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## The HRM role of line managers: A Malaysian case study

Nik Hazimah Nik Mat  
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Malaysian case study

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# **THE HRM ROLE OF LINE MANAGERS: A MALAYSIAN CASE STUDY**

**NIK HAZIMAH NIK MAT**

Bachelor of Management (Technology), Malaysia

Master of Management, Malaysia

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

Faculty of Business and Law

Edith Cowan University

Western Australia

2014

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## **Abstract**

While HRM has long been part of the line manager's role, it has now become a crucial component. Unfortunately, for many line managers, their HRM role is uncertain, in terms of their coverage and depth of involvement in HRM activities. It is therefore difficult to measure whether their involvement affects HRM effectiveness or contributes to organisational achievement. The purpose of this study is to explore the development of the line managers' HRM role, based on the perceptions of key members of selected organisations. This exploration may lead to the understanding of the effect of line managers' HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness. A critical realist approach is used as a research philosophy to guide the process of gathering data for answering the research questions. A critical realist paradigm provides a platform for answering "how" and "why" questions that can illuminate the LMs' HRM role. Case studies are conducted at three Malaysian airports. A case study approach enables gathering in-depth data about LMs' HRM role. A cross case analysis is conducted to identify similarities and differences in LMs' HRM roles. Drawing on role theory concepts, 36 interviews are conducted with line managers, senior managers and HR representatives. In this study, line managers are the role holders, while senior managers and HR representatives are the role evaluators. Document analysis is also conducted to obtain general information about the airports and to compare findings from the interviews. All data are analysed using content analysis. Based on role theory concepts and Conner and Ulrich's (1996) HRM typology, findings indicate a mismatch between the perceptions of role holders and role evaluators regarding the HRM role of line managers. A significant gap is found in the understanding of the change agent role. While performing as change agent is the most important requirement for HRM effectiveness, in these airports, the line managers' HRM role performance did not affect HRM effectiveness.

Adding to the understanding of how the HRM role of line managers is defined and enacted, this study provides insights into the refinement of role theory concepts in understanding the role development process. Further, emphasis should be given to developing role expectations, as these reflect what is required of the role holder. Findings clearly indicate the need for improvement in the implementation of HRM policy and practices to increase the accuracy of messages sent to line managers regarding expectations of their HRM role. Additionally, findings enhance the theoretical understanding of line managers' involvement in HRM; an area dominated by studies in a Western context. The line managers in this study are predominantly Malay Muslims, and Malay culture and Islamic values are seen to influence

the managers' perceptions and actions in HRM role enactment. The culture of high power distance in the Malaysian society affects LMs' understanding as they require authority to perform their HRM role. There is also a strong belief amongst Muslim LMs that performing their "responsibility" at work is one way of worshiping God. Although undertaking the HRM role meant LMs had additional roles to play, they did not view this role as a burden but took it as part of their responsibility. These unique identities are likely to differentiate the factors underpinning the HRM role enactment of line managers in Malaysia as compared to those in a Western context. Implications arise for aligning HRM strategy and organisational outcomes through a contextual-based understanding of line management's contribution.



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## List of Abbreviations

AMO	Ability, Motivation, Opportunity
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CA	Collective agreement
ECU	Edith Cowan University
E-HR	Electronic human resources
HR	Human resources
HPM	Human performance management
HRM	Human resource management
IT	Information technology
KPI	Key performance indicators
KSS	Knowledge sharing sessions
LM	Line manager
LMs	Line managers
MS	Microsoft
PMS	Performance management system
RE	Role evaluators
SOPs	Standard operating procedures
STOL	Short take-off and landing
OT	Overtime
UK	United Kingdom

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the background to the research problem. An overview illustrates the changing role of the line manager (LM) in people management, in the context of human resource management (HRM) activity devolution. The general research problem is explained, as is the need for this study. The theoretical and practical significance of this study is identified. The research questions and preliminary research framework are being presented. A brief overview of the methodology, data analysis and the limitations of the study also provided. This chapter concludes with an outline of the chapters, and definition of terms used throughout the thesis.

### **1.1 Research Background**

HRM is recognised as one of the key elements in the development and implementation of strategic responses under competitive pressure (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Budhwar, 2000). The importance of HRM is justified by its capability to provide management with the opportunity to secure organisational competitive advantage through a rich array of policies and practices that prepare the organisation for dealing with environmental change (McConville, 2006). HRM policies and practices are an essential element in building human capital and stimulating the necessary behaviours that create advantage for the organisation (Boxall & Steenveld, 1999). Importantly, the changing demands of HRM functions are evident; organisations need to deal with constant changes in their environment and remain competitive (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012). One issue related to these changes is the devolution of HRM to LMs (Budhwar, 2000). Therefore, researchers have suggested revisions be made to the HRM function to enhance its importance to organisations in achieving organisational goals (Ulrich, Younger, & Brockbank, 2008).

The devolution of HRM activities to LMs is an important practice in an increasingly competitive environment (Budhwar, 2000). The main purpose of devolving HRM activities is

to give human resource (HR) specialists opportunity to focus attention at the strategic level. This enables the HRM function to be effectively integrated into business strategies. Towards that end, LMs are given primary responsibility for managing HRM activities at the operational level. It is assumed that LMs are more responsive to staff needs and local conditions, enabling them to take responsibility for HRM in their areas. However, the LM's HRM role has gained prominence as they become increasingly involved in many HRM activities. These include performance appraisal, training and development, recruitment and selection, pay and benefits, career development, industrial relations, safety and health and workforce expansion and reduction (Budhwar & Fadzil, 2000; Currie & Procter, 2001; Larsen & Brewster, 2003).

The LMs' prominent role is justified through their influence on employee attitudes and behaviour (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Employee attitudes and behaviour are essential to connect HRM with organisational performance. This implies that LMs' HRM roles are greater than previously assumed (Currie & Procter, 2001). LMs are in the best position to take responsibility for converting HRM policies into practice, and for influencing the direction of work teams to achieve organisational goals (Townsend, Wilkinson, Allan, & Bamber, 2012). As employees are more likely to rely on the actions and support of their LMs, their attitudes and behaviours can be guided to achieve real improvements in unit level outcomes, potentially contributing to overall organisational performance (McConville, 2006; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Unfortunately, for many LMs, their role is confused and uncertain—especially in terms of their coverage and depth of involvement in HRM activities. It is therefore difficult to measure whether or not their involvement influences HRM effectiveness, contributing to increased organisational performance (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998).

A “role” is defined as ‘the specific forms of behaviour associated with given positions in which the behaviour develops originally from task requirements’ (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 43). In an organisational system, a role represents positions in the organisation. Each role has its own purpose being designed to contribute to achieving organisational goals. In exploring the LMs’ HRM role, role theory is relevant. Role theory is widely used to understand employee behaviour in organisations. It provides an understanding of the causes and outcomes of employee behaviour, specifically regarding an employee’s role (Lopopolo, 2002).

Early developments of role theory suggested that expectations were crucial in determining the performance of a particular role. Role development is influenced by the expectation of members in a role set. A role set ‘consists of the different people with whom the role holder has contact and who have a stake in, and hold expectations about, the role performance’ (Rodham, 2000, p. 72). This suggests the importance of interpreting the expectations of role evaluators and delivering the right message, so that the expected role behaviour is achieved. As Katz and Kahn (1978) note, the allocation of work roles reflects the required behaviour expected by the organisation, which employees should comply with to ensure that work is performed effectively, achieving organisational goals. In understanding employee behaviour, role theory provides a review framework, known as “role episode”. A role episode describes ‘any interaction between employees whereby role expectations and role behaviours are manifest in measurable consequences’ (Wickham & Parker, 2007, p. 443).

Role episode is underpinned by four assumptions:

1. “Role taking” suggests that an employee will accept a role that is conferred on them by other members in the organisation.
2. “Role consensus” refers to the understanding of the expectations of all roles that are interdependent.

3. “Role compliance” occurs when employees comply with the expected behaviour of their role.

4. “Role conflict” arises when the expectations of other members of the organisation are not consensual. (Wickham & Parker, 2007)

Commentators argue there are limitations in using role theory to understanding employee behaviour associated with role taking, role consensus and role conflict (Biddle, 1986; Wickham & Parker, 2007). In the modern environment, the complexity of performing a role is more apparent when the role holder is involved in more than one task. This suggests that the role holder has to accommodate the needs and priorities of each role, which demands different behaviour (Lynch, 2007). The pressure is to meet the requirement of each role, as well as accommodating a variety of role expectations from role set members. Based on the conditions of the modern environment, the role taking assumption is too simplistic; and fails to consider these conditions in its process. Consequently, the role holder fails to meet the expectations of their role, as the role set members have not agreed upon work role requirements, which remain unclear.

Role consensus is important for both role evaluators and holders. Consensus can ensure the role is enacted as required by the role evaluator. Achieving consensus implies that the role holder is rewarded based on the assessments of the role evaluator. Two contrasting views on how consensus occurs suggest that shared norms and attitudes between role evaluators and role holders may determine the extent to which role consensus occurs. Role consensus is also viewed as part of the employment contract. Employees are assumed to be aware of role expectations, and the associated reward based on role performance through this contract (Biddle, 1986). To ensure role consensus assumptions are operational requires the role to be pre-defined, fixed and agreed on by both the role evaluator and role holder (Wickham & Parker, 2007). However, this is difficult when organisations are continuously

changing. Complexity of organisational structures leads to role variation over time.

Consequently, role holders and role evaluators often have different understandings regarding expectations. This creates a gap between the intended and actual role behaviours.

Wickham and Parker (2007) suggest three conditions lead to role conflict: insufficient time focusing on other roles; difficulties in achieving the different requirements of each role; behaviours required for one role hindering the fulfilment of another. They argue that the identification of these conditions fails to account for other non-work roles that potentially stress and lead to dissatisfaction among role holders. Importantly, there is also stress and dissatisfaction associated with attempts to align understanding between the role holder and their role evaluators. Consequently, the role holder finds meeting role expectations difficult, and fails to perform as expected by their role evaluators.

The above mentioned concepts are obviously pertinent to the diverse demands of LM roles when undertaking HRM responsibilities. For instance, besides being responsible for the quality and quantity of their immediate work force production, they are responsible for training new workers and evaluating staff performance. Having multiple roles significantly affects the way LMs enact the HRM role (Lynch, 2007). This changing responsibility can create dilemmas among LMs and potentially affect their role performance. Therefore, the understanding of the basic concepts underlying role theory can assist in investigating how LMs define and enact their HRM role.

The purpose of this study is to explore the development of the LMs' HRM role based on the perceptions of key members of selected organisations. This understanding may lead to the exploration of the effect of LMs' HRM role performance on organisational HRM effectiveness.

## 1.2 Research Problem

While devolution of HRM activities attracts research attention, research to date has focused on the changes to HR specialists' function (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Currie & Procter, 2001; Yusoff, Abdullah, & Ramayah, 2010), rather than the effect of this changing responsibility on how the HRM role is defined and enacted by LMs (McConville, 2006). In practice, it is unclear who is required to perform certain HRM activities, especially those supporting organisational goals. Given that LMs are obliged to implement changes in HR practices, this is an important gap to be filled and affects the way an organisation's people are managed (Currie & Procter, 2001).

The prominent HRM role of LMs requires clear definition so they can be effective in their job. The role must be clearly defined so they can enact the role according to the expectations of their role evaluators. Evaluators include the LM's supervisor, employees and HR specialists (Jayawardana & O'Donnell, 2009). It is important to highlight the expectations of role evaluators; assessment of LMs' performance depends on what the role evaluator perceives to be valuable. While this reflects the need to understand whether LMs and their role evaluators agree on role definition, to date little exploration has occurred regarding the perception of LMs and different stakeholders in organisations other than in HR specialists (Harris, Doughty, & Kirk, 2002). Focusing only on HR specialists' views is likely to be biased as researchers have agreed there is complexity in the relationship between HR specialists and LMs (Larsen & Brewster, 2003). This suggests the need to gather perceptions from other key organisational members closely related to the LMs' HRM role. Moreover, HR specialists' views would best provide information on the intended HRM role from the perspective of the role evaluator as a policy maker, rather than LMs as implementers. LMs' views should receive due consideration as they reflect their understandings of policy maker expectations.



