR tools and systems in my organisation help me perform my leadership duties in a successful way	0.81	5.20	1.47

Item No.		Factor loading	Mean	SD
11	The Human Resources department in my organisation tailors the support they provide to meet the needs of the line manager.	0.81	5.13	1.40
12	The quality of the content and the way my organisation structures the training activities on how to use our HR tools and HR systems are satisfactory.	0.81	5.26	1.56
13	The Human Resources department in my organisation takes ownership to ensure that any HR issues I raise are resolved.	0.81	5.10	1.58
14	I am clear on the services provided by the Human Resources department in my organisation.	0.80	5.10	1.58
15	The employees working in the Human Resources department tell me exactly when their services will be performed.	0.80	5.28	1.57
16	The Human Resources department in my organisation is visible.	0.80	5.42	1.41
17	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides coaching to support me in having difficult conversations with my team members.	0.80	4.94	1.58
18	The Human Resources team members in my organisation share information effectively between them to resolve issues.	0.80	5.29	1.49
19	The Human Resources department at my organisation is easily accessible.	0.79	5.10	1.70
20	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides guidance on how to effectively implement an HR policy when it comes to my team.	0.78	1.29	-1.11
21	The Human Resources department has my best interests at heart.	0.78	5.22	1.49
22	I only have to explain my question to the Human Resources department once and they make sure that it is resolved.	0.77	4.96	1.64

Item No.		Factor loading	Mean	SD
23	The Human Resources department in my organisation provides a guide to HR policies for new line managers.	0.75	3.85	1.90
	Eigenvalues of components 1 and 2	12.70		
	Percentage of variance	72.25		

Appendix O

Extract from the coding carried out in the qualitative phase of the main study

Coding Category	Sample excerpt illustration	Broader theme (2 nd order theme)
Clarity	<p>“Well with the offshore support there are multiple people to respond and it is not always clear</p> <p>The terminology is not always that clear regarding what you asked about if it is a simple process, they are process led and very good but if it is something a bit more personal and unique go to the local contact ...For the offshore team they are so process driven that if it doesn't fit in a box they don't know what to do with it “I had a lady on maternity leave and she was paid full salary rather than maternity pay and she didn't want to be in debt and this took a long time to resolve and lots of back and forth with the (offshore) team.”</p> <p>“The issues with going to and fro with (the offshore team) is a little frustrating ...Personally, it is not a big thing for me but others who need to deal with HR more frequently may disagree. It would be nice to raise a ticket and to have it fixed immediately but that is not the reality”.</p> <p>“Speaking with (the offshore team) or wherever we're talking to, because with the language barrier it's very hard to make yourself understood. Likewise, for them.”</p> <p>”</p>	

	<p>“I got emailed a document describing the process, which I stepped through. That was quite thorough and accurate”</p> <p>“I think we asked the question; is this is what is meant to be happening now? We got a slightly fudgy answer to be honest.(needed to be clearer on) very clear about who does what sift levels, so who does the initial sift, who feeds back to applicants, is there feedback required?”</p>	
<p>Salient/Personalised or tailored information</p>	<p>“Yeah. I mean they’ve been through that process a number of times and they knew the member of staff in question and they had a good understanding about that team as well and the dynamics going on, so they were able just to kind of cut through the chase...”</p> <p>“I think that element of personal has gone”</p> <p>“The person at the other end doesn't necessarily understand the context or know the information. It can end up being quite back and forth.”</p> <p>“Yeah, I guess just being able to be clear and for answers and information and guidance to be specific and relevant to your context.”</p> <p>“I think the changes were just some assumptions from the managers that employees in (the offshore team) or new staff would know what the processes are on what we needed to do and the recruitment for assessment is different for other divisions”</p> <p>“There is an element of mistrust, you don’t know if the information that you’re getting back is correct for you if</p>	

	<p>that makes sense. I suppose because everybody is offshore or you just can't get hold of somebody to actually talk to, you question, I suppose, more the information that you're giving. You might get a response back, that response sometimes seems a bit scripted maybe in some instances, so you go back just to clarify certain points, but when they come back again, there's very little variation on what they sent to you originally. Then what you end up doing is you go, okay I'm going to bypass this person and go up a level."</p> <p>"The meetings were very scripted. For every one that I went through, it was the same conversation that was being had with the person."</p> <p>"At least (if HR personalised the messaging) that makes the employee feel that they are not just a number. They are an actual person that somebody is concerned about."</p> <p>"It is personal support. It is the support in terms of her understanding how our office is working and the environment itself. It's the local knowledge she has, the local experience she has. and also, from a UK perspective in terms of local employment laws".</p>	
<p>Frequency of information</p>	<p>"I would like more regular communication, e.g., once a quarter to meet with me and my colleagues for an informal chat about how it is going."</p> <p>"The updates are very far and few between. There isn't much information coming through."</p> <p>"After that initial (thing) it didn't feel as if there was any kind of follow-up. In the initial days and weeks there was</p>	

