

INTEGRATIVE CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

An Expanded Conceptualization of Line Managers' Involvement in Human Resource Management

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Recent research provides evidence that, contrary to implicit assumptions in much of the strategic human resource management (SHRM) literature, human resource (HR) systems and practices are in fact enacted with substantial variation across units even within organizations, with such variation largely a function of the line managers involved in implementing HR practices in the units under their supervision. While instrumental in demonstrating the critical role that line managers play in facilitating the causal chain linking organizations' HR practices with intended employee and organizational outcomes, we contend that the focus of this research on HR practice implementation as a singular and unidimensional characterization of line managers' involvement in human resource management (HRM) represents an oversimplification on several counts. Broadly, we propose that this focus fails to account for the varied nature of line managers' downward influences in the context of HRM. Thus, we integrate insights from research on HR practice implementation, workforce differentiation, and autonomous strategic behavior to develop a more complete understanding of line managers' downward involvement in HRM. Based on our synthesis of relevant insights from these literatures, we propose a research agenda focusing on questions spanning four broad areas with the aim of fostering and guiding future SHRM scholarship to further our understanding of the antecedents, processes, and consequences associated with line managers' influences on HR system content and process in organizations.

Keywords: strategic human resource management, line managers, HR practice implementation, autonomous strategic behavior, emergent strategy

Line managers are often the source of employees' most direct experiences with an organization's HR practices, yet their critical role in the process of human resource (HR) practice delivery is often overlooked. Indeed, strategic human resource management (SHRM) scholarship has predominantly focused on forging the link between HR systems and firm performance, with the inherent assumption that HR systems designed at the corporate level are implemented as espoused (Becker & Huselid, 2006). Yet, early SHRM theory (e.g., Wright & Snell, 1998) and more recent empirical inquiry by SHRM scholars highlight a potential disconnect between organizations' espoused HR systems and the HR

practices actually experienced by employees (Nishii & Wright, 2008), which stems from the fact that HR systems are enacted with substantial variation *across units* even *within* organizations, largely as a function of the line managers involved in HR practice implementation (Pak & Kim, 2018; Sikora, Ferris, & Van Iddekinge, 2015). This research has demonstrated that variance in the implementation of HR practices accounts for significant differences in many of the intended outcomes of these practices, including job performance, turnover intentions (Sikora et al., 2015), employee commitment (Shipton, Sanders, Atkinson, & Frenkel, 2016), and team performance (Pak & Kim, 2018).

Yet, despite this recognition, the current characterization of line managers' involvement in human resource management (HRM) by SHRM scholars represents an oversimplification which limits scholars' understanding of the influence processes that underlie the relationship between HR systems and firm performance—the core of the SHRM literature. In particular, a sole focus on line managers' HR practice implementation suggests that line managers act merely as messengers of the HR function, enacting—albeit to varying extents—the organization's espoused HR practices. This is despite abundant empirical research spanning the organizational behavior, strategy, and (other areas of the broader) HR literatures as well as early theoretical insights within the SHRM literature (e.g., Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Wright & Snell, 1998) that recognizes the significant strategic and idiosyncratic influences manag-

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ers have in their work environments, including on organizational structures, practices, and employees. Indeed, in reality, line managers are willful and agentic *human* actors whose differences in knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes (KSAOs), including personality, values, beliefs, and social standing within an organization may exert multifaceted influences on the nature of their involvement in an organization's HR processes. As such, as an alternative to simply acting as implementers of HR practices, line managers may adapt an organization's HR practices—or replace them with entirely different HR practices altogether—to achieve congruence between their capabilities, the surrounding environment, and their management activities. In so doing, line managers may become the source of variance not only in HRM *process*—but also in the *content* of HR practices within and across organizations.

The purpose of our review is to establish a foundation for expanding our conceptualization of line managers' roles in both process- and content-based variance in HRM. More directly, we seek to contribute to the SHRM literature through an explicit recognition of the environmental, social, and individual factors that influence HRM content and process as HR practices are interpreted, changed, and delivered by line managers in their path from the corporate HR function to the employees who experience them. To do so, we review and integrate relevant scholarship from several research streams, from which we find support for the ideas that (a) line managers vary in the extent to which they implement organizations' espoused HR practices (*HR practice implementation*); (b) there is planned and unplanned variance in the HR practices used to manage employees within organizations, with variance occurring both across and within jobs and work groups (*workforce differentiation*); and (c) line managers may adapt or replace their organizations' espoused strategic plans and practices (*autonomous strategic behavior*; see Table 1 for an overview of our review). A synthesis of these insights sheds light on the environmental, organizational, unit, line manager, and employee characteristics that may influence line managers' propensities to implement an organization's HR practices as intended, and/or to rely on HR practices that are distinct from those espoused by the organization—as well as the potential consequences of such actions. This integrative exercise is critical, because in the process of elaborating line managers' roles in generating and shaping several sources and consequences of variance in the HRM and strategic contexts within organizations, it brings together previously siloed knowledge related to the delivery of HRM more broadly to provide a foundation to understand how the dynamic intersection of HRM content and HRM process interfaces with the broader organizational context to shape the effectiveness of an organization's HR systems in supporting firm performance (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Following our integrative review, we propose a research agenda identifying questions spanning four broad areas from which future SHRM scholarship can build on the insights generated here. First, we expand the existing notion of line managers' HRM involvement by recognizing and defining three HR practice delivery behaviors (HR practice implementation, HR practice translation, and HR practice adaptation/introduction) that we propose more accurately characterize line managers' downward HRM involvement with respect to both HRM process and content. We offer several potential lines of inquiry concerning the contextual and

individual factors that influence the selection and consequences of each of these behaviors, including a consideration of the conditions under which the relative functionality of each may vary.

Second, in an effort to account for the full scope of line managers' roles in HRM and more comprehensively consider the role of informal influence processes in organizational change and renewal, we propose an additional line of inquiry focusing on line managers' lateral and upward HRM involvement. In particular, drawing on research in the emergent strategy and issue selling literatures, we generate insights related to the lateral and upward influence efforts in which line managers may engage as they seek resources, legitimacy, and/or social support for their adaptation and/or introduction of HR practices at the local level. It is through these behaviors that line managers may instigate transformative change in the formal HR system.

Third, we propose an integration of insights on line managers' HRM involvement and research on the vertical and horizontal fit of HR systems. We suggest that expanding our understanding of line managers' influence in shaping the HR practices that are actually experienced by employees opens up lines of inquiry related to the implications for how—and at what levels—we conceptualize vertical fit and horizontal fit in HRM.

Finally, our review underscores the need for inquiry into how qualities of individual line managers shape the likelihood and consequences of their engagement in different forms of HRM involvement. A more complete understanding of how specific KSAOs of line managers align with each form of HRM involvement will provide a foundation to advance knowledge on how organizations can best manage line managers to achieve fit between HRM activities and the strategic, competitive, and cultural contexts with which a particular organization interfaces.

Together, our integrative review and multidirectional research agenda allow for increased nuance (*three HR practice delivery behaviors, qualities of individual line managers*) and scope (*lateral and upward HRM involvement*) in our conceptualization of line managers' roles in the practice of HRM in organizations, as well as guidance for incorporating these insights into our understanding of two central concepts (*horizontal and vertical fit*) in the SHRM literature.

Line Managers' Downward Involvement in HRM

Bowen and Ostroff (2004) make a distinction between HR system content and HR system process. Whereas HR system content is reflected in the specific practices or activities in an HR system, HR system process refers to the enactment of these HR practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004, p. 204). While the SHRM literature has been dominated by research examining the effects of HR system *content*, recent research on line managers' roles in HRM has focused almost exclusively on HR system *process*. In this section, we seek to synthesize research on line managers' downward influences with respect to *both* HR system process and content, with the goal of developing an expanded conceptualization of line managers' downward HRM involvement. Insights from three streams of research hold particular relevance for this topic: HR practice implementation, workforce differentiation, and autonomous strategic behavior.

