



Line Managers' Personality Traits Related to Effective Human Resource Management Implementation

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Abstract

Human resource managers are vital actors in the implementation of HRM policies and practices. Effective HRM implementation depends on many antecedents, such as line managers' attributes (attribution theory), including personality traits. Though there has been recent research regarding attribute theory and HRM implementation, most research has centered on performance management, social relationships, or external (environmental) attributes. This has created a gap in the literature surrounding line managers' personality traits and HRM implementation. This study examined the relationship between line managers' personality traits, using the HEXACO Model of Personality Structure, and effective HRM implementation. The results show that line managers' personality traits associated with social and idea-related endeavors correlate more with HRM implementation than task-related personality traits. Personality traits such as *Agreeableness*, *Extroversion*, *Emotionality*, and *Openness to Experience* are significantly related to HRM implementation. In contrast, *Honesty-Humility* and *Conscientiousness* are not. This may be due to social relationships that encourage cooperation, creativity, sociability, and sentimentality. The study expands the body of knowledge surrounding HRM implementation by line managers, which allows for creating policies, procedures, and plans for line managers' recruitment, development, and retention to enhance organizational outcomes.

Keywords: Line Managers, Personality Traits, HEXACO, HRM Implementation, Attribution Theory

Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) implementation is the process of incorporating HR practice into the daily life of an organization by HR personnel, managers, and employees through the introduction, application, and perception of HR practices (Bondarouk et al., 2018). HRM implementation is the cornerstone of HRM effectiveness (Trullen et al., 2016). Effective implementation of HRM policies and processes creates positive results for the company and employees (Mirfakhar et al., 2018).

Line managers play a critical role in implementing HRM policies and processes (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018). Line managers interview candidates, develop employees, evaluate performance, and are involved in promotions and terminations (Lopez, 2018). Line managers are agents of the organization whose knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes (KSAOs), including personality and motivation, influence HRM implementation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Kehoe & Han, 2020).

Personality is a quality that impacts many behaviors and decisions of individuals. Ashton and Lee (2007) developed the HEXACO Model of Personality Structure. The HEXACO model uses a six-dimensional framework containing the personality factors *Honesty-Humility*, *Emotionality*, *Extraversion*, *Agreeableness*, *Conscientiousness*, and *Openness to Experience*. The HEXACO model is aligned closely with the Big Five or five-factors model (FFM) of personality for the first three factors. The other three factors offer a more complex relation to the last two dimensions of the FFM (Ashton & Lee, 2007). Beliefs and motivation are antecedents attributed to perceived causes (attributions) of behaviors, effects, or expected actions (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1985) offers the framework for understanding the relationship between antecedents and attributions that affect the implementation of HRM by line managers (Martinko & Mackey, 2019).

The bulk of the research involving line managers' HRM implementation is focused on performance management systems (Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018). For example, Fu et al. (2018) found that line managers' consistency in treating team members and individual responsiveness are positively related to individual job performance. The triad of social connections (line managers, coworkers, and employees) influence HRM attributions (Beijer et al., 2019). Employees have a positive perception of HRM policies if they have a good relationship with their line managers. Therefore, employee commitment to following HR policies increases (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018). However, additional research is required to understand how line managers' knowledge, abilities, personality, or other attributes influence how line managers implement HRM practices (Kehoe & Han, 2020).

Attribution theory identifies internal and external attributions that explain causal perceptions of various events, such as HRM implementation (Heider, 1958). Following the concepts of attribution theory, personality traits are personal (internal) attributes that can positively or negatively impact line managers' HRM implementation and performance. Personality traits, such as agreeableness and humility, impact how line managers behave and their attitudes about policies and processes (Moshagen et al., 2019). Evans (2017) found that role ambiguity reduced line managers' confidence in HRM implementation, whereas overload and conflict resulted in the renegotiation of HR policies. Similarly, line managers who experienced role stress or overload failed to consistently implement HRM (Evans, 2017).

The use of attribution theory with HRM is in its infancy. Heider (1958), in his seminal work, explained that it was human nature to seek out the causes of events. Attribution theory provides the framework to understand how people explain the causes of behaviors or events (Martinko & Mackey, 2019). Hewett et al. (2018) argued that people seek to explain the causes of the situations they find themselves in. Attributions are causal reasons for events (Gardner et al., 2019). Attributions can be internal or external (Heider, 1958). Kelley (1973) linked attributes to the distinctiveness of the behavior, the consensus from others regarding the behavior, and how consistently the behavior is displayed. High consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness often result in the attribution of the outcome to the nature of the task (Gardner et al., 2018). Line managers' effective implementation can be explained by attributing industriousness or aptitude (Weiner, 2018).