	<p>but then it kind of felt that that was it then everyone was just to get on with it”</p> <p>“They are quite proactive in chasing me.”</p> <p>“I think they tend to wait for us to come to them rather than them perhaps being engaged with us early enough.”</p> <p>“More proactive and a lot more communicative. I didn’t have to chase.”</p> <p>“Well, he always did what he said he was going to do by the date. There was always a good line of communication. You could always get hold of him.”</p>	
<p>Move to a “self-service” approach - ease of accessing information</p>	<p>“I think managers are used to a fully-fledged service, and I think people are reluctant to, move to self-service, especially if it's not easy. I think we have improved. But for example, if you get the change request, you can do it easily, from your mobile device, et cetera. That is super positive. It's just a click. I think services should just be one click away.”</p> <p>“I've found it a bit painful at times. As I say, I've not had to use it very often, so it's okay, but whenever I do have to use it and raise a query, it can be a bit frustrating at times. Again, it's trying to get that understanding across, which you can't get across if it's not people that you work with who know your staff and know what you're doing, and [can implement] it. It's changed a lot, but as I say, I can understand why they've don't it, because it's a lot cheaper and it still functions; it still works. It's just not as enjoyable an experience, if you can call it that... Yeah. I've hardly used it at all. I do think by kind of making it more inaccessible almost, people don't use it as much as they would.... I've raised my first HR request (via the self-</p>	

	<p>service portal) this morning. That's the first one I've done for a long, long time.”</p> <p>“I think that HR have developed their system to suit them, not to suit the users. So, it's sometimes quite difficult to find what you're looking for, because it doesn't sit in the natural place.”</p> <p>“The IT systems for HR are pretty good actually there is a lot of information to delve around a bit but that’s not perfect but good to have.”</p> <p>“The system itself is – yeah, it’s not intuitive.”</p> <p>“Raising a ticket can be frustrating, as it can say it will not be responded to for a long period of time e.g., 72 hours or something like that, and if you have a staffing issue or a member of staff who has Covid you have to deal with that really quickly.”</p> <p>“Because the question that you have doesn’t necessarily fit into the boxes that they’ve predefined, it can be I suppose more complex or more complicated than it actually needs to be. Sometimes you have a question and it’s not necessarily about, you know, the predefined drop-down boxes that they’ve got”</p> <p>“Personally, it is not a big thing for me but others who need to deal with HR more frequently may disagree. It would be nice to raise a ticket and to have it fixed immediately but that is not the reality.”</p> <p>“Workday tool has made things easier, in terms of the performance management side of [unclear], I still think</p>	
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	<p>that the centralised tool is sometimes restrictive. It tries to have a common approach for everybody across the organisation.”</p> <p>“Maybe this is just me in a lazy frame of mind, but it seems that as a manager you have to actively seek out all the information that you might need to deal with the particular situation.”</p> <p>“So, if you wanted to find that information you need to go off to this website, then you need to read it and whatever, but do it all electronically. This is not scientific, I can't scientifically prove this, but there seems to be a withdrawal of the more face-to-face and human interaction ways of communicating.”</p> <p>“Yeah, SharePoint is fine, it's all there. Pretty intuitive, really, pretty straightforward.”</p> <p>“If I’m honest, it shifts the workloads to the manager. I understand the reasons for it, but I also kind of think that when – I’m not sure it’s the most efficient use of time and money. If you could get more admin support - because actually, what I end up doing is I have to spend more time doing that kind of recruitment admin side of things which isn’t – I wouldn’t say it was the best use of my time”.</p>	
HR advice and expert knowledge	<p>“The reason we still have the UK connection (to HR colleagues based in the UK) is because the UK (team) has the knowledge of the UK law, UK company law and employment laws whereas the person (in the offshore location) wouldn't necessarily.”</p>	