Table 1
Overview of Research Included in Our Integrative Review

Literature	Key concepts	Contributions/relevance	Representative references	Missing elements for relevance to line managers' involvement in HRM
HR practice implementation	HR devolution (i.e., line managers' HR-related roles and responsibilities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identifies institutional (e.g., economic systems), organizational (e.g., organizational support) and individual (e.g., individual capacity) antecedents of HR roles delegated to line managers.Demonstrates influence of HR responsibility delegation to line managers on HR practice adoption and effectiveness.	Brewster, Brookes, and Gollan (2015); Op de Beeck, Wynen, and Hondeghem (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Limited focus on "process" aspect of line managers' HR practice implementation.Conceptualization of line managers as a passive actor whose primary role is to enact top-down HR decisions.
	HR practice implementation behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identifies contextual (e.g., HR department support; high-performance HR practices) and individual (e.g., line managers' HR competency; political skills; leadership) antecedents of the <i>degree</i> of line managers' HR implementation behavior; identifies contextual (e.g., support from the HR department, a supervisor, and peers; strong HRM processes) and individual (e.g., line managers' HR-related ability) antecedents of the <i>perceived effectiveness</i> of line managers' HR implementation.Demonstrates the effects of the <i>degree</i> and <i>perceived effectiveness</i> of line managers' HR practice implementation behavior on employee attitudes and group and organization performance.	Bos-Nehles, Van Riensdijk, and Looise (2013); DeWettinck and Vroonen (2017); Gilbert, De Winne, and Sels (2015); Op de Beeck, Wynen, and Hondeghem (2017); Sikora, Ferris, and Van Iddekinge (2015); Vermeeren (2014)	
Workforce differentiation	Differentiated HR architecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Emphasizes the need to adopt different HR configurations based on employee (e.g., value and uniqueness) and job (e.g., strategic value) characteristics.Suggests the role of line managers in implementing differentiated HR architectures.Indicates the possible changes by line managers to the "content" of HR practices.Identifies antecedents and consequences of "i-deals."	Becker and Huselid (2006); Becker, Huselid, and Beatty (2009); Lepak and Snell (1999, 2002)	Limited focus on individual employee-level modification of HR practices and work arrangements (i.e., with no attention to broader unit-level variation)
Autonomous strategic behavior	Autonomous strategic behavior of managers (i.e., intentional deviation from organizational strategies and practices)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Highlights the prevalence of line managers' intentional deviations from espoused organizational strategies and practices.Identifies the processes, antecedents, and outcomes of such deviations.	Burgelman (1983, 1991); Burgelman and Grove (2007); Floyd and Wooldridge (1997); Mirabeau and Maguire (2014); Wooldridge, Schmid, and Floyd (2008)	Lack of attention to HRM context

Line Managers' HR Practice Implementation

While the role of line managers in the delivery of HR practices has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years, this role was first recognized by HR scholars over 20 years ago. For example, in an early cross-industry case study of seven organizations, McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, and Truss (1997) concluded that line managers are charged with several HR-related responsibilities, and that there is substantial variation both between and within organizations in the HR responsibilities delegated to line managers as well as in the degree and quality of line managers' HR practice implementation behaviors and outcomes. Following these early findings, subsequent research on the topic has generally focused on line managers' involvement in the HRM delivery process from two angles: the top-down delegation (or "devolution") of HR implementation responsibilities to line managers and the degree to which—or the perceived effectiveness with which—line managers implement espoused HR practices (or line managers' implementation behavior).

HR devolution. HR devolution refers to the delegation of the responsibility for implementing HR practices to line managers outside the HR function—a notion that lays the foundation (i.e., that line managers occupy important—but varied—roles in HR practice delivery) of our review. HR devolution has been found to positively affect both employee and organizational outcomes, with scholars pointing to benefits related to line managers' abilities to respond to HR challenges that arise at the local level, as well as the increased availability of the HR function to focus on strategic issues given a shift of administrative duties to line managers. At the employee level, Kuvaas, Dysvik, and Buch (2014) found that enabling HR practices for line managers were positively linked to employees' perceived supervisor support, resulting in increased intrinsic motivation and affective commitment and reduced turnover intention. Others have documented benefits of HR devolution at the organization level. For example, Ryu and Kim (2013) demonstrated that line managers' authority to make HR-related decisions within their units was associated with higher firm-level HR effectiveness as measured by the combination of perceived increases in employee skills and motivation, labor productivity, and in the organization's attraction of top talent, as well as reductions in voluntary turnover. These authors further showed that the positive effect of line managers' HR authority was moderated by the organization's adoption of an "institutionally emerging HR system" (which weakened the positive effect due to line managers' lack of familiarity with focal HR practices) and knowledge transfer from the HR department to line managers (which mitigated line managers' confusion related to an institutionally emerging HR system). Finally, Mitchell, Obeidat, and Bray (2013) demonstrated that HR devolution supports a more strategic role of the HR function, such that the HR function's adoption of a more strategic role was more positively related to organizational performance when the administrative burden associated with day-to-day HR activities and responsibilities are delegated to line managers.

While research on the negative consequences of devolution is scant (Hall & Torrington, 2006), some scholars have raised concerns that the devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers may foster an excessive emphasis on short-term financial outcomes (Storey, 1992) and perceptions of inequity across employee groups who are managed differently (Leach, 1995).

HR implementation behavior. A second body of research in this vein has focused on the antecedents and consequences of line managers' HR implementation behaviors, with scholars taking a focus on either the extent to which—or the perceived effectiveness with which—line managers implement an organization's espoused practices. In research taking the former focus, DeWettinck and Vroonen (2017) found that line managers' perceived support from the HR department was positively related to their beliefs regarding the usefulness of performance management activities, which then enhanced their implementation of performance management activities. In the context of conflict management, Teague and Roche (2012) showed that an organization's use of commitment-oriented HR practices and a proactive approach to conflict resolution were positively associated with line managers' involvement in conflict management at the firm level. Similarly, Sikora et al. (2015) showed that an organization's adoption of high performance HR practices predicted line managers' implementation of such practices. In addition, Sikora and Ferris (2014) highlighted the importance of organizational cultures and climates that are supportive of HR practice use and an organization's emphasis on HR accountability from line managers in supporting more extensive HR implementation. In other research in this vein, scholars have demonstrated the role of line managers' individual characteristics, such as their HR competency and political skills (Sikora et al., 2015), as well as transformational leadership (Vermeeren, 2014), in predicting HR implementation behavior.

Scholars have also documented a range of employee, group, and organizational outcomes of line managers' HR implementation behaviors. The majority of this research has focused on the employee attitudinal outcomes of line managers' implementation of some form of high performance or high commitment HR practices. In particular, scholars have demonstrated that line managers' implementation of such HR practices adopted at the organization level are positively related to employees' affective commitment (Ang, Bartram, McNeil, Leggat, & Stanton, 2013; DeWettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Gilbert, De Winne, & Sels, 2011; Shipton et al., 2016) and job satisfaction (DeWettinck & Vroonen, 2017), and negatively related to employees' turnover intentions (Ang et al., 2013; Sikora et al., 2015). In this vein, Sikora and Ferris (2014) have also suggested that line managers' implementation behavior is likely to influence employees' procedural justice perceptions. Several studies have also found that line managers' HR implementation behavior positively affects employees' behavioral and performance outcomes, including individual job performance (Fu, Flood, Rousseau, & Morris, 2018; Pak & Kim, 2018) and participation in decision-making (Sikora et al., 2015), team performance (Pak & Kim, 2018), and organizational performance (Azmi & Mushtaq, 2015).

Other scholars have focused on employees' evaluations of or satisfaction with line managers' implementation of HR practices. For example, Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, and Looise (2013) showed that the effect of line managers' HR abilities on employees' satisfaction with their HR implementation (i.e., with respect to recruitment and selection, career development, and evaluation and rewards practices) was stronger when line managers received support from HR professionals in their organizations. Gilbert, De Winne, and Sels (2015) found that line managers' HR abilities mediated the positive link between line managers' perceptions of strong HRM processes (characterized by distinctiveness, consis-

tency, and consensus) and employees' evaluations of their HR implementation. Elaborating on the role of organizational factors (albeit using a self-rating of effectiveness), *Op de Beeck, Wynen, and Hondeghem (2017)* found that when line managers were able to simultaneously draw on several sources of support such as the HR department, a supervisor, and coworkers, they rated themselves as more effective in implementing HR practices. This finding along with the foregoing result by *Bos-Nehles et al. (2013)* highlights the problematic implications of *Hutchinson and Purcell's (2010)* interviews and surveys within health care organizations, which revealed that while line managers are increasingly charged with HR duties in these firms, they do not receive concomitant support from senior management and the HR function.