A consistent measure of line managers' attributions related to effective HRM implementation had not been articulated until recently. Bos-Nehles et al. (2020) developed a psychometrical instrument to measure HRM implementation based upon internal and external line managers' attributions. Bos-Nehles et al. (2020) considered the internal attributions of line managers, like desire, and the external attributions, like HR support. Personality traits have been measured for years through various instruments, like the Big Five or FFM (Ashton & Lee, 2007). In 2001, Ashton and Lee developed the HEXACO model to measure personality traits (Ashton & Lee, 2007). In 2009, Ashton and Lee developed the HEXACO-60 short measure of personality traits. This study examines line managers' personality traits as attributions related to HRM implementation.

The importance of understanding the effectiveness of HRM implementation was highlighted by the call for papers in *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* (Bondarouk et al., 2016; 2018). Kehoe and Han (2020) recognized the need for additional scholarship “examining the role of line managers' individual qualities in shaping the likelihood and effectiveness with which they engage in different forms of HRM involvement” (p. 120). Though there has been recent research regarding attribute theory and HRM implementation, most research has centered on performance management, social relationships, or external (environmental) attributes. This created a gap in the literature surrounding line managers' personality traits and HRM implementation. As Kehoe and Han (2020) pointed out, there remains a need for additional scholarship regarding how the individual qualities of line managers, including personality, influence HRM implementation. This paper fills that gap.

Methodology

For this study, a quantitative, correlation research method was used to examine the relationship between personality traits and the HRM implementation of line managers from various industries and organizations within the United States. Line managers are critical to the delivery of HRM policies and practices, and as Evans (2017) pointed out, an understanding of how and why they implement HRM is beneficial to organizations.

There exists a lack of understanding about how personal characteristics of line managers, such as personality traits, affect their HRM implementation of policies and procedures. In addition to HRM personnel, managers are vital participants in HRM policy implementation (Lopez, 2018). Regarding employee commitment, employee engagement, and enhanced performance, line managers are essential leaders who champion employee involvement and influence employee attitudes toward HR policies and

practices (Shipton et al., 2016). HRM implementation varies across organizations and industries due mainly to the line managers involved with HRM implementation (Kehoe & Han, 2020).

Mirfakhar et al. (2018) examined the antecedents influencing effective HRM implementation. They found that the beliefs and attitudes towards HRM practice affect organizational outcomes and encouraged additional research into personal attributes, such as personality traits and their influence on HRM implementation. Further, Kehoe and Han (2020) examined the research regarding line managers and HRM implementation. They realized that additional research into individual qualities (personality traits) could further understand line manager involvement with HRM implementation.

Behaviors and the characteristic patterns of thoughts and emotions are represented in an individual's personality traits (Diener & Lucas, 2021). Personality traits are associated with consistency and stability (Diener & Lucas, 2021), which are critical factors of attribution theory (Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1985). Beijer et al. (2019) pointed out that further study of personality factors, such as empathy and self-monitoring, may provide additional insights into the attribution influences between coworkers and line managers. The insights and discoveries of prior researchers have led to this study's research question:

RQ1: Is there a significant relationship between line managers' personality traits and their HRM implementation?

To answer this question, the personality traits of line managers need to be identified and then compared to effective HRM implementation. This study used the six dimensions of the HEXACO model: Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience (Ashton & Lee, 2007). Consequently, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H10: Honesty-Humility is not related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

H1A: Honesty-Humility is related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

H20: Emotionality (emotional intelligence) is not related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

H2A: Emotionality (emotional intelligence) is related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

H30: Extraversion is not related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

H3A: Extraversion is related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

H40: Agreeableness is not related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

H4A: Agreeableness is related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

H50: Conscientiousness is not related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

H5A: Conscientiousness is related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

H60: Openness to Experience is not related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

H6A: Openness to Experience is related significantly to effective line manager HRM implementation.

This study used two survey instruments, one to assess the effectiveness of HRM implementation and the second to identify the dominant personality traits of line managers. The HEXACO personality inventories are available in a variety of sizes and languages. The HEXACO 60-item and 100-item inventories are available for download free of charge to nonprofits and academic researchers from the website (Ashton & Lee, 2009). In this study, the authors utilized the English version of the HEXACO-60 Model of Personality Structure, a self-report form (Ashton & Lee, 2009). The goal was to reduce the amount of time participants must spend completing the surveys to increase participation and completion. Moshagen et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analytic investigation of the HEXACO inventories and found that all versions had high reliabilities and high degrees of self-observer agreement. Reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha) ranged from 0.80 to 0.84 (Moshagen et al., 2019). Further, the reliabilities of self-ratings and observer ratings were near identical (Moshagen et al., 2019). Each of the six domains is represented by ten items to cover a wide range of content (Ashton & Lee, 2009). Each of the four sub-traits is represented by at least 2 of the items in the instrument (Ashton & Lee, 2009).