	<p>“I’ve been with HR having conversations with team members to discuss performance improvement and sickness absence. You know, very personal, sensitive subjects where you need to have somebody on site to protect both you and the employee and make sure that both parties are getting the same information and the right information. Those sorts of sensitive subjects are the ones that I think HR need to support and help with and obviously they’re the ones that have done all the study about employment law and tribunal and all that sort of stuff”</p> <p>“We have experts but I yeah, I would say advice is more what's lacking here”</p> <p>“You can think okay, I know what to say but it's all about, especially when situations are sensitive, it's about the timing of those things and I think HR advice on those is really crucial because you don't want to do anything wrong.”</p> <p>“They’re the ones that have done all the study about employment law and tribunal and all that sort of stuff. I just deliver the information that I’m provided when I’m going in those situations. That’s obviously not my area of expertise, that’s where I need support”</p> <p>“Thinking about the broader HR landscape and how that works out, that’s definitely been a useful input. Somebody who understands I guess our needs and what we’re trying to do as a group, and bring that broader, have you thought about, what about, what about these things, these are other organisations that are doing similar kind of things. That kind of thing.”</p>	<p>HR skills</p>
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<p>Knowledge of the business</p>	<p>“Trying to get the remote (offshore) team to understand the terms and conditions of that individual that we’re going to appoint to a certain role can be a real challenge. I think that’s – so it’s that lack of – I think it’s the generality of the process that we suffer from.”</p> <p>“The main frustration with HR is to do with recruitment - (my sector) is a different business to other parts of the organisation and there is a lack of understanding of your business area”.</p> <p>“You have to validate the information you are getting to see if it is relevant for your location or business area”</p>	
<p>HR team’s personal skills e.g., empathy</p>	<p>“I do think that having HR spread across the teams closer to us would give even leaders higher up this softer touch in dealing with very difficult situations and decisions.... I don’t have this feeling that the HR really care about making sure that people are totally on board with the latest policies and regulations and just how we should lead people. It’s more about issuing policies, issuing communication but not really following up organising training or sessions or something that - there is no caring in that relationship.”</p> <p>“To just be told - have that dropped like that, I thought was awful. It didn't even come through line managers. I thought it just showed a real disregard and a complete lack of empathy about how that would be received and any kind of consequence, implications for the individual.”</p> <p>“We have been going through three years of a re-org, having HR in a different part of the globe, and we haven’t had support for peoples’ mental health and we</p>	

	<p>haven't had support for peoples' managers. People who are higher up the company and who are communicating the changes are doing this without HR's support necessarily and (how) this is coming across is in a very brutal, cold way."</p> <p>"HR is more about issuing policies or issuing communications but not really about following up-there is no caring in the relationship."</p> <p>"I've been through redundancies many, many times - more than anything at (the organisation) I thought that it was more a paper-based exercise and the humanity was completely taken out of it."</p> <p>"It felt like the HR person didn't care and it could have been made more human giving personal support on questions asked for example as it became personal for those going through it and due to the way it was handled it became difficult to work with colleagues due to the lack of support from HR."</p> <p>"I mean, on a personal level they have to be personable and I'm able to communicate with them and get advice. So there's no sort of, I don't know, stonewalling. They're open to give advice and happy to give advice in a friendly manner."</p> <p>"Sometimes they're a bit blunt in some of their communication."</p> <p>"I was quite heartened that there was a human element to particularly the ones from Hazel, which is quite good because it's human resources....Yes, the tone was pitched</p>	
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	<p>right and the human intention, I think, came through, or I felt it came through.”</p>	
<p>HR personal skills e.g., ability to act as a “sounding board”</p>	<p>“(My HR contact) It’s a sounding board really.”</p> <p>“So, if I think I'm totally on my own I can use them as a sounding board or to actually gain proper support from and I have done. So, it's worked quite well.”</p> <p>“When you’re going to get a very formal response potentially, whereas actually you just want to have a bit of a chat about, I think this is a bit of a problem, what can I do, and, you know, what shouldn’t I do?”</p> <p>“(Discussing issue with a team member who had been ill) I would have loved to have talked this through.”</p> <p>“Yes, she is absolutely fine, she tends to get the crux of the issue and would normally make the time to quickly run through it and get a feel for (the issue). So, if I think I'm totally on my own I can use them as a sounding board or to actually gain proper support from and I have done so in the past.”</p> <p>“Then the lady I worked with on the investigation was excellent, really, really good, an excellent sounding board and very even-handed and non-biased. She questioned me about some of the things I was proposing and some of the things I was suggesting, so came up with good challenge on myself as well. So it wasn't just - a terrible word to use but meekly following things. It was a good interplay and exchange.”</p>	