Additionally, due to methodological limitations, studies of LM involvement in HRM are debated (Budhwar, 2000). First, while LMs' HRM role is still uncertain, the reliance on quantitative data fails to provide a comprehensive picture of LMs' HRM role in the organisation. Generally, the quantitative data does not provide an explanation of the main logic of actual practice, or answer the question of "how" LMs enact their HRM role and "why" they behave in a particular way. Thus, qualitative data is more suitable to obtain in depth understanding of the LMs' HRM role development.

To gain a deeper understanding of the causes and outcomes of LMs HRM role, it is important to gather understandings of the parties affected by their role (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). Earlier studies gathered data from HR specialists, with little attention paid to other key stakeholders, such as supervisors and employees (Khatri & Budhwar, 2002; Renwick & MacNeil, 2002). Thus, considering other stakeholders' perceptions are important to get the whole understanding of the underlying causes that influence the development of the LMs' HRM role.

Third, most studies have been conducted in Western countries (Budhwar, 2000; Yusoff, Abdullah, & Ramayah, 2010). Given globalisation and competitive environment organisations face, it is necessary to explore LMs' HRM role from the perspectives of people in different parts of the world (Budhwar, 2000). In fact, Rees and Johari's (2010) review of HRM issues identified this as a gap in HRM literature, especially in relation to important emerging countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. Thus, it is vital to fill this gap, as HRM in Asian countries may face different challenges to that in Western countries (Varma & Budhwar, 2013).

Finally, the study of LM involvement in HRM is limited in terms of scope, as more researchers have focused on the manufacturing sector (e.g. Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; Yusoff, Abdullah, & Ramayah, 2010). Little attention has

been paid to other sectors, such as service and tourism (Maxwell & Watson, 2006). Thus, exploring what happens in other sectors may enhance the understanding of the LMs' HRM role development and their contribution in various fields. Since tourism is one of the important sectors for the Malaysian economy, airport sector was chosen as it is a driving force in generating income from the tourism sector. Airports can act as an attraction and are the first impression people have of the country when they arrive.

Limitations in exploring LMs' HRM role may hinder the effort to gain a more complete understanding of the development of the LMs' HRM role, and the impact of that role on HRM effectiveness. This demands a study that can overcome these limitations and provide useful insights to support the process of enhancing LMs' ability to increase the HRM effectiveness in organisations. These limitations will be addressed in this study in several ways. The focus of this study is on the development of the LM's HRM role from the perspectives of LMs who enact the role (role holder) and key members in the organisation who evaluate the role (role evaluators), such as LMs' supervisors and HR specialists. Multiple informants will be employed to capture the understanding of different stakeholders regarding the LM's HRM role expectations. The methodological limitations are also addressed by employing a qualitative research method through a case study and involving a service sector from a non-western country, Malaysia.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How is the HRM role of LMs defined?
2. How is the HRM role of LMs enacted?
3. What is the effect of LMs' HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness?

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This is an investigation of how the LM HRM role is defined and enacted in an organisation. In addition, the effect of the LMs' HRM role performance is also examined, to understand the LM contribution to HRM effectiveness in the organisation. The significance of this study can be explained in theoretical and practical terms.

### **1.4.1 Theoretical.**

The study sets out to make a theoretical contribution in two key areas. Whilst the critical role of LMs in the organisation is increasingly difficult to ignore, their involvement in HRM is an important area to be explored. Recent developments of the LMs' HRM role have shown that their role has changed and grown, in line with the increased expectations of the organisational environments (Townsend and Russell, 2013). The increased expectations of the LMs' HRM role is debated as managers try to align HRM with organisational goals. Due to that, researchers agreed that LMs' HRM role cannot be viewed as simple, instead they argue further detail is needed as the role is a complex task and with more responsibilities than initially assumed. This has heightened the need for clear understanding of the LMs' HRM role due to its implications for the accomplishment of organisational goals.

As HRM roles continue to evolve, the importance of understanding the appropriate HRM configurations is clear. This will influence how the organisation is structured and managed to achieve its goals, regardless of situations. In fact, scholars have urged more studies revising HRM functions, to provide a good platform to guide the optimal distribution of HRM roles in practice (Ulrich, et al., 2008). Given the prominent role of LMs in HRM and the potential to influence employees' attitudes and behaviours in competitive environments, it is essential to investigate how the LMs' HRM role is defined and enacted in an organisation. To date, very limited empirical research has been conducted exploring the development of the

LMs' HRM role. This is addressed in the study by using role theory concepts to understand the development of the LMs' HRM role in modern organisations.

By highlighting some limitations of role theory, attempts are made to reconceptualise this theory to suit current conditions. Traditional approaches to studying roles fail to account for the dynamic nature and continuous change in organisational environments (Rodham, 2000). Instead, this study will examine how key members of a role set perceive their LMs' HRM role in a changing organisational environment. This is in line with the role theory argument that suggests the role played by an individual is more likely to be influenced by a social setting than their own personality (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This study also attempts to provide further detail on the causes of LM HRM role behaviour; not only to explain "what", but most importantly to answer the questions of "how" and "why" LMs behave in particular ways, by identifying the processes that define and produce LMs' HRM role. It is important to explore such processes underlying LMs' HRM role, to gain an adequate understanding of the role. Therefore, four role theory concepts will be examined in this study: role expectations, role taking, role conflict and role consensus.

A key difference between this study and earlier studies of HRM is that this study will examine HRM effectiveness in terms of the devolution of HRM to LMs. Most studies have concentrated on the effect of HRM devolution to the HR unit, and the resulting organisational performance (Hope-Hailey, McGovern, Stiles, & Truss, 1997; Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Renwick, 2003; Sheehan, Holland, & Cieri, 2006; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). The impact of the devolution and HRM effectiveness is not very well established in the literature. This study will attempt to fill this gap and provide an understanding of whether or not the LMs' HRM role is associated with the effectiveness of people management in an organisation. Indeed, concentrating on the impact of LMs' HRM role performance is crucial, as researchers believe that HRM effectiveness now matters more than ever (Ulrich, et al.,

2012). This is because management recognises the importance of HRM to delivering value in achieving organisational goals, especially when dealing with the constant pressure of change in organisational environments.

#### **1.4.2 Practical.**

The understanding of LMs' HRM role enables organisations to use the right mechanism to influence their behaviour and performance (Rodham, 2000). Organisations can use this knowledge to develop appropriate HRM policies and practices, stimulating the desired HRM role behaviours of LMs that are necessary to achieve a particular goal. By developing and effectively communicating HRM policy and practices, role ambiguity may be reduced among LMs and their HRM role. As LMs' HRM roles remain uncertain, the coverage and depth of the message sent through effective HRM policies and practices could increase LMs' understanding of key members' expectations and assist them to convert the right expectations into appropriate actions. Reducing ambiguity in the HRM role may also allow LMs to realise where they can make contributions to the organisation.

While research attempting to explore the LMs' HRM role has been concentrated in western countries, little attention has been paid to Asian countries such as Malaysia (Budhwar, 2000; Yusoff, Abdullah, & Ramayah, 2010), where social and cultural differences may add further complexity in developing the role. The uniqueness of Malaysia being a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society may create structures and rules that influence how the LMs' HRM role is defined and perceived by different members in the organisation. Research into the Malaysian context is important as it allows for comparisons with findings from western context in relation to the development of the LMs' HRM role.

Some commentators assert that the transition from personnel management to HRM in Malaysia faces different challenges than in western countries (Yusoff, Abdullah, & Ramayah, 2009). One of the challenges for Malaysia in this transition is that senior managers are

uncertain about the costs and benefits of HRM investment because the traditional approach of personnel management is a low cost strategy (Rowley & Abdul-Rahman, 2007). As senior management support is crucial to influencing the construction of HRM policies and practices in the organisation, this may potentially affect the process of communicating the desired HRM role behaviours to LMs. Thus, this study will provide insights for senior management to reduce their uncertainties about implementing HRM policies and practices and recognise measures in reconstructing their current practices to assist LMs to meet new expectations. Indeed, this information may be beneficial for Malaysian organisations in shaping their decisions about HRM investments to cover short term and long term outcomes. Given that little attention has been paid to linking policy input to performance outcomes in Malaysia (Yusoff & Abdullah, 2008), this study is essential in making further improvement to HRM policies and practices in Malaysian organisations towards producing better outcomes in the future.

## **1.5 Preliminary Research Framework**

Drawing on the concepts of role theory, a research framework has been developed to frame the research questions (see Figure 1). Four role theory concepts will be examined to understand how the LMs HRM role is defined and enacted in the organisation: role expectations, role taking, role conflict and role consensus. Role theory argues that interpretations of organisational context will influence perception of role requirements (Shivers-Blackwell, 2004). In this study, this perception is important because it will guide the way LMs HRM role is defined by the role evaluators. To understand how this expectation is developed, this study will investigate the intended HRM role of LMs from the perspectives of key members in the role set who are closely related with the role. The concepts of role taking, role conflict and role consensus will be employed to explore how LMs' HRM role is enacted. The actual LMs HRM role reflects LMs perception of messages sent by the role senders in the

role taking process. Their responses will determine their understanding of the role expectations set by their role evaluators. Role conflict occurs if there are challenges to perform the intended HRM role required by the role evaluator. If LMs are able to perform the intended LMs' HRM role or the challenges have been overcome, this suggests that they have arrived at the role consensus. The ability to achieve role consensus also reflects the effectiveness of the company's HRM policies and practices in sending message about role expectations from the role evaluators. Results from role consensus can be used to redefine the LMs' HRM role and clarify role expectations. Understanding of the message sent through the company's HRM policies and practices will determine the HRM role performance of LMs. Subsequently, the impact of the LMs' HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness will be examined to see whether or not their involvement in HRM activities improves people management in the organisation.

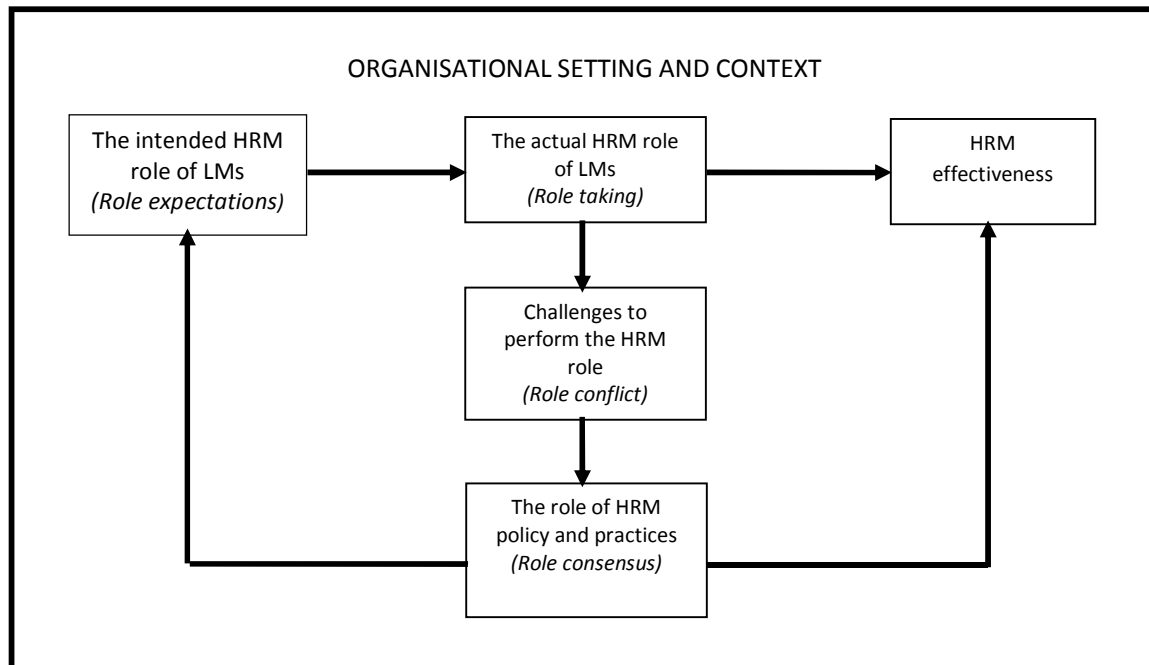


Figure 1. Preliminary research framework.