We identified only a few studies examining the outcomes of employees' evaluations of line managers' HR implementation, and these tended to be conducted in the context of specific HR practices with a focus on employees' attitudes and perceptions related to their job and work. For example, *Farndale and Kelliher (2013)* found that employees' perceptions related to line managers' implementation of performance appraisal were positively associated with the employees' affective commitment. In the context of workplace bullying, *Woodrow and Guest (2014)* showed that employees' perceptions of line managers' proactive implementation of bullying and harassment practices (which combines informal and formal actions to resolve issues) resulted in lower levels of intention to leave and higher levels of job satisfaction among employees. Lastly, *Purcell and Hutchinson (2007)* found that employees' assessments of line managers' effective enactment of HR practices such as training, performance appraisal, and information sharing were positively linked to employees' affective commitment, job autonomy, sense of achievement, and job challenge. Finally, in recent study, *Fu, Flood, Rousseau, and Morris (2018)* advanced a more nuanced treatment of employees' perceptions of line managers' HR implementation, assessing employees' satisfaction with two specific aspects of line managers' HR implementation—consistency (i.e., uniformity in HR implementation across team members) and individual responsiveness (i.e., consideration of team member contributions in HR implementation). These authors demonstrated the joint positive effects of these perceptions on employees' individual job performance. In sum, this body of research underscores the role of line managers' implementation behavior—as evaluated by line managers themselves and by the employees they manage—as a mediator between adoption of HR practices at the organization level and employees' responses to these HR practices at the individual and collective level.

Other relevant studies. Although not directly examining line managers' HR practice delivery activities, other studies have focused on how characteristics of an organization's HR function and line managers' relationships with the HR function shape line managers' perceptions and attitudes related to an organization's HR practices, along with related employee outcomes. For instance, *Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Smale, and John (2011)* investigated the determinants of line managers' commitment to HR practices in the context of MNC subsidiaries. These authors found that (a) the professional experience and tenure (albeit in an inverted U-shaped manner) of HR managers; and (b) line managers' perceptions of the strategic HRM capabilities of the HR department were positively related to line managers' commitment to the subsidiaries' HR practices. In another study, *Kim, Su, and Wright (2018)*

proposed that HR systems may be designed to build a cooperative relationship between HR personnel and line managers, and found that such "HR-line-connecting HR systems" indeed cultivated shared language and greater closeness in the network ties between the two actors, which then contributed to decreased turnover rates among employees. These studies lend additional support to the ideas both that line managers indeed play a nontrivial role in HR practice delivery and that their relationships with the HR function may be instrumental in shaping their influence on HR process.

Integration. The emerging body of research reviewed so far represents the key work directly examining—or explicitly acknowledging—line managers' roles in HR system process and suggests a number of contextual and individual factors that lead to variance in HR system implementation across line managers. This research has highlighted, for instance, the importance of (a) broader contextual factors such as organizations' adoption of high performance HR practices, HR-related training, line managers' partnership with the HR function, and organizational support (e.g., *Kuvaas et al., 2014; Sikora et al., 2015*); and (b) line managers' HR-related competencies, political skills, and leadership style (e.g., *Sikora et al., 2015; Vermeeren, 2014*) in determining line managers' implementation behaviors and performance. This research has also highlighted a variety of consequences of line managers' HR implementation efforts at multiple levels; to date, this work has largely focused on employee attitudinal and performance outcomes, including affective commitment, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, job performance, as well as team performance (e.g., *Ang et al., 2013; Gilbert et al., 2011; Pak & Kim, 2018*). However, a few studies have documented the impact of line manager HR implementation on organizational performance (*Azmi & Mushtaq, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2013*).

While this research demonstrates that line managers—through their implementation behaviors—shape the level and nature of employees' experiences with organizations' HR practices (i.e., reflecting process-based variance), it sheds little light on whether, how, and to what extent line managers exert influence on the content of the HR practices that they choose to deliver—or on the consequences of such content-oriented influence. In addition, whereas this body of research identifies predictors and outcomes of line managers' HR implementation, it has paid less attention to the boundary conditions associated with their other HR influence processes (*Hall & Torrington, 2006*). For example, we can imagine that the devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers may be more likely (and more functional) in certain structural contexts (e.g., in subsidiaries of MNCs, in geographically dispersed units; *Gilbert et al., 2011, 2015*), while pressure for consistent HR practice implementation may be greater in others (e.g., traditional, bureaucratic hierarchies). We elaborate on these points in our future research agenda.

Workforce Differentiation

In our efforts to gain insights into the role of line managers in generating content-based HRM variance, we review the body of work on workforce differentiation. Research in this area focuses on the differentiated management of groups of employees or particular individuals within an organization. We identified two separate but related streams of research taking this general focus. The first stream—which focuses on differentiated HR architectures—sheds

light on a more systematic, top-down approach taken by organizations to achieve differential workforce management (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Lepak & Snell, 1999, 2002), whereas the second stream—which focuses on idiosyncratic deals (“i-deals”)—provides insights into differential management that occurs through idiosyncratic, individualized arrangements negotiated between line managers and individual employees (Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006). These two streams of research explicitly recognize the role of line managers in implementing distinct HR practices among different employees or groups and in adapting various HR practices to meet individual employees’ unique needs and demands. As such, they contribute to our understanding of line managers’ involvement in HRM by shedding light on line managers’ influences on both process- and content-based variance in HRM within and across employee groups in an organization.

Differentiated HR architecture. The differentiated HR architecture perspective is based on the premise that organizations may benefit from adopting different HR configurations (e.g., commitment, market-based, compliance, and collaborative) for different groups of employees based on the strategic value and uniqueness of their human capital (Lepak & Snell, 1999) or based on the nature of their jobs (e.g., strategic vs. nonstrategic; Becker & Huselid, 2006). For example, Lepak and Snell (1999, 2002) suggested that a commitment-based HR system that emphasizes employee involvement and internal development may be desired in managing employees with strategically valuable and unique human capital, whereas a compliance-based HR system that focuses on results-oriented performance appraisal and rewards may be a more appropriate choice for employees with less valuable and less unique human capital. Similarly, Huselid and Becker (2011) suggest that disproportionately greater investments should be made in strategic jobs that have a more significant impact on a firm’s overall strategy execution.

Although traditional empirical research on the differentiated HR architecture is lacking, a few case studies highlight the benefits and risks that may emerge when organizations put this logic into practice (e.g., Ahmad, Solnet, & Scott, 2010; Sarina & Wright, 2015). For instance, Sarina and Wright (2015) detailed the case of Qantas Group—the legacy airline of Australia—which, in response to deregulation and increased competition in the domestic airline market, adopted a “hybrid” HR model wherein the organization’s previously universal commitment-oriented HR system was maintained only among “core knowledge” employee groups such as pilots and aircraft engineers, whereas a “low road” or cost reduction HR system was implemented for “ancillary” segments of employees such as baggage handlers and ground staff. Such a differentiated approach enabled the company to increase efficiency gains, though at the same time it led to equity concerns and low commitment among employees (Sarina & Wright, 2015).

While differentiated HR architectures originate with organizations’ top leadership and HR functions, scholars have emphasized the important role of line managers in their implementation. In particular, given that identifying strategic jobs and valuable and/or unique employee groups constitutes an essential element of effective workforce differentiation, scholars suggest that line managers are often likely to be entrusted to work with HR managers in assessing such jobs and employee groups developing action plans for each strategic job to ensure that the firm has sufficient talent in these roles (Becker, Huselid, & Beatty, 2009). Scholars have

highlighted that there is variance in the effectiveness with which line managers implement differentiated HR systems. Specifically, whereas “B-level leaders” are described as those who create little variation in performance ratings and rewards and do not rigorously seek top talent, “A-level leaders” are those who evaluate strategic contributions of employees, provide differential rewards, and fill strategic jobs with the best talent available (Becker et al., 2009, p. 90). Taken together, the differentiated HR architecture perspective suggests that organizations may create deliberate content-based variance in the HR practices used to manage different employee groups, and that line managers vary in their implementation of these differentiated HR practices, resulting in additional process-based variance within organizations. Additional research is needed to determine when these forms of variance are likely to be functional.

Idiosyncratic deals (“i-deals”). Outside of the formal, top-down, group-level differentiation created through differentiated HR architectures, line managers also engage in a more nuanced form of workforce differentiation through their own actions at the individual employee level. Specifically, research on idiosyncratic deals (or “i-deals”) suggests that line managers in some cases negotiate unique, nonstandard agreements with individual employees that deviate from an organization’s standard employment practices but which still serve to benefit both the employee and the organization (Rousseau et al., 2006). Specifically, line managers may create i-deals with individual workers in which they provide extra developmental opportunities, raise pay beyond levels dictated by formal policies, or allow for flexible scheduling and telecommuting based on individual employees’ requests (Gajendran, Harrison, & Delaney-Klinger, 2015; Rosen, Slater, Chang, & Johnson, 2013).