	<p>“Well, what it does, it sort of cements my thinking. So, if I've got an issue with somebody and I decide to go down a certain route, it's a sounding board. So I can understand am I thinking the right way.”</p>	
<p>HR personal skills e.g., the ability to listen to feedback and act on it/act collaboratively</p>	<p>“ So, what we did is, that we joined forces with - as an outcome, we joined forces with the HR team and worked with them to make changes to the performance management, so moving away from the ranking to something that was much more collaborative and that it was much more of a dialogue ...So, there's a community there that's been built up, which is good there's a trusted relationship. The fact that it was collaborative with HR, that it was - that you had people from the business that was great.”</p> <p>“The ability for us to feed in...So, they were very responsive to change.”</p>	
<p>HR personal skills e.g., ‘corporate memory’/ institutional knowledge</p>	<p>“They change a lot, so the one we have got now will not know anything about that situation. When it changes too much I am less likely to reach out. People don't know the history and it feels like they change it very regularly.”</p> <p>“I thought may be slightly better than others, but in a lot of instances that also comes down a little bit to experience. We've got our people who have been at Organisation Onshore as an organisation, there's a lot of people who have been there a long time. So, if you've been there 25, 30 years you know how things are done. Conversely, you could also be a bit set in your ways and not pick up some of the newer things. I think from that point of view, because of the continuity they've got, that's good. Maybe sometimes if you get the newer people they</p>	

	<p>might not be as experienced in the way Organisation Onshore works. It's a slight nuance but I think it mainly comes down more to experience than actual capabilities.”</p> <p>“Actually, there's been an occasion - I'll talk about this particular incident - where that person, my HR advisor if you like, wasn't available because I think she was on leave or sick or something. I noticed there was definitely - well, the advice I got from the stand-in wasn't as good, because there's that lack of understanding of the full case I felt.”</p>	
<p>HR skills and knowledge e.g., cultural knowledge</p>	<p>“If we had someone offshore in (location) they would not understand that office hours are different (in the UK) and commute times are different ...just those very basic things.”</p> <p>“I found it frustrating that I had to explain the background to them.”</p> <p>“They are removed from things and sometimes don't understand things so sometimes you have to explain things through that don't make sense.”</p>	
<p>Effect on FLMs e.g., confidence</p>	<p>“Yes (if I receive the right level of HR support) I am definitely happier and more confident and secure that I am doing the right thing.”</p> <p>“Again, I suppose because everybody is offshore or you just can't get hold of somebody to actually talk to, you question, I suppose, more the information that you're giving... I think I'd feel more confident in the message that</p>	

	<p>I was delivering (if I had more face-to-face support or a named contact).”</p> <p>“Yeah, well it would have made you feel more confident in the role and be a better manager for your team.”</p> <p>“Having the right level of support from HR) confirms that you are trying on the right lines and I agree with that it is more of a steer. Otherwise, you are going on gut instinct and you are less confident.”</p> <p>“It gives me more confidence. I’m not a HR person, I won't have all that knowledge behind it.”</p> <p>“I wouldn’t want to be going into an investigation with the trade union rep and you have got the person under investigation and you are there kind of on your own, it’s good to have someone there not to hold your hand but who has got the viewpoint for HR its imperative their knowledge is key and we don’t want to put the business in an awkward position.“</p> <p>“It was the first one I'd undertaken, so you're always a bit nervous about am I doing it the right way, am I proceeding, what's the feedback on my performance, as it were, after undertaking an interview.”</p> <p>“It gave you confidence in the output of what we came up with. Basically, we were asked to come up with some recommendations. We did that and those were kind of taken to our director and that was agreed. But definitely having the HR input.”</p>	<p>Manager attitudes</p>
<p>Effect on FLMs’ wellbeing</p>	<p>“At the moment it feels very lonely, I don’t have that person who can advise me.”</p>	

	<p>“It is not so much the time to type a clarification email is that the issue is at the back of your mind and you are thinking about it, like, e.g. the overpayment for mat leave so you feel that stress as a manager and it impacts on your stress level as a manager.”</p> <p>“If you don’t feel that you’re confident in that subject, again, it can be a stressful time for all parties involved.”</p> <p>“I can’t pay anybody, it’s driving me nuts.”</p> <p>“We had a deadline and needed an answer before that member of staff’s last day working and so we needed to cancel it on time so it was frustrating and it caused some stress for me.”</p> <p>“It is stressful as you must be compliant and “I Hate it! Help me!”</p> <p>“There has been some confusion at times and inconsistent messages which has been frustrating.”</p> <p>“No. It can annoy me if things don’t work.”</p> <p>“Not a complaint, just a frustration.”</p> <p>“I never felt like I was out on a limb or abandoned. I knew that of the three people from HR that I had contact with, I would have been able to contact any one of them and been given advice, information, or offered up the correct way to proceed on something.”</p> <p>“It’s definitely frustrating. It increases workload so it pushes other things out. It also kind of squeezes – the reality is it probably squeezes the amount of time you can</p>	
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	<p>put into that kind of thing, so you end up having to do things maybe with less thought.”</p> <p>“It’s – the particular issue itself I don’t think necessarily makes you more stressed. It’s that accumulation of other things that then increases the stress I think, yes.”</p>	
<p>Effect on FLMs’ perceptions of organisational support</p>	<p>“I think the HR at (my organisation) is a credit to the business rather than anything else I have built a relationship and I feel supported by the organisation.”</p> <p>“I think because of this whole feeling of inclusiveness and the ability to know that you can contact HR when you need them, not necessarily that I need it, but I feel that there is support that’s the case - if I have any issues with my line manager or with my co-workers. I’ve seen it happening with other people, so I know that they are there for you.”</p> <p>“I mean, I work with who I work with. If I need to call in HR, I do.... I feel supported by (my company) in what I do. I feel that there is a wealth of resources.”</p> <p>“Yes, I think it does as it influences how well I think I can support my team.”</p> <p>“I don’t think it really affects how I see the organisation.”</p> <p>“I think its fine, if I need their support they will be there and that’s what you want to know you can trust them when calling.”</p> <p>“As a manager a significant chunk of your time is spent dealing with people-related issues of one sort of another,</p>	