## 1.6 An Overview of the Methodology

To evaluate the structures and rules that influence how the LMs HRM role is defined and enacted in Malaysia, it is important to take into account unique Malaysian characteristics and explain how these characteristics shape individual's perceptions and actions in developing a role. Critical realism is suitable for this study for its ability, not only to answer 'what' is the LMs' HRM role, but more importantly to explain 'how' the LMs' HRM role is developed in organisations. Qualitative research via case studies will be employed to explore how the LMs' HRM role is defined and enacted within a specific context. The case studies will be conducted across the Malaysian airport sector, which comprises 39 commercial airports operated by one parent company. A multiple case study will be conducted involving three airports, which are selected on the basis of several factors: airport category, location and accessibility. The three airports reflected a range of sizes and functions, and they were differentiated by their connectivity to a number of destinations offered to customers and their operational size. The case studies comprised one international airport and two domestic airports. The international airport was larger in both size and operation, with a higher capacity to accept large aircrafts and offer connectivity to other countries. The domestic airports were smaller in size and provided services for passengers within the country.

Data will be gathered through interviews and document analysis of related publications such as company documents and web sites. The interviews will be conducted with LMs and their role evaluators (the senior managers and HR representatives). Two set of interview questions will be developed to gather responses from role holders and role evaluators. The questions will be common to all cases and constructed to investigate how the intended and actual HRM role of LMs in the airport is enacted. The impact of the LMs' HRM role on HRM effectiveness will be investigated as well through interviews with role evaluators.



## **1.7 Overview of Data Analysis**

Content analysis of the data collected in the interviews will enable the role theory concept to emerge from the data. Content analysis will be employed as it enables investigation of concepts decided upon earlier (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008). Theoretical propositions drawn from the role theory concepts will be used to guide the data analysis process. By applying this strategy, the actions leading to the LMs' HRM role can be explored while also investigating how the LMs' HRM role impacts on HRM effectiveness.

## **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

The main limitations of this study are related to scope and potential bias. First, the scope of this study is limited to service organisations specifically the Malaysian airport industry. Even though airport operations cover the whole country (Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia; Sabah and Sarawak), only three branches located in Peninsular Malaysia were studied. As the culture of each region differs and may influence the way employees respond to people management issues at the workplace, the findings of the study may only reflect the branches in the Malaysian Peninsular and not the whole country. Studies based on a critical realist paradigm are often criticised for personal biases of researchers in their critical judgements of the data. This could be due to an individual differences and experiences, which influence the perception and understanding about subject being studied. Thus, personal biases could be another limitation of this study. However, this is dealt by using the previously developed theory; role theory and Conner and Ulrich's (1996) HRM typology in guiding the interpretation of data to explain the LMs' HRM role in the selected organisations.

Second, an important issue in collecting data during interviews is trust of participants. Gaining sufficient information from employees at different levels (LMs, senior managers and HR representatives) may be biased depending on respondents' expectations about the interview. Access to this company was gained through the researcher's personal contacts and

this may create doubt about the consequences of participating in the study and influence respondent's feedback in the interview questions. This will be more challenging as the study involves one-off interviews with participants who the researcher had never met before. In dealing with these situations, researcher has guaranteed that no individual responses will be identified as the interviews feedback is labelled anonymously.

The Malaysian airport industry serves as a dynamic sector suitable for study. However, the findings may not reflect what occurs in other companies in the Malaysian service sector. Nevertheless, concentrating on one company offers in depth understanding of the development of the LMs' HRM role in the company and provides insights into the involvement of LMs in HRM that currently practiced among service companies.

## **1.9 Chapter Organisation**

There are eight chapters in this thesis. The sequence and structure of the chapters are as follows:

### **1.9.1 Chapter one: introduction.**

This chapter presents the general overview about the study, particularly the LMs' HRM role. The gap in the research on the HRM role of LMs is briefly explained as to the need of this study. An overview is given on the research questions and the significance of the study is described with regards to the theoretical and practical contributions. Summaries of the limitations, scope of the study, methodology and data analysis are also discussed. The chapter ends with the organisation of chapters and the definition and terms used throughout the thesis.

### **1.9.2 Chapter two: literature review.**

In this chapter is a review of the literature on LMs involvement in HRM. As the evolution of HRM function is evident, the problem of defining the LMs' HRM role is addressed. This problem is then linked to the gap in understanding about the LMs' HRM role

implementation. The changing demand of the HR function is discussed as is the potential of achieving HRM effectiveness through the LMs' HRM role. The HRM typology developed by Conner and Ulrich (1996) is explored as many researchers have used this for its ability to extend useful insights in redefining the HRM role. Prior to concluding, the concepts of role theory are reviewed and tailored to the understanding of how "a role" is developed in the organisation.

### **1.9.3 Chapter three: methodology.**

This chapter sets out to explain the chosen methods employed in the study to gather and analyse the data needed for answering the research questions. The chapter begins with the list of research questions and the research philosophy that underpins this research work. A review of positivism, interpretivism and critical realism suggests that this study encompasses the essence of critical realism. This is followed by a rationale of employing a qualitative research approach using a case study. The background of the case study organisation is also presented with the demographic characteristics of the participants involved in the study. This section ends with the summary of the chapter.

### **1.9.4 Chapter four: case study 1–Airport X.**

This chapter presents the interview results of the first case study airport. This chapter provides the background information about Airport X and participants involved in the interviews. Results are presented into themes and provide insights into how the LMs' HRM role is defined and enacted at this site. Following this, HRM effectiveness is explored through the role evaluators' perception of the relationship between the LMs HRM role and HRM effectiveness.

### **1.9.5 Chapter five: case study 2–Airport Y.**

This chapter shows findings from the second airport. The chapter begins with the background information about Airport Y and participants involved in the interviews. The

results are grouped into themes and provide insights into how the HRM role of LMs is defined and enacted in this site. The chapter ends with the summary of the findings in the second case study.

#### **1.9.6 Chapter six: case study 3–Airport Z.**

This chapter presents the interview results at the third case study airport. The results are presented as six themes similar to the previous cases. This includes how the HRM role of LMs is defined by the role evaluators, how LMs enacted their HRM role, the challenges to perform the HRM role and the role of HRM policies and practices to assist LMs in understanding the role evaluators' expectations. This chapter also covers the perception of role evaluators about HRM effectiveness and their perceptions of how the LMs contributed to effectiveness. This chapter ends with the summary of the findings.

#### **1.9.7 Chapter seven: cross case analysis and discussion.**

In this chapter is a cross case analysis and the discussion of the findings. A cross case analysis has been conducted to compare results within the cases. This is done to identify similarities or differences in themes that are related to the role theory concepts. Four role theory concepts are covered: role expectations; role taking; role conflict; and role consensus. The interview results were studied to identify the causal link between the real understandings of the respondents with the role theory concepts. The link between the real situation and theoretical concepts is important so that explanations on how the LMs' HRM role is defined and enacted in the Malaysian environment can be made. Moreover, the discussion of the results is also presented in reference to the literature. This leads to the justification for using role theory to model the development of the HRM role of LMs in organisations, particularly in the Malaysian airport sector.

### **1.9.8 Chapter eight: conclusion.**

This chapter represents the main findings of the study and conclusions about the LMs HRM role. The theoretical and practical contributions of the study are outlined. In addition, the limitation and potential future research is also discussed.

### **1.10 Definitions and Terms**

- LMs

Those managers with immediate responsibility for their employees' work and performance, regardless of functional areas other than HRM.

- The intended HRM role of LMs

A set of behaviours expected from other members in the organisation which contribute to the accomplishment of organisational goals. This reflects the HRM role behaviours expected from members in the role set, who will assess the LMs' HRM role performance.

- The actual HRM role of LMs

A set of behaviours which are performed by the LM based on their perception of the message sent by the role sender. This reflects the understanding of LMs as the role holder to perform their HRM role.

- HRM effectiveness

The improvements in the people management function through the value creation and not only focus on operational tasks in line with the organisational strategic process.

- Airport

A case study organisation, involving three units: Fire and rescue services, Operation and Security.

- Company

The parent company that is responsible for management, operation and maintenance of the individual Malaysian airport.

### **1.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced the issue of LMs' involvement in HRM as the study rationale. It presented an overview of the research and organisation of the thesis. Drawing on the role theory concepts, this study will examine how the HRM role of LMs is defined and enacted in the Malaysian airport sector. In addition, this study will also investigate the impact of the LMs' HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness.

In the next chapter, a review of the related studies on LMs' HRM role is presented to identify the gaps in literature that this study will fill.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to review related studies about LMs' HRM role and highlight the issues in the definition and enactment of their role. From the review, the problem of defining the LMs' HRM role is addressed. This problem is then linked to the gap in knowledge of LMs' HRM role implementation. Later, the changing demands of the HR function are discussed as is the potential of achieving the HRM effectiveness through the LMs' HRM role. The HRM typology developed by Conner and Ulrich (1996) is explored as it has been used by many researchers to extend useful insights in redefining the HRM role. The concepts of role theory are then reviewed and tailored to the understanding of how "a role" is developed in the organisation. The chapter ends with a summary of issues covered.

### **2.1 Introduction**

A range of studies has shown an increased HRM role assigned to LMs as part of the strategic move for more effective people management in organisations (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Currie & Procter, 2001; Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Renwick, 2003; Townsend, et al., 2012). These studies will be reviewed and key findings drawn out in a discussion to identify the gap in the HRM literature in relation to LMs' involvement in HRM.

Cunningham and Hyman (1995) investigated the role of LMs in transforming HRM vision into reality. Using a questionnaire and interviews, they conducted an in depth study of 45 employers in manufacturing and services sector in the United Kingdom (UK) in regards to employee relations practice. They suggested several issues to be addressed to enhance organisational performance through the change process in managing HRM. These included the preparedness of LMs to implement the hard and soft approaches in managing HRM, the skills development of LMs to perform the HRM role and the behaviours of LMs and HR specialists regarding the LMs' HRM role.

The relationship between HR specialists and LMs was examined by Currie and Procter (2001). They conducted two case studies at Edwards Hospital Trust in the UK, and carried out a total of 20 interviews with ten LMs, eight executive managers and two clinical directors. While the study focused on the pay scheme, their research findings indicated LMs played a more important role in realising change than previously assumed. This was due to the opportunity LMs had to implement the strategy formulated by top management and through their role in disseminating information to employees. However, they highlighted that LMs' prominent role in managing change in organisation could only be achieved through interaction with other stakeholders especially those in the HR department. This means in realising the HR strategy, LMs were obliged to perform in line with the needs of other members in the organisation.

Larsen and Brewster (2003) reported that HRM is increasingly assigned to LMs. Their study comprised a survey of 22 European countries with 4,050 responses from LMs and HR specialists. They found LMs' HRM role varied between countries and was confused due to several factors. A factor highlighted was the level of decentralisation in many aspects of HRM. The way the organisation reacted to change influenced the allocation of HRM roles between HR specialists and LMs. This allocation depended on the impact of the changes on the structure of HR department in the organisation. The survey findings were limited to the identification of tasks between LMs and HR specialists for six HRM activities and they did not explain the exact role of LMs in detail, particularly expectations to perform each activity.

Although Larsen and Brewster (2003) reported increased interest in involving LMs in the HRM role, Renwick's (2003) study revealed LMs' involvement was problematic for organisations. His findings were based on 40 interviews with LMs on their experience in undertaking HRM role from three large organisations in the UK. He suggested the allocation of the HRM role between LMs and HR specialists required reassessment due to the issue of



employees trust in LMs' capabilities to manage HRM activities. Renwick noted the issue of employees trust was caused by the false assumption that LMs were responsible only for the "operational" HRM role while the "strategic" HRM role was the responsibility of HR specialists. More involvement of LMs was needed if organisations wanted to achieve its goals by involving LMs in HRM role.

There has been increasing discussion about the link between LMs role and organisational performance, especially in regards to unlocking the 'HRM black box'. Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) investigated LMs' HRM role in the HRM-performance link. They argued employees' satisfaction with the implementation of HR practices by LMs could positively impact employee attitudes and job behaviours. The findings were gathered from a survey from 12 UK companies. However, the cross-sectional design of the survey was unable to show the trend and causality of LMs contribution to organisational performance. Although the data came from a longitudinal study between 2000 and 2003, the data was unable to identify when and who contributed to good HRM implementation, and thus lead to organisational performance (Guest, 2011).

A study about HRM as a 'signal' and the role of LMs in conveying the strong signals from top management to employees for more positive performance outcomes was undertaken by Townsend et al. (2012). LMs were found to play an important role in delivering the right message to employees in line with organisational goals. Their findings were based on semi-structured interviews with ward staff at a medium-sized private Australian hospital. They concluded that organisations need to invest in developing LMs' capabilities because they play an important role in influencing employees' perceptions and contribute to achieving the organisational goals. To generalise their findings, they suggested more empirical studies be conducted in other contexts to get a clearer understanding of LMs' role rather than merely assuming they are only involved in the operational HRM tasks.