Bos-Nehles et al. (2020) developed a psychometric measurement instrument to analyze line managers' attributions for effective HRM implementation. The survey consists of 44 items covering desire (motivation), competencies, support, capacity, and policy and procedures. Each dimension consists of sub-factors that influence the dimension. Under *desire* are intrinsic motivation factors, identified regulation, external regulation, amotivation, and value-added. Under the *capacity dimension* is role overload. Under *competencies* is occupational self-efficacy. Under the *support* dimension are HR support services and HR support behavior. The *policy and procedures* dimension includes role conflict, role ambiguity, and user-friendliness of HR forms. *Validity* was examined by comparing middle-managers with line managers within an organization. Independent samples *t*-test demonstrate that the two groups are significantly different, supporting the validity of the scale measurement (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020). Cronbach's alphas were calculated for each dimension to ensure internal consistency and reliability (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020). Cronbach's alpha consistently scored above 0.70 for each of the five domains (see Bos-Nehles et al., 2020, p. 753).

To calculate the sample size needed for the study, the researchers utilized G*Power (Faul et al., 2009). G*Power (Faul et al., 2009, p. 1149) "is a stand-alone power analysis program for many statistical tests commonly used in the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences;" it can be used for six correlation power analyses. For this study, *a priori* analysis was conducted. The calculations were based on a two-tailed study, a medium effect size of $p = 0.3$. The researcher presumed an α error of 0.05 and a power estimate of 0.80 ($1 - \beta$). If the value for the population (the p-value) is smaller than 0.05, the researcher can identify the relationship as significant and accept the alternative hypothesis. If the p-value is greater than 0.05, the researcher should accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis. The assumption is that the total sample size needed is 84.

To administer the survey and contact potential respondents, the researcher utilized Centiment, a marketing and research service provider. Informed consent was embedded at the beginning of the survey with a yes/no response. If a respondent answered no, the respondent was disqualified from participation. Only respondents aged 18+ were allowed to participate in the survey. Anonymity was ensured through tagging of participants with unique identifiers. Participants were not required to share personally identifiable information. Security measures were implemented to protect the data during collection and transmission to the researcher. Centiment does not store project data after collection and once the results have been delivered to the researcher (Centiment, n.d.).

Discussion

Over three days, Centiment sent out push notifications and emails about the availability of the survey. Once survey responses reached 250 completes, the survey window was closed. The total sample population was $N = 259$. Unfortunately, eight participants were removed after examining the survey results showed that all questions by the participants had the same answer and the time spent answering each question was under 0.5 seconds per question. The average time spent to complete the survey was 776 seconds (approximately 13 minutes). The removal of these participants' data reduced the sample to $N = 251$. Data analysis was conducted using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics to measure and test the data. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the participants' sociodemographic characteristics and the varied industries represented by the line managers.

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Gender	<i>N</i>	%
Male	114	45.4%
Female	137	54.6%
Age		
18-24	2	0.8%
25-34	20	8.0%
35-44	52	20.7%
45-54	75	29.9%
55+	102	40.6%
Number of Employees Supervised		
2-5	100	39.8%
6-10	62	24.7%
11-15	24	9.6%
More than 15	65	25.9%
Organization Size (Employees)		
Less than 50	46	18.3%
51-100	35	13.9%
101-500	35	13.9%
501-1000	22	8.8%
1001-5000	41	16.3%
5001+	71	28.3%
Do not Know	1	0.4%

Note. *N* = 251.