	<p>so I think yeah, it is important for me to have a good level of support from HR. It does make a difference.”</p>	
<p>Effect on FLMs' motivation</p>	<p>“No. It doesn't. It doesn't impact (my motivation) either way.”</p> <p>“No, I don't think it does, the motivation comes from myself and wanting to help my team to achieve.”</p> <p>“I think it can (affect my motivation) e.g., during that time when I was recruiting someone into my team and didn't feel like I was getting very helpful support. I found that, yeah, pretty frustrating and a bit demotivating because you're sort of being asked to do most of the process yourself, but there's this person who's sort of presumably meant to be helping you, but actually is slowing things down and is really.”</p> <p>“I think it does affect your motivation -you never feel more like a manager than at times like that.”</p> <p>“I can't say that the HR support has played a key part in any of the motivations or approaches. I don't think so.”</p> <p>“Well, having good support is good, isn't it? If you're not supported at all, then that's demotivating.”</p>	
<p>Effect on FLMs' direct reports</p>	<p>“We used to be a team of five, (the delays in hiring replacements into the team), it's not just affecting me. It's affecting other people in the wider team.”</p> <p>“I don't mind the chasing necessarily, it's more that I've now got a new starter sat in a desk and I am embarrassed because they don't have the access they need to do their job.”</p>	<p>Has an effect on others</p>

	<p>“Obviously I had the candidate turn up on the day we'd agreed, and she had no IT equipment for a day. So, it was a waste of time coming into the office but also, just a bit, you know, not great impressions for the first day”.</p> <p>“I think what's important to me is the detailed stuff around my team and so I suppose the feeling that you're giving your team the right information about things like holiday or paternity leave or maternity leave or flexible working.”</p> <p>“Gave comfort to the team that the situation was being handled right, the fact that it was being resolved and the team knew that it was being resolved impacted their motivation.”</p> <p>“It took 6-8 weeks to get a new person on board which meant that by the time we got the new person on board we had lost the handover and KT period.”</p> <p>“I think there was one guy who turned down when he accepted the job, he turned down three other jobs I think, primarily because of the interview.”</p>	
<p>Effect on others around the FLM, e.g., impact on colleagues</p>	<p>“Sometimes I – it's easier to go to other people and ask them.”</p> <p>“ Especially when it comes to things like recruitment, I don't do it that often so I think I would always go to someone who's been through that process more because these processes kind of change quite a lot as well, so I would typically go to someone who's been through the process more recently and kind of check things with them first. “</p>	

	<p>“Well, you just have to get somebody else, a colleague, a helpful colleague who’s not an HR person who will say to you, ah yes, I've done this. There's a box here that you really must tick or there's a field that you have to fill in”.</p> <p>“There are other people that do my role. It's a supporting network so we can find it. If we don't - if there isn't a policy, we find a way around it or find a way that's worked in the past.”</p> <p>“That’s where you tend to go to colleagues that you know and you work with quite closely and just to say, have you got a name? Have you had experience of this? What happened with you? They might be able to offer you something or at least somewhere to go and find information.”</p> <p>“We have three main managers ...So if anybody's experienced something new then they'll probably mention it to the others, because we do have regular meetups, so we're able to share practice.”</p> <p>“Yes, if I know my colleagues have had a similar case then I would go to colleagues and talk about how they solved it.”</p> <p>“We don't have a regular catch-up or anything like that. It would be if I've got an issue, I request a meeting. I suppose my default role would probably be to discuss it with other line managers in my area to get some sort of peer review...In the first instance, it's usually an opportunity to bounce - have a sounding board to discuss the issue. Sometimes talking through it makes you see things that usually they can relate to the challenges.</p>	
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	<p>They've probably got similar types of problems in their team.”</p> <p>“Yeah, we do that all the time. We have a team of four managers at my grade and our senior manager, and we have conversations like that all the time. Sometimes it's just a simple admin question, how do you process this, how do you do that, what button do you press sort of thing. Sometimes it's a case of have you had a situation like this before, what would you do here, that sort of thing.”</p> <p>“I would probably have an initial conversation with colleagues. I've got colleagues who would know the people in my team, so you can talk fairly easily and openly about if you've got some – and that's kind of worked quite well. There's a couple of individuals within the team that I kind of feel more able to do that with, mainly because there's probably a closer alignment between what they do and what I do. Yeah, I think it would be immediate peers.”</p> <p>“I mean, you do build up a network of people over the years. So, yeah. Operations, my directorate, is the biggest one anyway, so we've got a broad range of people. I get support from my own management team as well anyway to deal with anything specifically. Generally speaking, there is good support.”</p>	
Impact on manager's own supervisor or line manager	“I have my line manager and we try to support each other as best we can but it's not the same.”	