Scholars have identified several factors that contribute to these personalized HR arrangements. For example, employees with strong political skills (Rosen et al., 2013), personal initiative (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2008), and favorable leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships (Rosen et al., 2013) are more likely to attain i-deals from their supervisors. In turn, i-deals have been shown to predict a range of positive employee attitudes and perceptions, including affective commitment (e.g., Liu, Lee, Hui, Kwan, & Wu, 2013), job satisfaction (e.g., Rosen et al., 2013), reduced turnover intentions (e.g., Liao, Wayne, & Rousseau, 2016), perceived organizational support and organization-based self-esteem (e.g., Liu et al., 2013), as well as favorable behavioral outcomes, including increased job performance (e.g., Gajendran et al., 2015), proactive behavior (e.g., Liu et al., 2013), and organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., Anand, Vidyarthi, Liden, & Rousseau, 2010; see for review Liao et al., 2016). Further, when i-deals have been shown to successfully meet employees’ HR needs and are used repeatedly, they are likely to evolve into more formalized practices over time that are routinely available to all employees, and thus the source of broader change in HR system content (Rousseau et al., 2006). In sum, this stream of research provides evidence of line managers’ adaptation of organizations’ HR practices in isolated cases of individual employees, supporting the idea that line managers may be the source not only of process-based, but also content-based variance in HRM.

Integration. Although the differentiated HR architecture and i-deals literatures adopt distinct approaches in examining workforce differentiation (i.e., systematic, top-down vs. idiosyncratic,

localized), they complement each other in offering a more complete picture of how the corporate HR function and local line managers work both independently and together in planning and arranging differentiated HR strategies and practices across employees within an organization. Together, these two bodies of research highlight the important role of line managers in successful workforce differentiation, suggesting that line managers serve to (1) implement differentiated HR architectures, assessing the strategic contributions of jobs and employees and providing a basis for differentiated HR investments accordingly; and (2) negotiate customized HR practices for individual employees, identifying employees' idiosyncratic goals and needs, and coordinating nonstandard, specialized HR practices. Thus, the combined workforce differentiation literature offers theoretical insights and empirical evidence for line managers' influences on both process-based and content-based variation in HRM.

Autonomous Strategic Behavior

Research on strategy process embraces a distinction between induced (or deliberate) and autonomous strategic behavior in organizations (Burgelman, 1983; Mintzberg, 1978), recognizing autonomous strategic behaviors as the foundational components of emergent (or bottom-up) strategy (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). Whereas induced strategic behaviors represent activities that are aligned with an organization's prevailing strategic intent, autonomous strategic behaviors refer to activities that diverge from an organization's extant strategic plans (or that may substitute for top-down strategic planning when it is lacking), and thus result in internal variation (Burgelman, 1991) characterized by misalignment or dissonance with the organization's intended strategy (when one is present; Mirabeau, Kinder, & Malherbe, 2015; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). The prevalence of autonomous strategic behavior is reflective of line and middle managers' roles as human agents of the organization. Indeed, strategy process scholars recognize four (two upward and two downward) roles characterizing middle managers' involvement in strategy process. Two of these roles—facilitating adaptability and championing—reflect middle managers' active and agentic involvement in the local pursuit of autonomous strategic initiatives and in the garnering of broader (i.e., lateral and upward) support for such initiatives throughout the organization, respectively (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Importantly, in these capacities, managers form their own perceptions of the demands of the organization's environment, as well as how best to employ the competencies available within the organization to cope with these demands. Managers' perceptions and behavioral responses in this process are colored by their own self-images, goals, and prior experiences, and are ultimately also shaped by the resources and structural constraints imposed by the organization (Burgelman, 1991).

Although research on autonomous strategic behavior has been focused outside the HRM context, this work demonstrates the prevalence of middle and line managers' deviation from organizational strategies and practices and helps in characterizing not only the process but also the antecedents and outcomes of such deviation (e.g., Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Nonaka, Hirose, & Takeda, 2016). With respect to the focus of the present review, these insights are valuable in informing our efforts to expand our understanding of line managers' downward HRM involvement to

explicitly account for line managers' intentional strategic adaptations to the content in organizations' espoused HR practices. That is, it is reasonable to expect that just as an organization's structural and political contexts and managers' individual characteristics influence managers' propensities to adapt organizations' top-down strategic initiatives to align with the requirements of their local competitive landscapes, these contextual and managerial factors may similarly influence the prevalence and consequences of managers' strategic adaptation of the content of HR practices. In the section that follows, we review relevant research focusing on the autonomous strategic behaviors of middle and line managers. We note that we do not provide an exhaustive review of research on middle and line managers' roles in strategy process, but rather focus on scholarship from these areas that is most relevant to the focus of our review.

Research on autonomous strategic behavior has been largely situated in the study of emergent strategy. Thus, this research has focused on the broader strategic and structural contexts within which autonomous strategic behaviors both occur and are most likely to improve firm performance and/or gain legitimation and formalization by top management. As such, we structure our review around relevant antecedents, consequences, and relevant moderators.

Antecedents to autonomous strategic behavior. Scholars have identified antecedents to managers' autonomous strategic activities which can be classified into three broad categories: the structural and strategic contexts of the organization, managerial characteristics, and attributes of the focal espoused strategy or practice.

An organization's strategic and structural contexts shape the environment within which middle and line managers make decisions and thus influence the nature and extent of their autonomous strategic activities. For instance, Andersen (2004) suggested that the distributed decision authority within a firm—defined as the extent to which middle managers can pursue new initiatives without obtaining permission from the organization's top management team—may be influenced in part by the firm's approach to budget allocations (Bower, 1982), a perspective reinforced by Mirabeau, Kinder, and Malherbe's (2015) findings that science and technology labs that are supported by discretionary—as opposed to directed—funds take a less centralized and more autonomous approach to managing research portfolios. Interestingly, in a multiindustry sample of Dutch firms, Linder and Torp (2017) found no support for the effect of budgeting approaches on middle managers' autonomous strategic actions, but found evidence that stronger boundary systems, characterized by formal communication and strong guidelines around appropriate behavior, and middle manager autonomy positively predicted autonomous strategic actions by middle managers. Meanwhile, Burgelman (1983) highlighted the importance of the political context of an organization's appraisal and reward systems, underscoring the role of decision makers across multiple levels of the organization in determining how—and whether—autonomous initiatives at middle and lower levels are defined and supported.

Other scholars have pointed to the importance of strategy itself in shaping managers' autonomous strategic behavior. In proposing a broad typology of strategies ranging from pure deliberate to pure emergent, Mintzberg and Waters (1985), for example, argued that certain strategy types encourage autonomy in managerial actions

by design. For instance, in an umbrella strategy, organizational leaders lay out general guidelines for behavior and let managers throughout the organization maneuver within them. Alternatively, an unconnected strategy occurs when a single subunit with significant discretion uses its own strategy that is not connected to that of the rest of the organization. In both of these strategic contexts, the middle and/or lower level managers in one or all parts of the organization exercise significant discretion in their strategic actions. Taking this possibility to an extreme, Inkpen and Choudhury (1995) proposed that strategy absence is a legitimate phenomenon wherein no formal strategic anchor is made available by organizational leaders—thereby necessitating autonomy in managers' strategic decision-making. Finally, in a comparison of firms pursuing each of Miles and Snow's (1978) three strategic types, Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) demonstrated that divergent strategic behavior is more common within firms pursuing a prospector strategy than within those pursuing either a defender or analyzer strategy—presumably because relative to the latter two strategic types, prospector firms prioritize adaptability over predictability and efficiency. This insight is consistent with Burgelman and Grove's (2007) suggestion that managers' autonomous strategic initiatives are rooted in organization-level dynamic capabilities, which coevolve with the industry, competitive, and regulatory forces that are most pressing in a firm's environment.

Scholars have also highlighted the role of managerial characteristics in shaping why and how managers engage in autonomous strategic action. For instance, Burgelman (1991) distinguished between managers whose motivation to engage in autonomous strategic behavior is rooted in an "obligatory logic" (where such behavior is congruent with a manager's self-image) versus a "consequential logic" (where a manager believes such behavior will result in the attainment of desired rewards). More recently, Tarakci, Ates, Floyd, Ahn, and Wooldridge (2018) found that middle managers' organizational identification influenced whether they responded more to unit or individual performance feedback through their divergent strategic behaviors, with those managers reporting higher(lower) organizational identification engaging greater in divergent strategic behavior in response to feedback about their unit(individual) performance. Taking a more structural perspective on managerial characteristics, Floyd and Wooldridge (1997) found that managers in boundary-spanning roles engage in higher levels of autonomous strategic activity than do their counterparts, which is consistent with Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, and Whittington's (2016) argument that managers' interpretation, manipulation, and improvisation of strategy practices are influenced by both their social skill and position in the organizational structure. Finally, focusing on the "how" of managers' autonomous activities, Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) suggested that middle managers facilitate strategic adaptability by empowering lower level actors to identify the need for change and by then lending support for experimentation with novel solutions—largely shielded from the view of top management.