Table 2
Representative Industries of Participants

Industry	<i>N</i>	%
Architecture	3	1.2%
Banking/Financial/Accounting	11	4.4%
Communications/Information	2	0.8%
Construction/Carpentry/Electrical Installation	11	4.4%
Consulting	6	2.4%
Education	26	10.4%
Energy/Utilities/Oil and Gas	3	1.2%
Engineering	9	3.6%
Government/Public Service	16	6.4%
Healthcare/Biotech/Pharmaceuticals	20	8.0%
Hospitality/Tourism/Food and Beverage	9	3.6%
Human Resources	5	2.0%
Information Technology/IT/Telecommunications	14	5.6%
Insurance	9	3.6%
Legal/Law	6	2.4%
Manufacturing/Automotive	19	7.6%
Marketing/Advertising	1	0.4%
Media/Entertainment	3	1.2%
Non-Profit/Social Services	8	3.2%
Other	38	15.1%
Real Estate/Property	1	0.4%
Retail/Wholesale Trade	20	8.0%
Sales	4	1.6%
Security	2	0.8%
Shipping/Distribution/Transportation	5	2.0%

Note. *N* = 251

There was a suitable mix of female (55%) to male (45%) line managers. Line managers over 55 years old represented a large percentage of the sample (41%). Line managers supervised from 2-5 employees (40%), 6-10 employees (25%), 11-15 employees (10%), and more than 15 employees (25%). There was a wide variety of industries represented, with Retail/Wholesale Trade, Education, and Healthcare/Biotech industries making up approximately a quarter of the industries. In addition, there was a mix of line managers from small, medium, and large organizations sampled.

Spearman's correlation was chosen for hypothesis testing due to the skewness and lack of normality encountered with the data. Likewise, Spearman's correlation is not impacted by outliers as with Pearson's correlation. This is because Pearson's correlation is a parametric test and Spearman's correlation is a non-parametric test using the ranks of values rather than the values themselves (Field, 2013).

Honesty-Humility

Honesty-Humility is associated with a tendency not to manipulate others and a decreased risk of losses due to withdrawal of cooperation by others (Ashton & Lee, 2007). Interestingly, Honesty-Humility was not significantly related to line managers' HRM implementation, and there was a weak, negative correlation between Honesty-Humility and line managers' HRM implementation, $r_s(249) = -.109, p = .085$. Consequently, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis cannot be accepted. Line managers in the sample scored on average in the mid-range of scores. This points to line managers as being honest, sincere, and avoiding greed, overall. However, some may be more willing to engage in risky behaviors and manipulate others to get what they want.

Emotionality

Emotionality refers to the tendency to experience fear, physical dangers, anxiety, and the need for emotional support or sentimental attachments (Ashton & Lee, 2007). Emotionality had a significant relationship with line managers' effective HRM implementation, $r_s(249) = .197, p = .002$. The null hypothesis can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis can be accepted. This is consistent with other studies related to line managers' work relationships. Fletcher (2016) found a positive relationship between the meaningfulness of employee development opportunities and employees who perceived they had a good relationship with their line managers. Consequently, employees perceive positive HRM policies if line managers are engaged and develop positive relationships with their employees (Fletcher, 2016). Positive work attachments and emotional support through work relationships seem to affect line managers' HRM implementation positively.

Extraversion

Extraversion tends to feel confident addressing groups, enjoy social gatherings, be enthusiastic, energized, and feel positive about themselves (Ashton & Lee, 2007). Like, Emotionality, Extraversion was significantly related to line managers' HRM implementation, $r_s(249) = .281, p < .001$. The null hypothesis can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis can be accepted. Extraversion is associated with social endeavors (Ashton & Lee, 2007). For example, Bos-Nehles & Meijerink (2018) found that effective HRM implementation is a social process dependent upon the relationships between HRM professionals, employees, and line managers. Beijer et al. (2019) support the conclusion that the social

environment between line managers and coworkers influences HR attributions. Relational attributions involve attributions about a cause due to a relationship between people rather than internal or external attributions (Gardner et al., 2019). For example, a social endeavor of line managers is exemplified by their level of servant leadership. Relational attributions about a manager's serving influence the employees' gratitude (Sun et al., 2019).

Agreeableness

Agreeableness tends to forgive others, be willing to compromise, be lenient, cooperative, and control anger (Ashton & Lee, 2007). Therefore, it makes sense that Agreeableness was significantly related to line managers' HRM implementation, $r_s(249) = .231, p < .001$. The null hypothesis can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis can be accepted. Lopez (2018) found that line managers engaged in HRM policies and practices using their political and cognitive abilities. The line managers either proposed a decision based on their formal role, negotiated outcomes outside the formal policies, or avoided or circumvented HRM policies or procedures (Lopez, 2018). Line managers are willing to compromise to get what they need for their teams.