	<p>“For a lot of (HR) things I just go to my direct line manager that’s basically what I do and occasionally he will direct me to the HR person.”</p> <p>“I usually involve my line manager in some of that conversation before it happens so then there's no surprises for her when she gets contacted. Also, my colleagues if it concerns them. But yeah, if I need support, sometimes I'll ask my line manager if they've done this before and they will talk me through it. So that's fine, yeah.”</p> <p>“I would normally go to my manager first.”</p> <p>“So, I would run things past him sometimes first. One partly I suppose - unless it's a completely sensitive nature, in which he shouldn't be involved in it. I would go to him and go listen; I've got this problem. This is how I am going to address it. I just want to run it past you in case it comes to you and you are wondering what is this? “</p>	
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All mandatory fields are marked (M*). Applications without mandatory fields completed are likely to be rejected by reviewers. Other fields are marked “if applicable”. Help text is provided, where appropriate, in italics after each question.

1. APPLICANT DETAILS

1.1 (M*) Applicant name:	Eilis Collins
1.2 Supervisor (if applicable):	Malcolm Higgs
1.3 Other researchers/collaborators (if applicable): <i>Name, address, email, telephone</i>	n/a

2. STUDY DETAILS

2.1 (M*) Title of study:	What effect does the HR delivery model have on first-line manager behaviours?
2.2 (M*) Type of study (e.g., <i>Undergraduate, Doctorate, Masters, Staff</i>):	Doctorate
2.3 i) (M*) Proposed start date:	1 st April 2018
2.3 ii) (M*) Proposed end date:	31/12/2021

2.4 (M*) What are the aims and objectives of this study?
<p>1.1. Aims</p> <p>1.1.1. This study is centred on examining the relationship between the line manager and the HR function and the impact that this relationship may be having on employee engagement levels. Gaining a better understanding of how line managers behaviours are affected by HR departments and the mechanism by which line manager behaviours have an impact on the engagement of their team members will help to shed new insights into how line managers impact engagement as well as providing us with a deeper understanding of how HR departments can best support line managers in creating the psychological conditions conducive to engagement.</p>

1.2. Objectives

Using an online questionnaire survey approach this study will:

1.2.1 identify how Supportive HR practices and the relationship between HR and Front-line managers affect Supportive Front-line manager behaviours.

1.2.4 will contribute to the understanding of the impact of the role of the line manager and HR teams on engagement.

2.5 (M*) Background to study (a *brief rationale for conducting the study. This involves providing a brief discussion of the past literature relevant to the project*):

There appears to be an opportunity to develop the literature relating to line manager and HR teams' impact team members and an opportunity to develop knowledge about how the way in which HR support is delivered may influence managers' behaviours.

An initial review of the literature relating to how line managers and HR affect engagement, highlights that this is a topic that would benefit from more empirical research. The use of short online questionnaire surveys will provide an appropriate framework in which to situate this research.

This review of the literature has highlighted an opportunity for new empirical research that explores the impact of the relationship between the line manager and HR department and how access to HR information may influence behaviours. The literature reviewed does not include any detailed analysis of how line manager behaviours may be affected by the interaction between the line manager and HR department.

HR practitioners and leaders in organisations may benefit from a framework which raises awareness of the importance of the relationship with the line manager and which shows the impact of the HR delivery model.

2.6 (M*) Key research question (*Specify hypothesis if applicable*):

Research Question I: Which elements of HR Support do first-line managers value most when implementing HR practices?

Research Question II: To what extent does the mode of delivery of HR have an impact on first-line managers' perceptions of HR Support?

Research Question III: What influence does the HR support received by first-line managers have on managers' behaviours?