From this review, some weaknesses of previous studies have been identified which limit the understanding of the LMs' HRM role. In terms of the allocation of the HRM role between HR specialists and LMs, it is unclear who, in practice, is required to perform certain HRM activities to support the achievement of organisational goals. This is due to the tendency of studies to focus on one source of information. HR specialists can provide information on the intended HRM role from the perspective of the policy maker. Likewise, obtaining LMs' perceptions provide the understanding of an implementer. Comparing views from HR specialists and LMs is necessary as they are considered an "important elite" in understanding HRM in organisations (Maxwell & Farquharson, 2008). There is scarcity of research providing comparisons between the perceptions of the policy maker (those who evaluate LMs' HRM role) and implementer (LMs). Moreover, focusing only on HR specialists' views is biased as researchers agree on the complexity of the relationship between HR specialists and LMs (Larsen & Brewster, 2003). This suggests the need to gather perceptions from other key members of the organisation that influence the LMs' HRM role (Harris, et al., 2002).

Although previous studies provide valuable insights to the increased role of LMs in HRM, there is still a need for further empirical studies to gain in depth understanding of this role. It is necessary to distinguish between LMs and HR specialists' role and to maximise LM's management contribution to the organisation. However, studies (e.g. Currie & Procter, 2001; Larsen & Brewster, 2003) exploring the LMs' HRM role often focus on one HRM activity or several activities only (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). While this provides understanding about a particular HRM activity it does not lead to an understanding of all activities in practice. Each activity may require different involvement and attention of LMs and would have a significant impact on understanding the LMs' HRM role in the organisation.

Methodology influences whether detailed information about the LMs' HRM role is gained and some studies rely on quantitative data only (Budhwar, 2000). Quantitative data limits the ability of researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the specifics of the HRM activity distribution to LMs. Reliance on quantitative data fails to provide a holistic understanding of expectations of LMs' HRM role required by their role evaluators, which include HR specialists and the LM's supervisors. Expectations of LMs' HRM role could be explored qualitatively and would enable a detailed explanation of the underlying logic of the LMs' HRM role.

While LMs' contribution to achieving organisational performance is highlighted, researchers tend to focus their attention on financial outcomes instead of HRM effectiveness (Perry & Kulik, 2008). The effectiveness of the HRM function should be the main priority as current situations demand organisations deal with environmental uncertainty while attempting to add value through human resources (Ulrich, et al., 2012). This situation requires the exploration of the LMs' involvement in HRM as they are increasingly involved in implementing HR activities and have an important part in realising the strategy formulated by the top management. In addition, studies of the HRM-performance link mostly rely on 'tick-box' surveys which at best capture the information about whether or not HRM is based on pre-specified HR practices present in the organisation. This methodology contributes to the failure of prior research providing in depth information about employees' experiences linking the LMs HRM role and HRM effectiveness (Khilji & Wang, 2006).

Furthermore, a large proportion of the study of LMs' involvement in HRM is conducted in western countries. The gap in the HRM literature has been identified among important emerging countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand (Rees & Johari, 2010). This is an important gap to be filled as HRM in these countries may face different challenges from western countries (Varma & Budhwar, 2013). Differences between countries

are identified due to different contextual conditions that differentiate how the organisation is structured and the way employees are managed. If this gap can be filled, commentators believed that it will contribute to theoretical and practical improvement (Varma & Budhwar, 2013). In fact, authors, such as Larsen and Brewster (2003) and Townsend et al. (2012) recommend further empirical research be conducted in other contexts to enhance the earlier findings on LMs' HRM role and explore other contextual factors in order to clearly defined the line management contribution to the organisation.

The following section will review the understanding of LMs' involvement in HRM by exploring how their HRM role is defined in the organisation.

## **2.2 LMs' HRM Role Definition**

In discussing LMs' involvement in HRM, it has been assumed that LMs were involved in practice rather than lead policy issues (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2002). This assumption differentiated between HRM activities of LMs and HR specialists. In dealing with policy issues, HR specialists were reported to be involved in recruitment and selection, pay and benefits, employee rewards and employee development (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2002). As those who were responsible for implementation, LMs had a greater influence on activities such as employee relations, performance evaluation, quality initiatives, health and safety, and communications (Hall & Torrington, 1998).

Researchers have suggested two approaches to determining HRM activities of LMs (Brandl, Madsen, & Madsen, 2009). First, LMs involvement in HRM activities would be determined through their responsibility in the main HR functions including recruitment, pay, benefits, training and staff expansion and reduction. Second, LMs' HRM activities were measured through their involvement in more general managerial activities in relation to the interaction between managers and employees (Brandl, et al., 2009). This included five basic organisational operations: setting objectives, organising, motivating and communicating,

measurement and people development (Renwick, 2000). Other researchers identified eight general managerial activities involving LMs: staff wellbeing, staff development, supervision/coaching, motivating others, communication of values and attitudes, team building, delegation, handling conflicts and handling information (Brandl, et al., 2009). In the next section, studies about the involvement of LMs in the HRM activities are discussed in more detail.

### **2.2.1 LMs' HRM activities.**

LMs have been reported to be involved in many HRM activities (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Renwick, 2003). LMs involvement has been found in several areas including performance appraisal, recruitment and selection, training and development, managing grievance and discipline, pay and benefit and career development. In the UK, Budhwar (2000) identified six areas of HRM activities that increasingly involved LMs: pay, recruitment, training, industrial relations, health and safety, and workforce expansion/reduction (Budhwar, 2000). LMs were found to have a primary responsibility in these areas, indicated an increasing trend of devolving HRM activities to LMs. In Budhwar's (2000) study, there was evidence that LMs were being trained to perform the HRM activities suggesting the importance of LMs' role in the implementation of HR function.

Performance appraisal has been the most common HRM activity devolved to LMs (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995). LMs have played a major role in this activity as they were responsible for assessing the need of employees' training and development through employees' performance. Nevertheless, some researchers found limited involvement in the performance management system because LMs were reluctant to take responsibility (Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1999). Unwillingness to take responsibility and uneven devolution of responsibility to LMs, contributed to the ambiguity about their role (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1997).

Ambiguity was also seen in their uncertainty about the depth of their involvement or autonomy in undertaking performance appraisals. As a result, several organisations revealed that LMs did not perform well even though they believed they had performed well (Renwick, 2000).

Cunningham and Hyman (1995) argued that LMs were also involved in recruitment and selection. Even though decisions on recruitment and selection were often handled by the HR specialist, LMs were sometimes involved in the decision making as they knew the work group and employee needs for promotion. However, HR specialists still influenced the final decision making and LMs did not exert great influence over recruitment and selection activities.

Little research has considered the involvement of LMs in training and development activities (Renwick & MacNeil, 2002). These activities can be seen as an extension of the performance appraisals process where the LM identifies employees' training and development needs (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995). LMs' involvement in this HR activity can enable the creation of an environment that enhances employee performance and increases their satisfaction at work (Gibb, 2003).

Increasingly LMs have been shown to be involved in managing discipline but the HR specialist has authority to outweigh the LMs influence (IRS, 2001 as quoted in Renwick, 2003). Rollison, Hook, Foot and Handley's (1996) study found that LMs demographics (i.e. gender, age and tenure) did not significantly change the way they handled discipline issues, but gender was an issue in the management of grievances, in that female employees were handled more firmly than male employees. Moreover, Rollinson et al. (1996) noted that the style of managing grievance and discipline issues differed according to the issue at hand and 'the most serious issues were approached in the harshest way' (Rollison, et al., 1996, p. 50). However, employee tenure and gender had a significant effect on the way LMs handled

issues. Employees with longer periods of tenure were dealt with in a more conciliatory fashion as they were seen as being valuable to the organisation. The way LMs handled grievance and discipline issues was affected by the limited authority they had and therefore they were likely to refer certain issues to higher management (Rollison, et al., 1996).

Currie and Procter (2001) investigated the involvement of LMs in setting pay and benefits, and suggested their role varied depending on the situation. Their study was conducted at Edward Hospital Trust, a partly UK government owned institution and this impacted the boundaries within which decisions about pay and benefits could be determined. So, when the government invoked a cost-neutral policy in determining local pay for employees, LMs had little opportunity to influence pay. However, when the organisation moved towards developing a local pay framework that could solve a specific operational problem, LMs involvement was greater as they were able to initiate and influence the content of the framework. From this, Currie and Procter (2001) concluded that although the LMs role tended to vary, they played an important “link pin” role between operational and strategic level activity regardless of the situation facing the organisation.

Career development has been viewed as a responsibility LMs share with HR specialists (Renwick & MacNeil, 2002). Only with HR specialist support could LMs play a role in career development activities. This has found to be the case as many HR specialists viewed LMs as lacking skills to manage career development activities (Hall & Torrington, 1998). As a result, researchers have pointed out that HR specialists should also be responsible for poor HRM role implementation by LMs in career development as it reflected the failure of HR specialists to fulfil their role to support and advise the LM on related matters (Renwick & MacNeil, 2002).

In reviewing the role of LMs in various HRM activities, it can be seen that their involvement varies depending on the HRM issue and organisational context. While one HRM

activity may need LMs involvement in decision making, another may require LMs to implement what has been decided by the HR specialist. Organisational members' expectations of LMs change and this is a factor that contributes to variation in the LMs involvement in HRM activities. This variation leads to the problem in defining the exact HRM role of LMs as discussed in the next section.

### **2.2.2 Problems defining the LMs' HRM role.**

Despite evidence of greater LMs' involvement in many HRM activities, the overall picture of their HRM role remains blurred (Currie & Procter, 2001). As such, even though much of the responsibility for managing HRM activities at the operational level has been shifted to LMs, HR specialists still own some of these activities such as recruitment and selection (Hope-Hailey, et al., 1997). This happens because the intention to involve LMs in HRM activities is difficult to be realised in practice (Currie & Procter, 2001; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998).

While LMs have an important role in the implementation of HR activities, the clear understanding of the LMs' HRM role should bridge the gap between the intended and actual implementation of LMs' HRM role. This requires more in-depth investigation to explore LMs' involvement in HRM activities in order to explain their role in each activity. As such, there is a need for further exploration of what LMs *actually do* other than focusing only on what LMs *should do*. However, a gap in the HRM literature can be seen as most studies explore LMs' involvement in a particular HRM activity and focus only on the intended LMs' HRM role. Researchers, including Cunningham and Hyman (1995) and Larsen and Brewster (2003) focused their studies on one HRM practice, namely employee relations, while Currie and Procter (2001) only investigated pay schemes.

Commentators have suggested that the attitudes of HR specialists and LMs themselves have made it difficult to define the LMs' HRM role (Currie & Procter, 2001). In terms of the



former, HR specialists have been reluctant to give away HRM activities at the operational level because they have considered activities at operational and strategic levels should not be treated as substitutes but to complement each other. By giving away activities at the operational level, they believed a uniform HRM approach has been difficult to achieve (Hall & Torrington, 1998). Organisations also dealt with the LMs who refused to take this responsibility due to organisational constraints: institutional reinforcement, managerial short-termism and organisational restructuring (McGovern, et al., 1997). While LMs assumed the importance of their role should be translated through the organisation's policies, an institutional reinforcement fails to incorporate the LMs' responsibility in HRM activities into performance objectives or job descriptions. This failure affected LMs' understanding of their HRM role. As a result, LMs felt institutional recognition was insufficient to motivate their involvement in HRM activities. Managerial short-termism caused LMs' involvement in HRM activities to be seen as less valuable because their effort was not quantifiable over the short time. Lastly, organisational restructuring caused more workload to be given to LMs and thus they did not have enough time to perform all HRM activities. Highlighting the attitudes of both parties in regard to the involvement of LMs in HRM activities suggests the difficulties in defining the LMs' HRM role because their perceptions tend to differ.

While the relationship between HR specialists and LMs can be complex and often contradictory, researchers have highlighted the importance of getting perspectives from other parties who work closely with the LMs in order to define their boundaries in undertaking the HRM role (Harris, et al., 2002). In fact, Renwick (2003) indicated a "triad" approach be used to integrate the HRM activities into the LMs' HRM role. A triad approach requires the involvement of HR specialists, LMs and other employees to form a partnership and assist LMs to effectively deliver their HRM role. This is particularly true for the service sector where employees' input is crucial to achieve a competitive advantage through the value of the

LMS' HRM role in the organisation (Watson, Maxwell, & Farquharson, 2007). To date, most studies of the involvement of LMs in HRM have mainly focused on HR specialists' view with little attention has being on the view of other key stakeholders such as the LM's supervisor, senior operational managers and employees (Maxwell & Farquharson, 2008; Renwick & MacNeil, 2002).