In addition, Evans (2017) found that role overload, role conflict, and role ambiguity led to role stress. As role stress increased, there was a corresponding variance or deviation from the intended HRM practices and policies. If line managers' role stress is reduced and they feel comfortable in their positions, they are less likely to experience anger. Agreeableness will increase.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is a task-related endeavor and is the tendency to be organized, disciplined to achieve work goals, strive for accuracy and perfection, and be deliberative and careful with decision-making (Ashton & Lee, 2007). It was surprising that Conscientiousness had a weak, insignificant relationship with line managers' HRM implementation, $r_s(249) = .003, p = .961$. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis cannot be accepted. However, line managers from the sample scored higher in Conscientiousness on average than in any of the other traits. Consequently, task-related personality traits may not influence the HRM implementation of line managers. Instead, there may be a relationship to leadership or another role-related attribute necessary for line managers to obtain their positions.

Openness to Experience

Openness to experience had a significant, weak relationship to HRM implementation, $r_s(249) = .188, p = .003$. The null hypothesis can be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis can be accepted. The Openness to Experience domain describes the tendency to be absorbed in the beauty of art and nature, inquisitive, use imagination freely, and interest in unusual ideas or people (Ashton & Lee, 2007). Line managers may have unique perspectives on how to implement HR policies. The HR department plays a critical role in line managers' HRM implementation (Trullen et al., 2016). HR personnel can help develop line managers' abilities and opportunities by participating in the development of HR policies and by deploying HR specialists in the field (Trullen et al., 2016). HR managers can play a critical support role to help keep line managers from deviating from the HR processes due to a lack of understanding or a failure to see the value in the policies (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017). When managers are

free to use their imaginations and make suggestions for HRM approaches, the implementations' effectiveness may increase.

The results show that line managers' personality traits associated with social and idea-related endeavors correlate more with HRM implementation than task-related personality traits. Task-related characteristics, such as Conscientiousness, may be related to the line manager role but not necessarily to the function of HRM. HRM implementation is one of many functions performed by line managers. As Bos-Nehles and Meijerink (2018) found, effective HRM implementation is a social process. It is clear from the results that personality traits such as Agreeableness, Extraversion, Emotionality, and Openness to Experience are significantly related to HRM implementation. This may be due to the social relationships that encourage cooperation, creativity, sociability, and sentimentality (Ashton & Lee, 2007).

Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

As Ashton and Lee (2009) pointed out, the HEXACO-60 model helps examine domain-level traits when time constraints exist. The 100- and 200-reports offer a more thorough look at the facet levels of personality that make up the six domains of the HEXACO model. Therefore, future researchers could examine the facet-level attributes, which may provide more insight into effective HRM implementation beyond the initial examination of this study. The effective HRM implementation measure consists of five domains (Desire, Competencies, Support, Capacity, and Policy and Procedures) (Bos-Nehles et al., 2020). Therefore, research examining correlations between the six HEXACO personality traits and each HRM domain could provide a more in-depth understanding of line managers' HRM implementation practices. Observers, such as line managers' supervisors, HR personnel, or employees, could provide a different viewpoint of line managers' personality traits and HRM implementation. Then researchers could compare the observer reports to the self-report findings of this study to see if the results hold across studies. In addition, future research could examine the various social relationships that effect HRM implementation.

In professional practice, managers and HR personnel can develop strategies that highlight the development of social traits, such as Extraversion and Agreeableness. Training managers can develop programs to strengthen the personality traits of line managers. For example, a development program can focus on creating positive social relationships between employees and managers, or how to deal with anxiety or frustration positively, characteristics of Extraversion and Agreeableness.

The results show significant and moderate correlations between social-endeavor personality traits (Emotionality, Extraversion, and Agreeableness). Likewise, idea-related personality traits (Openness to Experience) were substantial. Consequently, HR practitioners should consider these traits when making promotions or talent acquisition decisions. This is not to say they are the only considerations. For example, Conscientiousness may not be related to HRM implementation, essentially. However, the personality trait may well be an essential trait of leaders and managers.

Line managers are agents of an organization's HR. They are often encouraged to act with autonomy and flexibility concerning HRM implementation, which may require a distinct profile of competencies, personality, and motivation (Kehoe & Han, 2020). Openness to Experience is characterized by inquisitiveness, use of imagination freely, and an interest in unusual ideas or people (Ashton & Lee,

2007). Management should consider policies and practices that provide more autonomy to line managers to make decisions. Line managers can use their imaginations and curiosity to improve processes and make positive changes for enhanced outcomes.

This study aimed to examine the relationship between line managers' personality traits and their effective HRM implementation. The results show that line managers' personality traits associated with social and idea-related endeavors correlate more with HRM implementation than task-related personality traits. The study is significant because it increases scholars' and business managers' understanding of personality traits related to effective HRM implementation and how those traits can influence organizational outcomes. As a result of this study, managers, employee development leaders, and HR personnel have additional information to make better hiring, promotion, and training decisions concerning line managers.

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