2.7 (M*) Study design (*Give a brief outline of basic study design*)

Outline what approach is being used, why certain methods have been chosen.

The study is an empirical study using online survey questionnaires which will be rolled out to line managers and employees. In the case where an online survey is impractical the questions will be asked using a Teams call.

3. SAMPLE AND SETTING

3.1 (M*) How are participants to be approached? *Give details of what you will do if recruitment is insufficient. If participants will be accessed through a third party (e.g., children accessed via a school, employees accessed via a specific organisation) state if you have permission to contact them and **upload any letters of agreement to your submission in ERGO or provide the name and contact details of the person granting you permission to access the sample (to check that permission has been granted).***

The online surveys will be administered via an online survey tool or via Teams calls. Participants will be approached via the researcher's personal network and postings on LinkedIn and introductions from colleagues. The researcher will work with the HR department of the relevant organisations to communicate with the sample group regarding the purpose of the research and what is required as well as the measures which have been taken to assure anonymity and confidentiality.

3.2 (M*) Who are the proposed sample and where are they from (e.g. fellow students, club members)? How many participants do you intend to recruit? List inclusion/exclusion criteria if applicable. NB The University does not condone the use of 'blanket emails' for contacting potential participants (i.e. fellow staff and/or students).

It is usually advised to ensure groups of students/staff have given prior permission to be contacted in this way, or to use of a third party to pass on these requests. This is because there is a potential to take advantage of the access to 'group emails' and the relationship with colleagues and subordinates; we therefore generally do not support this method of approach.

If this is the only way to access a chosen cohort, a reasonable compromise is to obtain explicit approval from the Faculty Ethics Committee (FEC) and also from a senior member of the Faculty in case of complaint.

200+ line managers and employees who will be grouped into dyads and by coordinating with the HR department of the organisation 2 short surveys will be shared with them which they will complete online. Organisations will be identified via the researcher's personal network and extended network of colleagues as well as via postings on LinkedIn. The HR contact from the participating organisations will receive a briefing from the researcher regarding the purpose of the research and the measures taken to protect data and ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

3.3 (M*) Describe the relationship between researcher and sample (*Describe any relationship e.g., teacher, friend, boss, clinician, etc.*)

The relationship between the researcher and a small proportion of the sample group may be one of a colleague however it is expected that for the majority of the participants included in the sample the relationship between the researcher and sample will be one of a professional researcher/survey participant rather than friend, colleague, boss etc

3.4 (M*) Describe how you will ensure that fully informed consent is being given. *You must specify how participants will be told what to expect by participating in your research. For example, will participants be given a participant information sheet before being asked to provide their consent? Upload copies of the participant information sheet and consent form to your submission in ERGO.*

Participant Information Sheet.

Consent form.

(see attached)

3.5 (M*) Describe the plans that you have for feeding back the findings of the study to participants. *You must specify how participants will be informed of your research questions and/or hypotheses. For example, will participants be given a debriefing form at the end of your study? Upload a copy of the debriefing form to your submission in ERGO.*

The participants will be given the opportunity to request a summary of the research when the study is completed by indicating this on the participant consent sheet and providing contact details.

4. RESEARCH PROCEDURES, INTERVENTIONS AND MEASUREMENTS

4.1 (M*) Give a brief account of the procedure as experienced by the participant

*Make clear who does what, how many times and in what order. Make clear the role of all assistants and collaborators. Make clear total demands made on participants, including time and travel. You must also describe the content of your questionnaire/interview questions and EXPLICITLY state if you are using existing measures. If you are using existing measures, please provide the full academic reference as to where the measures can be found. **Upload any copies of questionnaires and interview schedules to your submission in ERGO.***

Participants who are line managers will be requested in the first instance to complete a short online survey of around 15 questions which will focus on supportive HR policies, relationship with HR and access to HR information through the HR delivery structure.

This survey is based on the scale which looks at supportive HR practices and which has been used by Allen et al, 2003 as well as the trust scale from Mayer and Davis 1999 which looks at the relationship with HR and a new scale which will be developed and validated to assess access to HR information.

This will be followed by a second short online survey which will be rolled out approximately one month later to the same line managers and which will include approx. 10 questions also to assess their own line manager behaviours and which is based on the scale used by May et al, 2004 and which may be delivered via Teams call if impractical to issue a second survey.

5. STUDY MANAGEMENT

5.1 (M*) State any potential for psychological or physical discomfort and/or distress?

n/a

5.2 Explain how you intend to alleviate any psychological or physical discomfort and/or distress that may arise? (if applicable)

n/a

5.3 Explain how you will care for any participants in 'special groups' (i.e. those in a dependent relationship, vulnerable or lacking in mental capacity) (if applicable)?

n/a

5.4 Please give details of any payments or incentives being used to recruit participants (if applicable)?

n/a

5.5 i) (M*) How will participant anonymity and/or data anonymity be maintained (if applicable)?