Additionally, the dynamic nature of business environments makes it difficult to accurately define the HRM role of LMs because their roles vary depending on the situation (Wickham & Parker, 2007; Farndale, Ruiten, Kelliher, & Hope-Hailey, 2011). Societal and workplace changes impact on the allocation of work roles as well as the requirements and expectations of organisational members. For instance, organisations have to deal with employee diversity in regards to cultural and age differences and this impacts on HRM policies and practices as organisations need to be flexible and adaptable (Malek, Varma, & Budhwar, 2013). Advancements in technology also influences how works is done (Lynch, 2007) or structured so employees including LMs are often expected to perform multiple tasks at once.

Much discussion of LMs involvement has been taken in the broader context of the distribution of HRM activities and lack specifications of the responsibility for each activity (Valverde, Ryan, & Soler, 2006). The discussion includes the activities, their position, power relationship and influence, which have tended to explore what LMs actually do instead of what they should do. The design of studies also has implications for findings in HRM activities and LMs involvement has not been specified in detail.

### **2.2.3 Summary of LMs' HRM role definition.**

In summary, there is a problem in defining the HRM role of LMs, who are the subjects of this study. While the HRM role is increasingly assigned to LMs, the allocation of the role between LMs and HR specialists remain confused due to different understanding that

organisational members have about the LMs' HRM role. There is a need to differentiate between the sole and shared responsibilities of LMs (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2002). Changing expectations of organisational members contributes to the variation in the LMs' involvement in HRM and how the LMs' HRM role is defined. LMs need to understand what is valuable for those who are impacted by the HRM role in the organisation to guide their actions. However, little empirical evidence has been found to define the LMs' HRM role in regards to the perceptions of the LMs and other key related parties (Harris, et al., 2002).

While the rationale of exploring the LMs' HRM role definition is intended to capture the perspective of the policy maker, there is also a need to draw on LMs perceptions as the implementer in order to determine how both parties assess HRM effectiveness (Nehles, et al., 2006). A review of studies examining LMs experience in performing their HRM role is presented in the following section.

## **2.3 LMs' HRM Role Implementation**

Researchers have noted that if LMs do not understand their HRM role, then HRM issues may be difficult to manage (Allen, 1991 in Renwick, 2000). As those responsible for implementing the HRM role, LMs perceptions reflect their understanding of the expectations of the organisation for them to perform the task. There is scarcity of research on HRM implementation although some constraints around effective HRM implementation have been identified (Nehles, et al., 2006). These constraints are lack of desire, capacity, competencies, support and policy and procedures.

### **2.3.1 LM understandings of the HRM role.**

Studies taking into account LMs' views in undertaking their HRM role indicate different perceptions amongst them based on the context of their work environment. A study in small organisations revealed that LMs perceived their HRM responsibilities as part of their role as a manager (Hunter & Renwick, 2009). However, small organisations are less likely

than larger ones to have a HR department. In smaller firms, LMs are responsible for managing few employees. However, LMs may manage multidisciplinary teams in smaller firms. Therefore, LMs rated their HRM role to be more important than their operational tasks in small organisations (Hunter & Renwick, 2009).

LMs in larger organisations experienced difficulties coping with their HRM role as this increased their workload with no appropriate changes made to the resources, training or time for them to perform the new role (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Renwick, 2003). Consequently, LMs in large organisations indicated that low priority was given to their HRM role as they put more attention on their general functional task. Whittaker and Marchington (2003) found that LMs emphasised business needs and their HRM tasks took second place in their priorities.

The understanding of HRM roles also differed between LMs at different levels of management. For example, a study highlighted that the strategic level LMs reported a slightly greater involvement in HRM activities than the front-line LMs (Watson, et al., 2007). This finding was supported by Hales (2005) study, which found that although the HRM role of front-line LMs changed, they did not get involved in many aspects of HRM responsibilities compared to strategic level LMs. Instead, changes to front-line LMs' HRM role were around strengthening their supervisory tasks. Both studies suggested LMs involvement in HRM roles varied and this influenced how LMs enacted their role. Importantly, most LMs indicated a positive response to their involvement in the HRM activities regardless of their level of management (Watson, et al., 2007).

Despite the attention of researchers on investigating LMs' role implementation, only a few attempts have been made to explore LMs ability to undertake all roles expected by their role evaluators (Mantere, 2008). In fact, Renwick (2003) suggested that LMs' involvement in HRM required reassessment as it was viewed as a problematic approach for the organisation.

In the following section challenges encountered by LMs in performing their HRM role are discussed.

### **2.3.2 Challenges when performing the HRM role.**

Undertaking the HRM role requires LMs to perform multiple roles at once (Renwick, 2003). This includes their role in the general functional task as well as the HRM task. In addition, LMs also need to act as both supervisor and subordinate. The experience LMs have as an employee is likely to influence their behaviour as a supervisor. Importantly, this experience shapes their understanding when they undertake their HRM role (McConville, 2006). Since roles have inflexible structures and are difficult to combine, the diverse expectations of each role may cause conflict for LMs (Lynch, 2007). Studies have found LMs experienced difficulty managing their HRM work when there were other duties that needed to be completed (Renwick, 2003). Thus, unsurprisingly there was a gap between the intended HRM role perceived by the members in the organisation and the actual HRM role performed by the LMs (Nehles, et al., 2006).

A study by Nehles et al. (2006) on the implementation of HRM in four multinational business units used five factors - desire, capacity, competencies and ability, support, and policy and procedures - to explore the challenges front-line LM had in performing their HRM role.

- Desire reflected the willingness of LMs in undertaking the HRM role. Desire may be influenced by personal and institutionalised incentives. Personal incentives were related to LMs motivation to implement HRM practices while the key institutional incentive was the HRM system design that makes the LMs contribution to their HRM role to be parallel with LMs performance evaluation. Other institutional incentives relate to the organisational effort to include the HRM role in LMs job description or business policy.

- Capacity was often associated with the time spent on HRM activities. The assumption has been that the devolution of the HRM role to LMs did not reduced their responsibility for operational tasks. Instead, devolution increased their responsibility to the organisation because they needed to perform multiple tasks at one time: operational and HRM duties.
- The LMs' knowledge and skills about HRM activities can determine their competencies and abilities in undertaking the HRM role. Continual and systematic training was needed to develop LMs knowledge and skills about HRM. This was critical as competencies were measured through individual level of achievement which distinguished it from capability which applied at the collective or organisational level .
- Sufficient support should be in place to ensure the successful implementation of the HRM role by LMs. As LMs lacked of HRM knowledge and skills, support from HR specialists was needed to give advice and coach LMs to perform their HRM role. However, it was observed that LMs receive insufficient support especially from HR specialists whose role was to advise LMs in undertaking the HRM role.
- HRM policy and procedures were important for LMs as guidelines to perform their HRM role and to provide advice to LMs on how they should perform their HRM role. In addition, a clear HRM policy and procedures was also needed to avoid individual judgement by LMs which could affect the consistency of them implementing HRM role. More importantly, it was suggested that unclear HRM policy and procedure caused LMs to be unclear about their HRM role.

In their study, Nehles et al. (2006) identified four factors that hindered effective implementation of the HRM role by LMs. The only exception to effective LMs' HRM implementation was desire, as LMs in the study reported accepting responsibility to perform their HRM role. This finding contradicts those of Harris et al. (2002) and Hope-Hailey et al.

(1997), who reported a reluctance of LMs to accept their HRM responsibility as one of the challenges to devolve HRM role to LMs. Nehles et al. (2006) reported that a key factor that contributed to the exception of desire as a challenge was the LMs' assumption that they were closer to employees rather than others in the organisation which permitted them to better perform the HRM role.

In similar vein, Renwick (2003) had earlier suggested the need for a 'triad' approach that involved the LMs, HR specialists and employees to assist LMs engage in their HRM role. However, learning from other people suggested that it had to be a two-way process in which both parties needed to react to each other and respond to any issue arisen. As this kind of support was likely to happen in small organisations, LMs were found to be more satisfied in accepting their HRM role because they had been closely guided by their senior managers and peers on decisions and actions on HRM issues. Moreover, the network built among organisational members determined who they can trust for assistance in undertaking their HRM role. In contrast, a lack of support from key members in the organisation was a problem for LMs in larger organisations (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995). A study revealed frustration among LMs as they did not have enough assistance from HR specialists when needed (Renwick, 2003). Another study by Whittaker and Marchington (2003) reported inconsistent support from HR specialists for LMs and this influenced the way LMs enacted their HRM role (Watson, et al., 2007). In this case, strategic LMs indicated higher satisfaction with their relationship with HR specialists than the front-line LM.

Challenges faced by LMs in performing their HRM role were also caused by their relationships with employees (Renwick, 2003). When LMs worked closely with employees and understood local conditions, this knowledge influenced LMs behaviours in conveying HRM policies into practice (Townsend, et al., 2012). Whether or not LMs thought that certain HRM policies suited local conditions and the needs of their employees, they still needed to

implement those policies. This is because their position in the organisation demanded them to undertake and enact the HRM role accordingly as required by the organisation (Floyd & Lane, 2000). As a result, a study reported that employees would question LMs capabilities to perform the HRM role particularly when LMs implemented the practices contradicting employee needs (Renwick, 2003).

Researchers have investigated factors influencing individual performance to understand the challenges of performing the LMs' HRM role and developed determinants of work performance in the form of the AMO (ability-motivation-opportunity to perform) framework (Boxall & Purcell, 2011). The advantage of this framework is its capacity to explain the gap between the intended and actual practices, particularly by LMs in performing their HR roles (Harney & Jordan, 2008).

- Ability influences employee behaviour and task performance (McShane & Travaglione, 2007). It encompasses the necessary knowledge, skills and aptitudes of the employee to perform their job (Boxall & Purcell, 2011).
- Skilled employees do not perform well if they are unmotivated (Delaney & Huselid, 1996). The form and structure of an organisation's HRM system will impact on employee's motivation in several ways. First, organisations may implement an approach of positive reinforcement to guide employee behaviour towards specific organisational goals. This can be done through merit pay or incentive compensation systems that provide rewards to employees when they successfully achieve desired goals. Organisations may however adopt negative reinforcement approach such that grievance procedures are used to avoid unnecessary behaviours. By doing this, employees are motivated to work harder because they realise the consequences of their work behaviour.



- Some commentators believe that the delegation of work to employees offers them the opportunity to perform and is useful for improving employee capacity (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982). Given that devolving HRM activities to the LM by itself reflects a desire to provide LMs with the opportunity to perform, LMs need a suitable work structure and environment to maximise their contribution to the organisation (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Delaney & Huselid, 1996)

While the AMO is widely accepted as a framework for understanding individual performance through HRM, there is no clear justification on which HRM practices should be considered to achieve the organisational outcomes (Guest, Paauwe, & Wright, 2012). This could explain the gap of LMs' HRM role implementation which is often reported in studies (Nehles, et al., 2006).

### **2.3.3 Summary of LMs' HRM role implementation.**

In summary, it is necessary to explore the LMs' HRM role to ensure that the actual implementation of LMs HRM role conforms to the intended HRM role formulated by policy makers. If there is conformance, then the effectiveness of HRM can have a positive impact on the organisation. Additionally, exploration of the implementation of HRM practices may assist managers understand what improves employees' satisfaction of HRM (Nehles, et al., 2006). The assumption has been that the more HRM practices are implemented as intended, the higher HRM satisfaction will be (Khilji & Wang, 2006).

Most employees, including LMs, have different understandings of their work role requirements to their employers' understanding (Rousseau, 1989). However, members of the organisation often assume that LMs hold a similar understanding of their HRM role requirements (Lynch, 2007). As a result, the actual implementation of the LMs' HRM role is often reported to be misaligned with the intended HRM role perceived by the role evaluators (Nehles, et al., 2006). This has important implications for LMs HRM role performance

because work role requirements are the main source from which effective HRM roles are assessed. Importantly, when there are differences in perceptions of both parties and LMs fail to meet these expectations, the requirements perceived by LMs are often called into question and viewed as inadequate (Dierdorff & Morgan, 2007). Unless a consensus is arrived at LMs performance has the potential to be rejected even though they have acted in a way appropriate to their local conditions. Researchers have highlighted the need for the HRM role to be clearly communicated to assist those who are responsible for the role to prepare themselves with appropriate skills, knowledge and abilities and contribute towards achieving organisational goals (Conner & Ulrich, 1996).