Finally, research on practice diffusion has suggested that characteristics of specific practices—and the fit between a practice and the local context in which adoption may occur—influence the extensiveness and fidelity of practice adoption, with extensiveness referring to the completeness of practice implementation and fidelity referring to the extent to which a practice is used in its original form. This work suggests that a lack of fit between a focal

practice and the local context triggers practice adaptation (Ansari, Fiss, & Zajac, 2010). Moreover, this work posits that the creation of differentiated (rather than uniform) achievement levels in the design of a practice will increase extensiveness in implementation, and that organizations can proactively manage the balance between extensiveness and fidelity in implementation by defining and controlling which aspects of the practice are discretionary (allowing for or encouraging adaptation) versus mandatory (restricting adaptation; Ansari, Reinecke, & Spaan, 2014).

Consequences (and moderators) of autonomous strategic behavior. Burgelman and Grove (2007) note that managers' autonomous strategic behaviors may extend and renew an organization's competencies, helping the organization to adapt to changing environmental demands, or may undermine an organization's competitive position in the absence of a secure new one. Indeed, scholars have assumed two primary goals of autonomous strategic behaviors: increasing the immediate performance of a unit or firm and/or creating the foundation for an emergent strategy that will ultimately gain broader acceptance and adoption through the organization. In line with this perspective, strategy process research has examined factors that influence whether, how, and to what extent managers' autonomous strategic behaviors affect unit and firm performance, as well as the conditions under which autonomous strategic behaviors gain broader support in the organization. Research in this vein has focused on three categories of factors that may influence the outcomes of autonomous strategic behaviors: factors in the organization's environment, characteristics of the organization or unit, and managerial actions.

Research on environmental characteristics suggests that autonomous strategic behaviors may be more likely to bolster firm performance in more variable organizational environments. For instance, Andersen (2004), who failed to find a significant main effect of decentralized decision making on firm performance, found that this relationship is significantly positive in organizations facing dynamic environments, a finding consistent with Wiltbank, Dew, Read, and Sarasvathy's (2006) prediction that environmental dynamism and uncertainty increase the benefits associated with a more adaptive approach to strategy making. In particular, this research suggests that top-down planning is too constraining and prevents such firms from demonstrating the flexibility required in changing environments.

Scholars focusing on characteristics of organizations' and units' internal structures and practices have suggested that factors that foster(inhibit) the pursuit of autonomous strategic initiatives are likely to similarly facilitate(limit) their broad adoption, while factors that increase the need for local adaptation are likely to increase both the positive relationship between autonomous strategic behavior and firm performance, as well as the likelihood that autonomous strategic behavior will form the basis for emergent strategy. For instance, in support of the former point, Mirabeau, Maguire, and Hardy (2018) suggested that resource allocation practices that discourage autonomous behaviors from occurring in the first place are also likely to hinder their translation into emergent strategy, as managers may have difficulty acquiring sufficient resources to bring these initiatives to fruition in such contexts. Likewise, Slevin and Covin (1997) found in a multiindustry sample that emergent strategies are more positively related to sales growth in firms with an organic structure, reasoning that because organic structures are conducive to learning and adaptation, man-

agers operating in these contexts are likely better able to identify novel solutions that are well aligned with the idiosyncratic challenges they face.

In support of the latter point, Wooldridge, Schmid, and Floyd (2008) concluded from their review of research on middle managers' strategy involvement that complex and geographically dispersed organizations require distributed and interactive leadership to match their structural and competitive diversity. In a related vein, Ahearne, Lam, and Kraus (2014) found that middle managers' efforts to facilitate adaptability are more positively related to firm performance in larger units and when the managers' social networks include greater informational social capital, as such units are likely to face greater diversity in the environment(s) within which they compete, and autonomous initiatives within these units are likely to be informed by a greater wealth of relevant information.

Finally, another stream of research has examined how the actions and characteristics of managers influence the outcomes of their autonomous strategic behaviors (Wooldridge et al., 2008). This work suggests that managers attain support for their autonomous activities through a process of strategic context determination (Burgelman, 1983), which entails explicit efforts to link a manager's autonomous strategic behaviors at the local level to the organization's higher-level concept of strategy. This championing process involves identifying and acquiring resources (Burgelman, 1991), demonstrating the viability of the initiative (Noda & Bower, 1996), and mobilizing lateral and upward support (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Mirabeau et al., 2018).

Integration. In sum, research on autonomous strategic behavior offers insights into the antecedents, consequences, and processes surrounding middle and line managers' deviations from organizations' espoused strategic practices. Relating this work to our central focus on line managers' downward involvement in HRM, this research provides support for the idea that middle and line managers are not simply passive mediators in the process of delivering organizational practices. Rather, as rational and agentic organizational actors, they work within the structural contexts of the organization to interpret the environment around them, modify and introduce practices in response to local and organizational pressures, and mobilize support for their autonomous activities. Moreover, this literature suggests that managers engage in these efforts for a variety of reasons, including to maintain their own self-image, to advance their status and career progression (Burgelman, 1991), to fulfill expectations of their role in the organization's strategic process (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985), to cope with the absence or incompleteness of extant strategic practices of the organization (Inkpen & Choudhury, 1995), and/or to facilitate adaptability to improve the alignment of practices (Ansari et al., 2010) and operations (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014) with the requirements of their local environments.

How do these insights specifically help to deepen our understanding of line managers' influence on content-based variance in an organization's HR practices? While future research is needed to assess these relationships in the HR context, this work lays a foundation to guide questions related to when line managers are more or less likely to deviate from organization-espoused HR practices, as well as when such deviation is likely to be more or less adaptive and/or generate other outcomes in an organization. For instance, extrapolating findings from the autonomous strategic

behavior literature to the HR context, we may expect that the likelihood of line managers' deviation from corporate HR practices will be increased by contextual factors such as less formal organizational structures, greater managerial discretion in the allocation of resources, and organizational environments that favor adaptability more generally. Moreover, just as in the case of broader or less directive business strategies, deviation may be more likely when an organization's espoused HR strategy or practices are "content-sparse," leaving room for—or even requiring—line managers' adaptation of HR practices by their very design. Alternatively, when an organization's espoused HR practices are well aligned with the characteristics or requirements of the environment in which a manager is operating, the manager may be less likely to deviate from these practices. Finally, managers' roles and positions in the organizational structure may play a role in their HR practice adaptation—with those managers occupying boundary-spanning roles potentially more likely to modify HR practices due to their work at the interface of the organization's multiple internal and external environments which may offer them a richer, more comprehensive perspective of the varied needs of different groups of employees, customers, and/or other organizational stakeholders.

Research on autonomous strategic behavior also offers insights into when adaptation of HR practices may be more beneficial. In particular, extrapolating from this literature, we may expect line managers' adaptation or introduction of HR practices to be more valuable—and to gain broader support—in organizations with organic structures, as well as those interfacing with multiple, diverse, and/or dynamic environments. In addition, we may expect increased performance and support associated with HR practice adaptation among line managers with greater access to diverse and abundant information, as well as those who effectively link their deviant HR activities to the organization's higher-level HR strategy or philosophy. In contrast, deviant HR activities that are not effectively linked to an organization's HR philosophy, that occur in the absence of changing or distinct HR requirements at the local level, or that are enacted in organizations with more rigid, mechanistic structures may be less likely to gain support or to generate positive returns.

Overarching Integration of Relevant Research Streams

Our review of these literatures generates meaningful insights related to the downward involvement of line managers in HRM. First, research on HR practice implementation highlights line managers' key roles in executing the formal HR practices that are most often determined by the corporate HR function. Line managers vary in the degree and effectiveness with which they execute corporate HR practices as intended, with such differences leading to variation in HRM process within the organization. Importantly, however, insights from other relevant research streams lead us to *redefine* the role of line managers as agentic and proactive enactors—rather than simply passive transmitters—who may pursue autonomous initiatives to respond to local environmental contingencies, which may involve the use of tailored or modified HR systems or practices that aim to more precisely address their local strategic needs (i.e., autonomous strategic behavior). This expansion of our understanding of line managers' potential roles in HRM planning and delivery points to line managers' likely impact

on HRM content, as well as process, which may occur in both systematic and idiosyncratic ways. Specifically, line managers may be encouraged by an organization's corporate HR function to systematically adapt the content of local HR practices (i.e., HR devolution) and/or to implement distinct sets of HR practices across different employee groups based on their varied strategic value for the organization (i.e., differentiated HR architecture). Alternatively, line managers may make modifications to an organization's espoused HR practices to accommodate the needs of individual employees (i.e., i-deals). Taken together, the research we have reviewed underscores that line managers may be an important source of both process- and content-based HRM variation, not only at level of the line manager and the units which they manage, but also at the individual employee, job, and organization levels. A summary of the contributions of each of the reviewed literatures to our understanding of line managers' roles in within-organization variation in HRM is provided in Table 2.