Two definitions of anonymity exist:

i) Unlinked anonymity - Complete anonymity can only be promised if questionnaires or other requests for information are not targeted to, or received from, individuals using their name or address or any other identifiable characteristics. For example if questionnaires are sent out with no possible identifiers when returned, or if they are picked up by respondents in a public place, then anonymity can be claimed. Research methods using interviews cannot usually claim anonymity – unless using telephone interviews when participants dial in.

ii) Linked anonymity - Using this method, complete anonymity cannot be promised because participants can be identified; their data may be coded so that participants are not identified by researchers, but the information provided to participants should indicate that they could be linked to their data.

The research and any data collected for the research will comply with the Data Protection Act and the University Data Management policy. In accordance with the University of Southampton Data Protection Policy and Research Data Management Guidance, the data will be stored on the University secure SharePoint site.

Participants and participating organisations will not be explicitly identified in the final research.

5.5 ii) (M*) How will participant confidentiality be maintained (if applicable)?

Confidentiality is defined as the non-disclosure of research information except to another authorised person. Confidential information can be shared with those who are already party to it, and may also be disclosed where the person providing the information provides explicit consent.

How will the data be stored and backed up during the research?

In accordance with the University of Southampton Data Protection Policy and Research Data Management Guidance, the data will be stored on the University secure SharePoint site. The data will be held on a SharePoint 2010 collaboration group "HR engagement".

The group will be set to the maximum level of confidentiality and security (Hidden - this group is invisible to all non-members. It is appropriate only for the most confidential material where the existence of the group must be kept out of the public domain). This reflects the personal and potentially commercially sensitive nature of the research.

The secure University Personal Files (also known as My Documents) will also be used to store the research data.

Both My Documents and the SharePoint group are regularly backed up (every two hours for My Documents).

How will you manage access and security?

Access to the data via the SharePoint group will be managed by Eilis Collins, the principle and sole investigator and the DBA supervisor (Professor Malcolm Higgs). It will be restricted to only those requiring access to support the DBA.

Access to data via "My Documents" is restricted to Eilis Collins, the principle and sole investigator.

5.6 (M*) How will personal data and study results be stored securely during and after the study? *Researchers should be aware of, and compliant with, the Data Protection policy of the University (for more information see www.southampton.ac.uk/inf/dppolicy.pdf). You must be able to demonstrate this in respect of handling, storage and retention of data (e.g. you must specify that personal identifiable data, such as consent forms, will be separate from other data and that the data will either be stored as an **encrypted file and/or stored in a locked filing cabinet**).*

Unless the data is used to support a published article all the personal and organisation data will be destroyed within 12 months of the award of the DBA. Subject to any University of Southampton requirements for further retention.

If any of the data is used to support a published article the data will be retained in accordance with any associated requirements.

5.7 (M*) Who will have access to these data?

Given the potentially commercially sensitive nature of the research and the need to provide assurances of data confidentiality and security to participating organisations and individuals, the data will not be shared. Only myself and my supervisor(s) will have access to these data.

N.B. – Before you upload this document to your ERGO submission remember to:

1. Complete ALL mandatory sections in this form

2. Upload any letters of agreement referred to in question 3.1 to your ERGO submission

3. Upload copies of your participant information sheet, consent form and debriefing form referred to in questions 3.4 and 3.5 to your ERGO submission

4. Upload any interview schedules and copies of questionnaires referred to in question 4.1

From: ERGOII

To: Eilis Collins

Subject: Study extension request approved - ERGO II 40546.A1

Date: 11 September 2021 16:48:35

Study extension request approved - ERGO II 40546.A1

ERGO II – Ethics and Research Governance Online <https://www.ergo2.soton.ac.uk>

Submission ID: 40546.A1

Submission Title: “A Social Exchange Perspective on the role of the manager” (Amendment 1)

Submitter Name: Eilis Collins

This email is to let you know that the extension request to your research has been approved.

This extension has been approved providing there are no other changes arising from the extension, such as changes to the protocol, sample size or researchers. If there are any additional changes please submit an amendment.

If your study has NHS ethics approvals in place then please ensure the REC are informed as well as all other parties from whom you have received permissions for your study.

If this is a student project, please note that this extension relates to the research itself, but does NOT alter deadlines for submission of your dissertation or thesis. Separate arrangements are in place to request an extension for submission of the dissertation and these can be found in your Handbook or by asking your supervisor.

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