Researchers have argued that LM responsibilities have been overstated although their actual enactment shows that LMs roles are dominated by HR matters (Poole & Jenkins, 1997). With limited exploration of the implementation of HRM practices by LMs and little effort to explore the actual HRM role rather than the intended role perceived by key members of the organisation, this problem remains unsolved. However, as LMs implementation of HRM influences HRM effectiveness, there is a need to explore how consensus can be achieved between the policy maker and the implementer (Nehles, et al., 2006). The relationship between the LMs' HRM role and HRM effectiveness will be discussed in the next section.

## **2.4 LMs' HRM Roles and HRM Effectiveness**

Devolving HRM activities to the LMs marks a paradigm shift from traditional personnel management to modern HRM (Budhwar, 2000). While there is a clear need to explore the relationship between the devolution of HRM activities to the LMs and HRM effectiveness, studies on the topic are limited (Perry & Kulik, 2008).

### **2.4.1 The importance of HRM effectiveness.**

Researchers believe that HRM effectiveness now matters more than ever as the importance of the human resource function to deliver value in achieving organisational goals has been recognised especially in dealing with the constant pressure for change from the organisational environment (Ulrich, et al., 2012). In fact, early assumptions made to describe the contribution of HRM states that the introduction of HRM can lead to improvements in organisational effectiveness (Truss, 2001). This can be done through two main elements: the quality of HRM practices and the implementation of HRM practices by HR people (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997; Kane, et al., 1999; Wright, et al., 2001). As a result, there is a need to understand the contribution of those who involved in delivering HR services in the organisation, especially HR specialists and LMs.

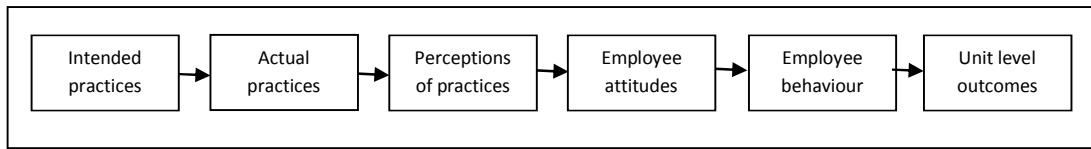
In looking at prior studies on HRM effectiveness, it is clear that criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the HRM function differed (Tsui, 1987). There was a reliance on the perspectives of top management or HR specialists (Khilji & Wang, 2006). The views of LMs and employees were not often gathered. Findings were drawn from one party, the policy maker (top management and HR specialists) but not the other, the implementer (LMs) and therefore an incomplete picture has been gained. Commentators have suggested that the HRM role should be evaluated by its capability to act as a reference for formulating and implementing business strategies (Teo & Rodwell, 2007) and this is consistent with the contribution of the HRM role shifting from HR activities to the outcomes (Ulrich, et al., 2008). Outcomes of the HRM role can to explain the LMs contribution as “link pins” bringing together operational and strategic plans (Currie & Procter, 2001).

Three factors have been suggested for evaluating HRM effectiveness: HR service; roles; and contributions (Wright, et al., 2001). HR service encompasses the services delivered to convey the HR policies into practices. HR roles can be explained through Ulrich's (1997)

typology that suggests four HR function: business partner, change agent; administrative expert; and employee champion. HR contribution is viewed in terms of stakeholders' perception about HRM function towards organisational achievements. Of the three factors, HR service has been the important element in assessing the value of HR function. HR service specifically relates to the LMs' HRM role as LMs are assumed to be responsible in the implementation of HR policies and practices.

#### **2.4.2 LM contributions to HRM effectiveness.**

In discussing the contribution of the LMs' HRM role, Purcell and Hutchinson's (2007) study moved researchers' attention to the role of LMs in the HRM-performance relationship. The LMs' role is highlighted in the HRM-performance relationship as they are assumed to be closest to employees and thus able to influence employees' perceptions about their work and performance. Further, employees talk to their LM about their work rather than other people in the organisation, indicating the importance of the LMs' role to guiding employees' performance in line with organisational goals. The role of LMs in the HRM-performance link, as illustrated in Figure 2, suggests that the effectiveness of HRM function through the LMs' HRM role can be evaluated through the perceptions of employees about HR practice delivered by LMs. If employees are satisfied with the implementation of HR practices by LMs, there will be a positive impact on their attitudes and job behaviours. The capability of shaping employee views is important in the HRM-performance link because the effectiveness of the HRM function can potentially influence the unit level outcomes which lead to the realisation of HR strategy to achieve organisational goals (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013).



*Figure 2.* The people management–performance causal chain.

Source: Purcell and Hutchinson (2007, p. 7)

Researchers have found that the LMs role has an impact on employee engagement to their work (Rees, Alfes, & Gatenby, 2013). This can be done through LMs' role as an intermediary to voice employees' opinions and suggestions to management. Employees who felt supported by their LM tended to express positive behaviour which could influence their levels of engagement. Employee engagement can lead to mutual benefits between employees and organisations, which are reflected in employees' willingness to support the organisation to achieve the desirable outcomes. In their study, Rees et. al. (2013) reported higher employee engagement was found in the organisation that has a strong employee-LM relationship. Thus, the importance of LMs' HRM role was explained as LMs is increasingly being responsible for the implementation of HRM practices in organisations.

In addition, another study indicates that positive performance implications can only be achieved if HRM decision making is made by HR specialists in discussion with LMs (Dany, Guedri, & Hatt, 2008). This suggests that the impact of the HRM role of LMs cannot be denied, although they were only assumed to be involved in the HRM implementation (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2002). Dany et al. (2008) suggested disagreement between LMs and HR specialists could have a negative impact on the organisation. However, they agreed that further exploration was needed to examine the relationship between the involvement of LMs and HRM by understanding the actual processes to develop the LMs' HRM role.

Perry and Kulik (2008) suggested more exploration was needed of the actual processes of developing the LMs' HRM role in explaining LMs' contribution to HRM effectiveness.

They found the impact of the LMs' HRM role could only be measured if there was appropriate support and training in place to assist LMs to perform their role. More interestingly, they argued that the impact of the LMs' involvement was greater in organisations that had not devolved the HRM role to LMs (non-devolved) compared to organisations that had adopted the devolution strategy (devolved). LMs in non-devolved organisations received sufficient support from HR specialists and were involved in HRM tasks at the operational level, although they were not be held responsible for the HR roles. Perry and Kulik's (2008) study relied on HR managers and directors' views, and they suggested further studies consider views of multiple constituencies especially LMs to reduce measurement error and bias (Perry & Kulik, 2008).

#### **2.4.3 Summary of LMs' HRM role and HRM effectiveness.**

In summary, interesting findings on the relationship between the LMs' HRM role and HRM effectiveness have been reported. The positive relationship between LMs and employees has been agreed by researchers to have an impact on employee performance due to the ability of LMs to influence employee perceptions of HRM practices. This suggests that LMs could influence the HRM effectiveness in organisations through their implementation of HRM. Therefore, the impact of the LMs' HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness will be investigated in this study. The understanding of the LMs' HRM role will be explained through Ulrich's typology of the HRM roles, which is discussed in the next section.

### **2.5 Ulrich's Typology of HR function**

Ulrich, Brockbank, Yeung and Lake's (1995) typology is the most cited framework in explaining how the HR function adds value to the business strategy (Yusoff, Abdullah, & Ramayah, 2010). Ulrich points out that the value of the HR function should be judged by its contributions instead of its activities. Ulrich's typology suggests four key roles for HR people to fulfil: strategic partner, change agent, employee champion and administrative expert.

Initially, Conner and Ulrich (1996) suggested three HR roles namely the administrative expert, champion role and change agent/strategic partner role but the change agent and strategic partner were found to be independent because in order to perform strategically, the HR people needed to be involved in the change process. Each role is discussed below.

### **2.5.1 Administrative expert.**

Conner and Ulrich (1996) found that the administrative expert role was the HR roles rated highest by HR executives. As they investigated multiple roles played by the HR people and the development of HR profession, their results suggest that the rating for administrative expert role was influenced by the fact that the tasks associated with this role were easy to manage because the processes involved were routine in nature. The administrative expert role involved day-to-day tasks performed repetitively and rarely changing as these were operational tasks (Yusoff, 2012). Implementing operational HR tasks required HR people to focus on execution rather than strategic relationship or new knowledge creation (Ulrich, et al., 2008). The purpose of operational HR tasks was to ensure the efficiency of the process of HRM activities such as the management of staff, training, performance, rewards and promotion. However, Ulrich et al. (2008) also suggested that performing administrative HR tasks could be a platform for developing skills for more important HR roles including strategic integration and new knowledge creation (Ulrich, et al., 2008). Further, in their study about the evolution of HR function in twenty first century, Ulrich et al. (2008) noted that advanced technology had changed the focus of the administrative HR role and the way HR work was done. Technology advancement enabled employees to manage their own records anytime they wished without relying on the HR people to do it for them. Researchers believed that this change offered several benefits because it avoided duplication, reduced operational costs and increased consistency in implementation due to uniformity in HR practices required by the technology (Ulrich, et al., 2008). Consequently, these benefits resulted in the increased

expectations of managers to perform the administrative expert role. With this change, managers were expected to make better decisions due to the availability of information about employees and access to information anytime.

It is questionable whether the changing focus in the administrative expert role was defined clearly by key organisational members and delivered to HR people responsible for performing this function. In fact, researchers argue there have been problems in dealing with changes in the organisation in relation to HRM (Holbeche, 2009). This is particularly true for LMs as the administrative expert role has been viewed as encapsulating operationally oriented tasks which are assumed to be their responsibility. The impact of the changing focus of administrative expert may influence the expectations of key organisational members of the LMs' HRM role. These expectations are important in defining the LMs' HRM role and will be explored in this study.

### **2.5.2 Employee champion.**

The employee champion role was another highly rated HR role by HR practitioners in Conner and Ulrich's (1996) study. The tasks involved in performing employee champion role were considered manageable by HR people including LMs (Conner & Ulrich, 1996). The employee champion role engaged in operationally focused tasks (Yusoff, 2012). However, this role was concerned more with people than the process of HRM activities. Researchers suggested that this role involved spending time with employee to understand their needs and problems that affect their work performance. The main purpose of enacting this role was to practice a "fair hearing" for all employees (Yusoff, 2012, p. 146). Other researchers suggested that LMs were also responsible for promoting new ideas introduced by the organisation through the employee champion role (Floyd & Lane, 2000). It was believed that through this involvement, managers should be able to impact the company's future by influencing employee perceptions of the company individually as well as collectively.



More importantly, researcher noted performing the employee champion role necessitated a partnership between LMs and HR specialists. A partnership was needed because each group offered different capabilities which were important to fulfilling the employee champion role. In explaining these capabilities, Ulrich (1997) noted the importance of LMs participation lay in their ability to bring authority, power and sponsorship to the employee. HR specialists were the ones who owned technical expertise and a domain of ultimate credibility which was necessary for decision making. Unfortunately, the complexity of the relationship between LMs and HR specialists was more likely to influence the support given to LMs in performing the employee champion role. This will be explored in this study to provide the understanding on how LMs enact their HRM role.

### **2.5.3 Change agent/strategic partner.**

The change agent role was the most varied HR role in Conner and Ulrich's (1996) study. Variety reflected differences in the implementation of this role between organisations and over time. Results of the Conner and Ulrich's (1996) study also suggested that those responsible for this task needed to be flexible and be able to adapt to environmental changes. As the change agent role had the greatest variability, it meant that this role was changing compared to the other two roles of administrative expert and employee champion. Other researchers have also reported new configurations of HR roles related to the change agent role that required a "dramatic movement" of those who managed the HR function so that it would be recognised by other members in the organisation (Sheppeck & Militello, 2000, p. 14).

The broader literature on the devolution of HRM to LMs also suggested the change agent role was 'the interventionist HRM role' which was increasingly devolved to LMs (Caldwell, 2003; Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Hope-Hailey, Farndale, & Truss, 2005). This marked the change in the HRM task distribution where HR specialists gradually reduced their focus on managing changes in the organisation and increasingly relied on LMs to undertake

this role. However, the inability of LMs to perform this role was identified as a contributor affecting the effectiveness of HRM implementation (Nehles, et al., 2006).