An Aspirational Research Agenda

Our review offers a conceptual foundation on which future research may build to move beyond examinations of line managers' implementation of HR practices within their work units to consider the full scope of line managers' HR activities. We explicate these potential areas of inquiry in the sections that follow, wherein we propose four broad areas of research that we believe would propel SHRM scholars toward a more complete understanding of line managers' contributions to organizational HR systems and practices. In particular, first, we advance an expanded conceptualization of line managers' downward HRM involvement, wherein we identify three categories of HRM delivery behaviors with an aim toward moving SHRM research beyond the simplistic and narrow treatment of line manager HRM involvement in terms of HR practice implementation. We offer insights to guide future research that takes a more comprehensive approach in identifying the antecedents and consequences of line managers' various HR practice delivery behaviors. Second, we draw on research on emergent strategy and issue selling to offer the notions of line managers' lateral and upward involvement which concerns their influences on the HR practices implemented by their peer managers and adopted by the corporate HR function, respectively. Third, we highlight the significance of line managers' local deviations from corporate HR practices as well as their lateral and upward influences in the HR realm for considerations related to the hori-

zontal and vertical fit of HR systems, which are foundational to the theoretical underpinnings of the SHRM literature. Finally, we call for 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, underscoring implications for how organizations may best manage the line manager role to achieve alignment with their desired HRM and strategic outcomes.

An Expanded Conceptualization of Line Managers' Downward HRM Involvement

Our review points to the need to expand our conceptualization of line managers' HRM involvement to account for line managers' roles in both process- and content-based variance in HRM. Based on the insights generated in the literatures reviewed, we propose that line managers may engage in three specific forms of downward HRM involvement, which fall along a continuum with respect to the process- versus content-based HR variance that they generate within an organization. These include *implementation* (i.e., enactment of the organization's espoused HR practices), *translation* (i.e., "filling in the blanks" of sparser or more generic espoused HR practices to fit local needs), and *adaptation/introduction* (i.e., explicit modification or replacement of an organization's espoused HR practices at the local level), with line managers' HR practice implementation serving as the source of local process-based variance and translation and adaptation/introduction as the source of local content-based variance in HRM. We further explicate and provide case study examples of these three HRM delivery behaviors in Table 3.

Our identification of these three HRM delivery behaviors accounts for the fact that, in addition to implementing an organization's espoused HR practices, line managers may make local modifications to corporate HR practices that cause the employment of those practices to qualitatively differ in their units. Such modifications may thus shape the horizontal and vertical fit of an organization's HR systems and practices (see below for details), thereby influencing their performance outcomes at both the unit and the organization levels. In addition, such local modifications of HR practices may be particularly well suited to shape the employees' individual satisfaction, fulfillment, and well-being, because line managers are more proximal to employees and may thus have a better understanding of their unique goals and needs.

Table 2
Classification of Types, Levels, and Sources of Variance Examined in Relevant Literatures

Research area	Subarea	Types of HRM variation	Level at which variation occurs	Sources of variation
HR practice implementation	HR devolution	Process and Content	Line manager	Corporate HR function and line managers
	HR implementation behavior	Process	Line manager	Line managers
Workforce differentiation	Differentiated HR architecture	Process and Content	Job or employee group	Corporate HR function and line managers
	I-deals	Content	Individual employee	Line managers with employees
Autonomous strategic behavior		Content (outside HR context)	Line manager or strategic initiative	Line and/or middle managers

Table 3
Explanation of Three HR Delivery Behaviors

HR delivery behavior	Definition	Relevant case studies	Supporting concepts/insights from our integrative review
Implementation	The enactment of the organization's espoused HR practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evans (2017): In the context of three United Kingdom retail companies, the study demonstrated variance in line managers' implementation behavior in a wide range of HR practices, including staffing, performance management, training/ development, staff scheduling, and workload allocation.• Trullen, Stürpe, Bonache, and Valverde (2016): In eight large Spain companies, the authors documented variance in the extent and effectiveness of line managers' implementation of HR practices, ranging from onboarding, training, performance appraisal, performance pay, and employee suggestion.• Bredin and Söderlund (2011): In the context of six engineering project-based firms in Norway, line managers were tasked with performing career planning and competence development given the unique needs of their project workers.• Currie and Procter (2001): In the context of new pay initiatives in a United Kingdom hospital, it was found that the HR function provided a generic framework for new pay plans, which line managers contextualized based on the operational needs of their local units.• Maxwell (2005): The study of five firms in the United Kingdom retailing, tourism, and finance sectors showed that line managers initiated the development of various work-life balance practices including job share, special shift arrangements, home working, among others.• Mirabeau and Maguire (2014): In one autonomous strategic initiative examined in this study, a line manager independently planned and delivered customized training sessions to facilitate call center operators' abilities to adopt a multilingual call flow procedure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Line managers' HR practice implementation
Translation	The "filling in the blanks" of sparser or more generic espoused HR practices based on fit to local unit needs		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Autonomous strategic behavior; "umbrella strategies" (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985)
Adaptation/Introduction	The explicit modification or replacement of an organization's espoused HR practices at the local level		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Autonomous strategic behavior• HR devolution• I-deals

An important area for future research entails the empirical validation and measurement of our expanded concepts of line managers' downward HRM involvement as well as an examination of the specific antecedents, processes, and consequences surrounding the three different HRM delivery behaviors. Importantly, the research included in our review provides critical—but fragmented—insights that offer a starting point for these lines of inquiry. For instance, with respect to antecedents and processes, our review suggests that the form(s) of HRM involvement taken by line managers may be shaped by (a) the structural and political contexts of the focal organization (Andersen, 2004; Bower, 1982); (b) the characteristics of the HR function, the HR decision processes, and the resulting HR practices present in the organization (Brewster, Brookes, & Gollan, 2015; Kuvaas et al., 2014); and (c) the individual characteristics of the line managers responsible for their implementation (Sikora et al., 2015), and d) the characteristics of the units and employees for which line managers are responsible (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Rosen et al., 2013). Research examining how these factors shape the prevalence of line managers' various HRM delivery behaviors would be valuable in advancing our understanding of how line managers' HRM involvement is simultaneously situated in the broader organizational and unit contexts while also shaped by line managers' personal qualities. Moreover, one could imagine a variety of natural extensions from extant work, with room to explore how various additional factors at the national, state, or industry (e.g., legal regulations), organization (e.g., leadership, culture, strategy), unit (e.g., availability of slack resources, position within the organization), and manager (e.g., status) levels shape the formal and informal rewards and/or sanctions associated with line managers' different HRM delivery behaviors—and thus, indirectly, the likely prevalence of these behaviors—in a particular context. Extant literatures on empowering climate (e.g., Seibert, Silver, & Randolph, 2004; Wallace, Johnson, Mathe, & Paul, 2011), creative deviance (e.g., Mainemelis, 2010), organizational design, and innovation management (e.g., Burns & Stalker, 1961; Damanpour, 1991) are just a few of several potentially useful starting points for advancing these lines of inquiry.

In turn, our review suggests that the consequences of each form of line managers' HRM involvement may include effects on (a) employee attitudes and behaviors (Liao et al., 2016; Pak & Kim, 2018; Sikora et al., 2015); (b) unit performance (Pak & Kim, 2018); and/or (c) subsequent upward feedback or input into organization's formal HR system, and may depend on (a) the supportiveness of the organizational environment (Gilbert et al., 2015; Mirabeau et al., 2018); (b) the effectiveness of the HRM delivery behavior in question (Noda & Bower, 1996); and (c) the actions taken by line managers to “sell” their HR practice modifications to other organizational actors (Burgelman, 1983; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014).

Importantly, we observe that prior research has taken a narrow view on the functionality of line managers' deviation from organizations' espoused HR practices, with strong literature-specific traditions guiding the focus and partiality of scholars' inquiry. For instance, research on line managers' implementation behavior has adopted as a starting point the assumption that the organization-espoused HR system (i.e., often a HPWS) is ideal, such that anything less than full implementation of this system by line managers compromises desired employee and unit outcomes (Pak

& Kim, 2018; Sikora et al., 2015). In contrast, research on i-deals and autonomous strategic behavior has focused on benefits of managers' customization of practices to accommodate the needs of employees (Ho & Kong, 2015; Rosen et al., 2013) and local unit environments (Burgelman, 1983; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014), respectively. Moreover, prior research has been relatively silent on how and when line managers' deviation from organizations' espoused HR practices may lead to consequences that span beyond local employees' attitudes and behaviors and unit performance. For instance, one could imagine that line managers may be less familiar with relevant labor and employment laws than would an organization's corporate HR function, such that deviations from certain corporate HR practices by line managers could expose the organization to legal issues (e.g., due to bias in selection processes or outcomes). Line managers' local HR practice deviations could also create confusion or perceptions of unfairness among employees in other parts of the organization (Clark, 1993), which could result in negative spillovers in the form of unfavorable attitudes and even reduced performance in other organizational units even if a focal unit benefits from a line manager's local HRM delivery behaviors. Thus, there is an important need for future research to examine a broader array of both positive and negative outcomes that are not constrained to the typical foci of the disciplinary traditions of a particular line of inquiry, and more specifically to consider how and when deviation of different forms is likely to yield positive or negative consequences across an organization's multiple relevant contexts (e.g., strategic, legal, interunit) and stakeholders.

In sum, we have laid the foundation for multiple streams of future research that can build on our expanded conceptualization of line managers' downward HRM involvement to advance our understanding of the antecedents, consequences, and boundary conditions associated with the prevalence and functionality of each type of HRM delivery behavior. This is critical, as our understanding of how HR practices and HR systems influence the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of employees as well as performance outcomes across organizational levels—that is, the very core of the field of SHRM—rests on this knowledge. Importantly, given that the occurrence and functionality of line managers' downward HRM involvement is likely to be highly dependent on organizational and local contexts, future research should adopt multilevel research methods that would allow scholars to assess the interplay among contextual factors, line managers' individual qualities, and the distinct forms of HRM involvement. In addition, because the functionality of line manager-generated content-based variance in HR practices may depend in part on some level of diversity in the multiple relevant local environments and strategic needs encountered by an organization, this scholarship would benefit from research designs that involve observations which encompass organizations that vary in size, structures, geographic dispersion, and strategic logics. Moreover, because individual organizations may select, promote, and retain managers with similar personalities and other traits (Oh, Han, Holtz, Kim, & Kim, 2018; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995), cross-organizational research designs would be ideal in ensuring sufficient variability in the assessment of the relationship between line managers' individual qualities and the different forms of HRM involvement.

Line Managers' Lateral and Upward Influence in HRM

A second direction for future research that follows from our review is a consideration of line managers' lateral and upward influence efforts in the HRM context. In particular, as rational organizational actors, line managers may seek to exert influence on HRM activities and policy in other parts of the organization—particularly to the extent that a line manager is seeking resources, legitimacy, and/or social support for his or her own adaptations or replacement of the organization's espoused HR practices. Indeed, as detailed below, research on emergent strategy points to the prevalence of middle managers' lateral- and upward-directed actions to garner peer and institutional support for their autonomous strategic behaviors (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). Moreover, a substantial body of research on issue selling confirms that managers make lateral and upward appeals for the attention and buy-in of their organizational peers and superiors with respect to issues they perceive to be worth championing (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997). Thus, we suggest that an important avenue for SHRM scholarship is the examination of the antecedents, processes, and outcomes associated with line managers' efforts to effect change in the informal and formal HR practices among peer units and in the corporate HR function, respectively. Whereas line managers' lateral influence efforts may be directed toward shaping the HR practices and implementation processes in other units, we imagine their upward influence efforts are more likely to be aimed at gaining and maintaining support for their local HR practice deviations and effecting broader change in the formal corporate HR policy.

Specifically, the two literatures noted above—emergent strategy and issue selling—are likely to be particularly relevant to line managers' lateral and upward influencing behaviors. First, research on emergent strategy suggests that, in addition to engaging in local deviations from organizational strategies and practices (i.e., through their autonomous strategic behaviors, which we discussed in greater detail in the downward influence portion of our review), managers engage in dialectic interactions with peers and top managers to mobilize broad support for their adaptations to organizational strategies and practices (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Nonaka et al., 2016). Emergent strategy research sheds additional light on the elements of successful influencing processes, pointing for example, to the importance of (a) securing lateral support as a step in gaining upward influence, (b) aligning the strategic context with the autonomous activity in question, and (c) codifying autonomous activities to formalize them within the broader organizational context (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). This work demonstrates that successful influencing efforts indeed lead to change in organizational strategies (Noda & Bower, 1996).

Second, research on issue selling, which is defined as "individuals' behaviors that are directed toward affecting others' attention to and understanding of issues" (Dutton & Ashford, 1993, p. 398), has typically focused on middle managers' efforts in conveying the importance of and eliciting action on specific strategic issues among top management, and sheds light on the contextual, relational, and individual antecedents and outcomes of issue selling in organizations. Importantly, this body of work highlights that line managers are not merely implementers of organizational initiatives, but rather are proactive actors who can bring about organi-

zational change, in part by securing and directing the time, attention, and resources of key decision makers. Research on issue selling has pointed to a variety of factors that shape the motivation and effectiveness of line managers in the issue selling context, providing evidence, for example, that the likelihood of issue selling depends on the openness of top management and supportiveness of the organizational culture (Dutton et al., 1997), relationship quality between middle managers and top management (Ling, Floyd, & Baldrige, 2005), and structural location and functional orientation of the middle manager in question (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). This research has also highlighted the importance of issue selling *strategies* in determining the effectiveness of managers' issue selling efforts, suggesting that effective issue packaging and the appropriate choice of selling channels contribute to issue selling success (Ling et al., 2005).

While generally focused outside the realm of HRM, insights from these two literatures provide evidence to support the possibility that line managers may engage in interactions with peer managers and the corporate HR function as they seek support and buy-in for their local HR activities, and that the influencing efforts that characterize these interactions may indeed change the content of informal HR practices as well as formal corporate HR systems. For example, in their study of a telecommunications firm, Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) noted that a front line manager was responsible for persuading the organization to adopt a multilingual call flow structure—along with the formal training programs to support it—in order to accommodate the requests of international clients for calls to be conducted in French or Spanish, and that his success depended largely on garnering lateral support from peer managers and demonstrating the consistency of the initiative with the organization's strategy. Additionally, Ashford and Detert (2015) detailed the case of a regional sales manager's successful recommendation for his organization to adopt the industry's best practices for managing sales talent, which the manager "sold" by connecting it to upper managers' espoused goals for the sales division.

Thus, we believe that research in these areas offers a useful foundation for not only expanding our understanding of line managers' involvement in HRM but for considering line managers as potential sources of change and renewal in organizations' HR systems. This is meaningful, as the adoption and elaboration of this notion offers an important complement to the prevailing top-down model of HRM that has long dominated SHRM scholarship.

The Interplay of Line Managers' Involvement and Horizontal and Vertical Fit in HRM

A third area where our review points to future research opportunities concerns the horizontal and vertical fit of HR systems, which represent key internal and external contingencies surrounding the performance outcomes of HRM (Wright & Snell, 1998). Horizontal fit refers to the internal consistency and congruence of the practices within an HR system (Delery & Doty, 1996; Wright & McMahan, 1992), with strong horizontal fit characterized by a combination of synergistic HR practices that work together to support desired outcomes. Vertical fit refers to the alignment of an organization's HR system with other characteristics of the organizational environment, including the organization's strategy, com-

petitive context, or industry trends (Baird & Meshoulam, 1988; Wright & McMahan, 1992).

With respect to horizontal fit, an important line of inquiry arises out of the recognition of line managers' influences on process- and content-based variance in HRM. In particular, while SHRM scholars have typically conceptualized and assessed horizontal fit at the organization level where HR systems are adopted or designed (Delery & Gupta, 2016; Wright & Ulrich, 2017), to the extent that line managers create variance in the implementation or content of practices throughout the organization, horizontal fit may also vary across employee groups for whom different line managers are responsible. This observation points to two related considerations for future research. First, at what level is horizontal fit most appropriately conceptualized and measured? More directly, is it the horizontal fit of the formal HR system espoused by the organization or the horizontal fit of the HR practices actually enacted by line managers that is most theoretically and practically relevant? This question merits explicit attention, particularly in light of qualitative evidence that line managers' active influences in shaping HR practices vary across practices within an HR system (Hall & Torrington, 2006).