Researchers noted the change agent role was strategically oriented and this focus differed from the administrative expert and employee champion role (Yusoff, 2012). To perform this role, ability was needed to deal with changes in the organisation by ensuring the implementation of efficient and flexible HRM processes. Other requirements to perform this role were identified as the ability to manage resistance to change from employees and positively influence members in the organisation. Importantly, the enactment of this role was more likely to be measured by its impact on the entire organisation instead of in a particular unit or department. Based on its contribution to assisting the company deal with changes in the business environment, it was suggested the change agent role has a greater contribution to the company than the other roles (Conner & Ulrich, 1996).

More importantly, in their study, Conner and Ulrich (1996) found the change agent role and strategic partner role were not separate roles because implementing the strategic partner role required HR people to capably manage organisational change. Researchers have shown the constant changes in business environments have caused changing demands to HR roles where managing change is a priority (Ulrich, et al., 2012). This will be explored in this study to see how the changing demand of HR roles influences the LMs' HRM role definition and enactment.

#### **2.5.4 Increased expectations of the HR function.**

The subsequent work of Ulrich and his colleagues on HRM roles has suggested the competitive pressures have changed the demands and priorities of the HR function. HR people including LMs and HR specialists need to become HR “players” instead of “partners” (Ulrich & Beatty, 2001). Further, Ulrich and his colleagues also found the contribution of HR roles changed from activities to outcomes (Ulrich, et al., 2008). To become the HR player and

add value to the company, researchers have suggested six roles to be fulfilled by HR people including LMs (Ulrich & Beatty, 2001).

- Coach: Reflects the need for HR people to help employee to improve. This requires them to identify the requirement to achieve certain goals and guide employees towards that. While the requirement for every achievement may differ, the flexibility is needed to stimulate the right behaviour among employee to support the goals.
- Architect: Helps to identify ideas and gear the actions towards organisational success. This requires them to organise the work flow in line with the ideas set by the leader. They communicate available choices and help the organisation to choose the right option that can increase the organisational effectiveness.
- Builder: After the best option has been articulated, HR people help to transform the idea into action. This is related to designing and enacting HR practices that can shape the right attitudes among employees through information, behaviour and reinforcement.
- Facilitator: Considering the requirement for organisations to deal with changes, HR people need to have a strategic change leadership.
- Leader: This necessitates HR people be the best example reflecting their HR function. Seven elements to be considered in their actions include business realities, HR vision, deliverables, HR investments, HR governance, HR measures and actions, and HR professionals. Being an effective leader requires HR people to emphasise attributes and results. Attributes mean they have to ensure work has been done in the right way. Results reflect the outcome of their HR function.
- Conscience: This reflects the role of ensuring that actions taken by the organisation are based on moral and ethical rules. HR people need to act as an internal

referee to examine HR practices undertaken to manage the work related issues in the organisation and ensure that those practices have been implemented in the right way.

Performing the above roles required HR people including LMs to have multiple skills and knowledge. Further, the above roles suggest that LMs involvement in HR function is crucial because their contribution would influence the achievement of organisational goals. This is particularly true in the changing organisational environment with the need to integrate the HR strategy into the business strategy.

Ulrich's most recent work has identified new competencies for HR practitioners to deliver value to the organisation (Ulrich, et al., 2012) (see Table 1). The identification of these competencies is made by considering constant changes in the organisational environment over time. These competencies are useful for organisations to improve the contribution of HR practitioners and HR department to achieve organisational goals. By demonstrating these competencies, HR people could affect HRM effectiveness and contribute to business performance (Ulrich, et al., 2012). Importantly, these competencies reflect the new work role requirements need to be performed by HR people in the modern organisational environment.

Table 1

Activities for new HR competencies

HR competency	Activities
Strategic positioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpreting global business context</li> <li>• Decoding customer expectations</li> <li>• Co-crafting a strategic agenda</li> </ul>
Credible activist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earning trust through results</li> <li>• Influencing and relating to others</li> <li>• Improving through self-awareness</li> <li>• Shaping the HR profession</li> </ul>
Capability builder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalizing organisational capability</li> <li>• Aligning strategy, culture, practices and behaviour</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a meaningful work environment</li> </ul>
Change champion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiating change</li> <li>• Sustaining change</li> </ul>
HR innovator and integrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimising human capital through workforce planning and analytics</li> <li>• Developing talent</li> <li>• Shaping organisation and communication practices</li> <li>• Driving performance</li> <li>• Building leadership brand</li> </ul>
Technology proponent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving utility of HR operations</li> <li>• Connecting people through technology</li> <li>• Leveraging social media tools</li> </ul>

Source: Ulrich, et al., (2012, p. 221)

Identifying the new HR competencies suggests that the HRM roles of LMs change and depend on the requirement to achieving the organisational goals. In fulfilling their HRM role, LMs need to equip themselves with the right competencies to maximise their contribution to the organisation.

#### **2.5.5 Summary of Ulrich's HR function typology.**

In summary, although the HR function has become more strategic, other roles (change agent, employee champion and administrative expert) cannot be neglected, especially those linking operational and strategic activities (Currie & Procter, 2001). These roles included in Ulrich typology would best describe LMs' HRM role at the operational level and need to be explored because the increased expectations of the HR function reflects the changing demands of LMs HRM role in line with the organisational goals. LMs need to have competencies enabling them to perform their role accordingly. Further exploration of the LMs' HRM role development is necessary as the role changes and is difficult to fix (Larsen & Brewster, 2003). While changes in the organisational environment influence the expectations of organisational members on the LMs' HRM role (Lynch, 2007), this requires understanding

the process of defining and redefining the role which can be explored through the role theory. Therefore, the underlying assumptions of role theory are reviewed in the next section.

## **2.6 Role Theory**

Role theory is useful for understanding the causes and outcomes of employee behaviour, specifically in relation to the role they play (Lopopolo, 2002). Role theory is applicable for understanding the development of a role in the organisation because it covers the structure of developing the role and its association with employment relationship in the organisation. In role theory, a role is developed through the expectations of the organisational members on the requirement to perform the role. It also contributes to providing an understanding of work roles' allocation in the organisation (Biddle, 1986; Broderick, 1999; Lopopolo, 2002). This is achieved through the assumption that each role is designed for its own purposes in achieving the organisational goals.

Although role theory is not isolated from criticisms in its application, researchers believe that the essence of the role theory is useful to minimise human problems (Biddle, 1986). This can be achieved as role theory considers the impact of “a role” to the role holder as an individual or a representative of the social group such as an organisational member. Human problems can be solved as role theory works to explore the interactions between the role holder and other organisational members who evaluate the role to ensure that the role is enacted in line with the organisational goals.

In understanding the early development of role theory, most researchers referred to the work of Katz and Kahn (1966; 1978), as they provide the history and concepts applied in the role theory (Wickham & Parker, 2007). Some key elements of role theory are used in understanding the development of a role and these will be elaborated below.

### **2.6.1 Role expectations.**

Early developments of role theory suggested that expectations were crucial to the performance of a particular role. As Katz and Kahn (1978) noted, the allocation of work roles reflected the required behaviour expected by the organisation. The role behaviours shown by employees should mirror the expectations of other organisational members who evaluated the particular role. Two important points are needed here (Wickham & Parker, 2007). First, an employee needed to accept the role as part of organisational culture and norms. Second, the expectation of the role needs to be well delivered and clearly understood by employees to ensure that it was effectively performed by employees. Role theory recognised the role of HRM policies and practices as a medium to deliver the message of expectations from role evaluators to role holder. The assumption has been that employees would accept the role and perform as required if the role was formally institutionalised and clearly translated through the organisational policies and practices.

Biddle (1986) used three terms namely role, social position and expectation to explain the enactment of roles played by individual which influenced what was required from members in the social system (Biddle, 1986). The roles enacted by employee were planned, based on task and reflect the organisational structure which determined the importance of each role to the achievement of the organisational goals. This concept has been criticised as the change of organisational environments reflected the difficulty of each role to be pre-planned and rely on tasks yet to be flexible and depend on the need and demand of the current situations. By knowing the importance of their role in the organisational structure, the role holder was assumed to perform the behaviour associated with their position. Criticisms on the concept of social position were based on the assumption that every role with similar social position should have the same and typical behaviours although each role differed in terms of its function. Thus, the assumption of social position contradicted the assumption of the role

applied in the role theory. In terms of expectation, Biddle (1986) suggested that experience was an important element that generated the understanding about the requirements to perform a role and the role holder was aware of the expectations of the role they held. The assumption of human awareness however was too simplistic to reflect the change of expectation over time. The criticisms of the three terms suggest the main focus to improve the role theory application should lay on these basic concepts, however reviews show there have been few attempts to focus on these (Biddle, 1986). This may be due to more concentration with practical concerns which related to certain role theory concepts including role taking, role conflict and role consensus.

Research by Truss et al. (2002) employed role theory to understand the expectations of the changing roles of the HR function in two organisations. Identified were several factors that influenced role expectations amongst role set members during the evolution of the HR function. These included factors in organisational environments which consisted of sector/industry, organisational culture, shared meaning of strategic HRM, organisational size, workforce characteristics, degree of centralisation, diversity, recent experiences of corporate shocks and organisational structure (Truss, et al., 2002). It was reported that in public sector organisations there were limitations on the degree of discretion expected from HR people because of a centralised structure and goals. In terms of organisational size, there was difficulty in performing a more strategic role in the larger and complex organisation. The expectation of the role set members was also largely influenced by the organisational culture and the values shared by members in the organisation. In their study, Truss et al. (2002) found that senior managers expected tasks to be performed tactically rather than strategically. A change experienced by an organisation was another factor that essentially influenced the role expectations. As changes happened in the organisational environment, the HR function was expected to be flexible, react to current needs and reduce uncertainty for employees so they



could effectively deal with change. More importantly, all factors noted above were identified to affect what was the nature of the HRM function and how much resource to be allocated for the operation of the function (Truss, et al., 2002).

Other researchers have discussed the role expectations for managers at different levels of the organisation namely the organisational centre and periphery. Regner (2003) investigated strategy creation in four multinational corporations and found significant differences between organisational centre and its peripheries in their expectations about managerial activities. Managers in the organisational peripheries were expected by key managers (who were involved in the strategy creation process) to be involved in the inductive strategy while deductive strategy was implemented by managers in the organisational centre. Regner (2003) referred to the inductive strategy as being externally oriented strategy activities of an explorative character directed at strategy creation and this differed from the deductive strategy which was more industry and exploitation focused actions aligned with the existing strategy (Regner, 2003, p. 58). Based on the finding, Regner (2003) suggested that managers in the periphery were expected to be more flexible and explore activities that appropriate to their situations while managers in the organisational centre were required to perform tasks that were routine in nature. This was because the situations in the centre and periphery differed. The organisational centre had a stable environment compared to the complex situation at the organisational peripheries. This finding paralleled another study (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2004) where negotiations amongst middle managers impacted on managing activities in the absence of top management who were focused on strategic activities. Despite the significant impact of role expectations in determining the role behaviour of the role holder, researchers suggested there was a lack of empirical research that examined the influence of differences in work role requirements and organisational context on how the role expectations were delivered to achieve the role consensus (Dierdorff & Morgan, 2007).

### **2.6.2 Role taking.**

Apart from role expectations, inherent in the role theory are four other concepts to explain employee behaviour: role taking, role consensus, role compliance and role conflict (Parker & Wickham, 2005). First, role taking deals with the need for employees to take assigned role when the individual agrees to work in an organisation (Biddle, 1986). In the organisational system, individual employment position ties them with the responsibilities to perform the role that has been allocated by the employer (Jackson & Schuler, 1992).

Three factors are associated with understanding how employees accept their role, namely organisational, personal and interpersonal factors (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Organisational factors consist of the organisational structure, policies used in the organisation and incentives in terms of rewards or penalties (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Researchers suggest organisational factors can influence employee role enactment through their job effectiveness and satisfaction (Thorntwaite, 2004). It was believed that employees who interacted consistently with their colleague were more likely to have less problems with their role enactment because they had the opportunity to share their perspectives and listen to others and this generated understanding of their role (Wickham & Parker, 2007). Personal factors included individual employee characteristics that influenced how they behaved towards their role such as their individual values (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Personality was another personal factor differentiating employee behaviour towards the role taking (Shivers-Blackwell, 2004). In explaining this, role theory suggests each individual may interpret the organisational expectations of their role differently based on their own personality. Shivers-Blackwell's (2004) proposed a model in exploring the relationship between various personality characteristics and leader behaviour. This model suggested certain personalities were more flexible and sensitive to organisational context. Instead, others may react consistently no matter of changes happen in the context (Shivers-Blackwell, 2004, p. 46). The purpose of this

was to explain why managers in the same context reacted differently to organisational expectations. However, this proposition was not supported by empirical evidence.