Second, what is the effect of different forms of line managers' HRM involvement on the horizontal fit of HR systems? We expect that as line managers' HRM delivery behaviors generate more content- versus process-based variance, their effects on horizontal fit of the HR system will become stronger. This is because process-based variance occurs within the confines of a single (organization-espoused) set of HR practices, whereas content-based variance reflects a fundamental alteration of the HR practices in question. With respect to line managers' potential lateral and upward involvement, on the other hand, it is possible that greater influence by line managers on the actual HR practices implemented by peer managers and on the formal HR practices espoused as part of an organization's corporate HR system may increase the horizontal fit of the HR system(s) in use throughout the organization, such that espoused HR practices with strong horizontal fit at the organization level—which are shaped in part by feedback from line managers—are more consistently delivered throughout the organization.

In studying vertical fit, SHRM scholars have traditionally assessed the alignment of a focal HR system with one or more characteristics of the organizational environment, including firm strategy (e.g., Collins & Kehoe, 2017; Delery & Doty, 1996), industry characteristics (e.g., Datta, Guthrie, & Wright, 2005), and labor market conditions (e.g., Sun, Aryee, & Law, 2007). An important premise underlying our conception of content-based variance generated through line managers' HRM involvement—and one borne out consistently in research on autonomous strategic behavior—is that the local environments faced by line managers may substantively differ from the singular organizational environment conceived by decision makers at the organization level. Thus, if we accept that organizations interface with multiple distinct environments, then vertical fit may be more appropriately defined and assessed at the local levels where the organization-environment interface varies. In turn, we must acknowledge that both the multifaceted structure of organizations and the influence of line managers on HRM affect the vertical fit of HRM in organizations. Alternatively—or in addition—line managers' lateral and upward influence efforts may instigate change that im-

proves the vertical fit of HRM in other parts of the organization or at the organization level. Thus, we encourage future research to examine the effects of line managers' downward HRM involvement on vertical fit both at the organization and the local level—and to further consider how line managers' lateral and upward HRM involvement influence the vertical fit of HRM across these levels over time.

The Role of Line Managers and Their Individual Qualities in SHRM

A fourth direction for future research follows from the foregoing recognition of line managers as autonomous, agentic, and human actors in the organization's HR process. Line managers' multidirectional involvement in HRM suggest that managers are not mere passive transmitters of HR practices—rather, they may serve along with other key HR actors such as CEO (Chadwick, Super, & Kwon, 2015) and HR department/managers (Barney & Wright, 1998; Chadwick, Guthrie, & Xing, 2016) as active participants in the formulation and execution of HR strategy. In addition to underscoring a variety of potential implications of line managers' multifaceted HRM involvement as a source of variation in HR practices delivered within organizations, the insights generated in our review invite additional scholarship along several interrelated lines of inquiry into the role of line managers' *individual qualities*—including their competencies, personalities, and motivations—in our models of SHRM.

Extending our insights on the interplay between line managers' HRM involvement and fit in HR systems, future research may also benefit from considering line managers' fit with an organization's ideal model of HRM. Whereas horizontal fit is traditionally conceptualized as the internal consistency of HR practice *content*, we might think of line managers' HR delivery behaviors as an element of—or a precursor to—process-based horizontal fit in an organization's broader HR system, with greater horizontal fit achieved when there is increased consistency in the prevalence of desired HRM delivery behaviors across line managers in the organization. From this standpoint, to the extent that an organization seeks to encourage autonomy and/or flexibility in line managers' HRM delivery behaviors, this likely calls for line managers with a distinct profile of competencies, personality, and motivation to innovate and adapt relative to in organizations that prioritize the consistent HR practice implementation across line managers. Although previous research on horizontal fit has typically focused on internal consistency at the HR practice level (Delery & Gupta, 2016), line managers' HR-related qualities may constitute a useful level of abstraction in considering HRM delivery activities and horizontal fit within the HRM architecture at the line manager level (see Kepes & Delery, 2007, pp. 390–393).

Alternatively, we might think of line managers' qualities as representing an element of—or precursor to—vertical fit in HRM at the local level. For instance, given that different business strategies (e.g., innovation vs. cost leadership) may require different HR outcomes (e.g., employee knowledge and motivation) and thus different types and/or intensities of HR practices (Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014), to the extent that line managers' HR competencies (or other qualities) are useful for enacting strategically relevant HR practices within their

units to support unit performance, such HR competencies may be relevant to the vertical fit of the HR system.

The consideration of line managers' individual qualities as precursors to each of the two types of fit underscores our earlier observation that line managers' HRM involvement may not always translate into desired employee and organizational outcomes. For instance, in circumstances where line managers seek to implement, modify, or replace an organization's espoused HR practices in their units, the effect of these HR practices may be weakened if the manager lacks a requisite understanding of their functioning. Similarly, line managers' lateral and upward influences may not bring about broader changes in the organization if a line manager lacks relevant HR competencies and thus fails to be viewed as an effective "change champion" (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2013, p. 463). One can imagine, furthermore, that line managers' political competencies—and ability to attract supportive allies—may affect their influence in such contexts as well, particularly because, if not presented effectively, advocating for changes in formal policy may be interpreted as criticism of key organizational decision makers (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998; Dutton et al., 1997). In more extreme cases, line managers' lack of HR competencies may lead to dysfunctional outcomes, with potential legal, employer branding, and/or performance implications for the organization. For example, in adapting corporate staffing practices, line managers may adopt a social media-based recruitment platform, but as a result may inadvertently limit recruiting pools to those who use social media more extensively, resulting in adverse impact (based on age and ethnicity) and subsequent legal challenges (Roth, Bobko, Van Iddekinge, & Thatcher, 2016). They may also make inaccurate judgments of applicant qualifications based on nonjob related information provided on social media, thereby compromising the human capital needs of their units (Roth et al., 2016). As another example, line managers may introduce multisource feedback in performance appraisals but fail to recognize biases and errors associated with ratings from each feedback source (Ng, Koh, Ang, Kennedy, & Chan, 2011); or may use the results only for administrative purposes such as promotion and pay raises, rather than for employee development, for which multisource feedback is better suited (Hensel, Meijers, van der Leeden, & Kessels, 2010).

The potential for dysfunctional outcomes that may be influenced by line managers' competencies points to the need for future research to identify the KSAOs required for effectiveness in each form of downward, lateral, and upward involvement in HRM. For example, while HR functional expertise may be sufficient for the successful implementation of an organization's espoused HR practices, a deeper familiarity with relevant legal, labor market, and strategic contexts may be required to ensure appropriate HR practice adaptation. Moreover, line managers may need additional competencies associated with change management and a broader knowledge of the business (e.g., the organization's strategic needs) to influence their peers and the corporate HR function through lateral and upward influence behaviors (Ulrich et al., 2013). In addition, other line manager characteristics such as personality may play a similarly important role. For instance, we can imagine that line managers' conscientiousness may shape process-based HRM variance

(e.g., with more conscientious line managers engaging in consistent and effective HR practice implementation), whereas their openness, adaptiveness, and proactivity may have a stronger influence on their effects on HRM content (cf. Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010). Thus, future research would benefit from an examination of how specific KSAOs correspond with the likelihood and effectiveness of line managers' engagement in each form of HRM involvement. It is only then that we may begin to explore how organizations can best select, train, and evaluate line managers to improve the fit of their HRM involvement with the broader strategic, competitive, and cultural contexts with which the organization interfaces—an avenue of research that the selection (e.g., Van Iddekinge & Ployhart, 2008), training (e.g., Arthur, Bennett, Edens, & Bell, 2003; Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010), and performance appraisal (e.g., Rynes, Gerhart, & Parks, 2005) literatures will be valuable in advancing.

Conclusion

We suggested at the outset that current conceptualizations of line managers' roles in HRM are overly narrow and simplistic—a problematic state in light of scholars' calls for greater attention to HR practice delivery (e.g., Becker & Huselid, 2006; Nishii & Wright, 2008). We have synthesized insights from several literatures to offer a richer and more accurate perspective on line managers' HRM involvement—one which recognizes the individual and contextualized aspects of line managers' behaviors as they engage with their HRM roles and responsibilities. In so doing, we have laid the foundation for future research to further explore line managers' downward influences (i.e., through different HRM delivery behaviors) on both HRM process and content; the lateral and upward influence efforts through which line managers seek broader support for their localized HR practice deviations; the interplay between line managers' downward, lateral, and upward HRM influences and the horizontal and vertical fit of HR systems across organizational levels and over time; and the influence of individual line managers' qualities on their HRM involvement. We believe that these four broad areas of research offer promise for advancing our understanding of line managers' critical roles in linking HRM with the unique needs of different employees and groups within the organization and with the unique and changing requirements of both the local and global environments outside the organization.

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