Interpersonal factors were related to the relationship between employee and other members in the role set which held different expectations of the role played by the employee (Katz & Kahn, 1978). An example of interpersonal factors included the level of support received from other employees in the role.

Researchers suggested that the organisational factors were less relevant in the modern organisation because employees were more likely to be required to multi-task as a changing demand of the organisational environment (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Thornthwaite, 2004). This came from the assumption that every employee realised when they held an employment position, they were prepared to perform any tasks assigned by the organisation. This led to some criticism of the classical role theory because the process of communicating the role expectations were actually more complex in the modern organisational context due to the increased role behaviours required to perform each role and the variability of role expectations amongst members in the organisation (Jackson & Sullivan, 1990; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Therefore, researchers suggested other factors to be considered in relation to role taking to reflect the actual situations happen in the modern organisations such as different requirements to perform “a role” which differentiate between norms, beliefs and preferences (Biddle, 1986; George, 1993).

Mixed results were reported among studies on LMs’ HRM role taking. Earlier studies such as those by Cunningham and Hyman (1995), Torrington and Hall (1996) and Hope-Hailey et al. (1997) found that LMs were reluctant to accept their HRM role. The reasons for LMs’ reluctance were their incapability to make decisions on HRM issues and their perception that HRM tasks were new responsibilities being pushed on them. In contrast to these studies, Maxwell and Watson’s (2006) showed LMs willingness to accept HRM roles.

This was captured through LMs strong sense of commitment to perform their HRM role as part of their responsibility as a LM. The understanding of HRM role taking could influence LMs behaviour in the implementation of the role.

### **2.6.3 Role compliance and role conflict.**

Role compliance suggests that in each role, a set of behaviours are expected to be performed by the role holder and generally described through the job description. Jackson and Schuler (1992) argued role compliance was influenced by HR policies and the performance objectives set for each position in the organisation. Thus, if the employee's position required them to perform multiple roles at the same time, then these employees may have to deal with different work requirement for each role. In fact, performing multiple roles was common in the modern organisation because organisations wanted to maximise the contribution of individual employee to achieve organisational goals (Lynch, 2007). However, when the expectations of one role conflict with the expectations of another role, then the employees may experience role conflict (Wickham & Parker, 2007).

A review by Parker and Wickham (2005) found that factors that contributed to role conflict were perceived differently by researchers. These factors include participation in decision making, communication networks, internal control mechanisms, personality types, individual needs and individual approaches to conflict (Parker & Wickham, 2005, p. 4 & 5). The more employees were involved in the decision making process, their ability to deal with conflict was better because they had opportunity to channel any dissatisfaction or problem in performing their role. Employees who had a good relationship with other organisational members especially those who influenced their role development tended to have more opportunity to discuss the expectations of their role and get perspectives on the requirements to perform their role. Other factors were related to personal factors that influenced individual perceptions on what was happening around them. In regards to the situation at the workplace,

one author stated that three conditions contributed to the role conflict at the workplace (Noor, 2004). First, insufficient times to perform all roles where one role took time needed to perform other roles. Second, the pressure of performing one role caused difficulties for employees to meet the required behaviours of other roles. Third, different requirements of each role make it difficult for employees to fulfil all requirements for all roles.

Undertaking the HRM role exposed LMs to role conflict as they were required to perform additional HRM tasks while maintaining their operational duties. A study of 760 LMs from Hilton hotels throughout the UK found heavy workloads and short time pressures were two key challenges for LMs undertaking their HRM role (Maxwell & Watson, 2006). Another study undertaken by Nehles et al. (2006) indicated four factors contributed to role conflict among LMs: capacity, competencies, support and policies and procedures. Results of the four case companies that participated in the Nehles et. al. (2006) study, recorded almost the same result in terms of LMs perceptions about factors that contributed to the role conflict. However, they suggested company characteristics, task complexities and educational level to be considered in explaining differences of LMs' perceptions about challenges that influenced their HRM role implementation success. While both studies gathered LMs perceptions through a questionnaire, their findings were limited as to the causes of the perceived challenges. Importantly, the existence of challenges in performing the LMs' HRM role suggested organisations would bear the consequences if the role holder failed to perform the behaviours as expected by members in the organisation. This explains the need to achieve the role consensus between the role evaluators and role holder (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

#### **2.6.4 Role consensus.**

Role consensus states that the individual who plays the role needs to have the same norms and values as of the other members in the role set to ensure that the role behaviours conform to role expectations (Biddle, 1986). The consensus is essential to ensure that the role

can be performed effectively and contributes to organisational performance. This is because the understanding between the role evaluators and role holder influence the enactment of the role in fulfilling its purposes.

In discussing a situation in the organisation, some researchers agreed that negotiation between senior management and middle managers has a direct impact on the role consensus because it improves the understanding between both parties towards achieving organisational goals (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). This negotiation can be done by involving the middle managers in the strategic planning together with the senior management (Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004). From this involvement, it was believed that middle managers can reduced the biases they had regarding the expectations of the position they hold in the organisation. This was particularly true in the organisation that implemented top-down management where the ability of middle management in the implementation part was valued by top management who acted as planner in the planning process (Mantere, 2008).

The importance of achieving role consensus between the role evaluators and role holder also can be seen through the employment contract (Biddle, 1986). Interestingly, Wickham and Parker's (2007) review of Kerr's (1978) study noted that achieving consensus required the work role to be pre-defined, agreed by members in the role set and fixed. As roles changed over time, these characteristics have caused criticism about role consensus because it does not reflect the complexity of situations in the new organisational environments which influence the role expectations.

To achieve role consensus, HRM policies and practices play an important part in stimulating the desired HRM role behaviours of LMs in meeting with the expectations of the role evaluators (Boxall & Steenveld, 1999). Role theory recognises HRM policies and practices as a primary means of communicating the role information and stimulating the desirable role behaviours of the role holder (Jackson & Schuler, 1995). They can be used to

influence LMs' understanding of the required performance of their HRM role (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). These can be done through selection, training, performance management, motivation and career planning (Baran, Karabulut, Semercioz, & Pekdemir, 2002; Boxall & Steenveld, 1999; Delaney & Huselid, 1996). Appropriate selection mechanisms are needed to search for the best candidates. The selection mechanism applied should be able to identify LMs skills and knowledge necessary to perform the HRM role. LMs abilities in handling the additional HRM tasks in the future as required by the organisation need to be assured. Moreover, a comprehensive training program is required to prepare LMs with the desired skills and knowledge. As LMs may come from different functional areas and backgrounds, training is essential for them to equip themselves with appropriate skills and knowledge when they undertake HRM roles, particularly people-centred skills (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995). Hall and Torrington (1998) highlight that HRM policies and practices can be used as an effective approach for changing the attitudes of LMs towards their HRM role. Incorporating LMs' HRM role into performance targets in addition to their technical tasks may make LMs realise the importance of implementing their HRM role. Moreover, procedures and manuals on how to implement HRM activities should be prepared for LMs to guide them in performing the HRM role.

Despite attention to studying the relationship between HRM policies and practices and organisational effectiveness to achieve role consensus, the exploration of the implementation of these policies is still limited (Kaufman, 2010; Nehles, et al., 2006). This is heightened when the evidence shows that the implementation of HRM practices in the organisation has no value if it is simply imitated from other organisations (Khilji & Wang, 2006). Instead, researchers believe that the effective implementation of HRM policies and practices can be achieved by enhancing level of HR satisfaction among members of the organisation (Khilji & Wang, 2006, p. 1187). Specifically, the investigation of HRM policies and practices

implementation is important as its function as a role sender has been questioned because it often fails to contribute to role consensus between the role holder and their role evaluators through the message sent (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Indeed, researchers note the need for the implementation of HRM policies and practices to be explored if it is to be used as a signalling device to deliver the message on the organisational expectations to achieve role consensus (Sonnenberg, et al., 2011). This exploration may be valuable to bridge the gap between the intended and actual implementation which has been widely reported in the study (Thompson, 2011).

#### **2.6.5 Limitations of role theory.**

Lack of concentration on the ‘process’ of developing the role is the main critique of the role theory application. This includes how the role holder learns about and, adapts to their role and effects on role performance over time (Lynch, 2007, p. 380). Much focus is given to the behaviour of an individual in performing their role, which is the result of the role development process. The importance of understanding the process of developing the role lies with the ability to interpret the expectations of the role which lead to a particular behaviour of the role holder. This interpretation is important in linking the role with the social settings, particularly in the organisational context (Lynch, 2007).

Researchers have highlighted another limitation of role theory that is it fails to take into account the dynamic nature of an organisation especially due to the diversity of the workforce based on cultural and age differences (Wickham & Parker, 2007). These characteristics can impact on role theory concepts including role taking, role conflict and role consensus (Wickham & Parker, 2007). This is due to the impact of these characteristics on the complexity of situations in the organisational environments that influence the requirements to perform a role. By ignoring the dynamic nature of the workplace, researchers believed that the applications of role theory concepts were taken loosely without considering the real situation



in the organisation. Conceptual refinements of role theory were suggested to consider these limitations for more understanding of employee behaviour in the workplace especially in performing each role in the organisation.

Role theory also fails to consider the agency factor in understanding employee behaviour (Mantere, 2008). Agency is defined as micro-sociological factors that influence individual's action such as organisation-specific conditions (Mantere, 2008, p. 295). The failure to consider the agency factor has been identified in the application of two important concepts of role theory namely role expectations and role enactment. By neglecting the agency factor, the assumption of role theory has been that the role holder acts similarly towards the same role expectations. This assumption has been criticised as the nature of the agency was to reflect differences in the ability of the role holder to act to their role expectations (Giddens, 1979 in Mantere, 2008). In fact, the role of agency has huge implications for the development of role expectations because the tendency of members in the organisation to evaluate the requirement and performance of the role through their own experience (Biddle, 1986). Researchers need to consider the importance of agency in understanding the process of developing the role as to reflect the real situations happening in organisations.

Whilst limitations of the application of role theory can be seen to influence the process of developing roles in the organisation, this can be linked to the problem of defining and enacting the LMs' HRM role. For instance, the challenges from the changes in organisational environments have resulted in increased expectations for LMs to perform their HRM role. While the role is socially constructed in the organisational system, for LMs to succeed in performing their HRM role they need to be made aware of any change of expectations from members in the role set. However, the extant studies suggest that more attention has been

given to the outcome of the LMs' HRM role rather than the process to deliver the right message for them to understand their HRM role expectations (Valverde, et al., 2006).

#### **2.6.6 Summary of role theory.**

In summary, the review of the role theory concepts suggests that they can be used to understand employee behaviour in performing their role. However, researchers have highlighted the need for role theory to be reconceptualised in line with the complexity of situations in the organisational environment (Broderick, 1999; Cardina & Wicks, 2004; Lopopolo, 2002). Role theory would be more beneficial if the dynamic nature of the modern organisations was considered in light of its effect on role development. This can be done by understanding the real world situations and translating that into the work role requirements to be performed by employees to increase the possibility of employees to achieve the role consensus (Wickham & Parker, 2007).

The application of role theory to LMs HRM role development is clear as criticisms of the weaknesses of the previous literature pertain to defining the HRM role of LMs which is related to the complexity of the HRM responsibilities distribution process and lack of identification of factors that can influence the process (Valverde, et al., 2006). Researchers suggested the need for the external and internal factors of organisational context to be considered in the study to define the role of HRM agents including LMs (Ulrich & Beatty, 2001; Valverde, et al., 2006). These include factors such as social, economic and political conditions as well as size, structure and culture of the organisation. There is a need to interpret the conditions of the organisational context to identify work role requirements and expectations of role evaluators (Shivers-Blackwell, 2004). Importantly, this consideration would fill the gap in the detailed analysis of the LMs' HRM role development that is still under researched (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010).

## 2.7 Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter suggests that while a prominent role of LMs in HRM is evident, greater exploration should be made as to the optimal distribution between LMs and HR specialists (Dany, et al., 2008). A clear understanding of the HRM role distribution is important because it causes a problem in defining the LMs HRM role. Moreover, the changing demands of the HRM function suggest that the expectations of the LMs' HRM role have increased while they are still required to perform their operational tasks. The identification of HRM positioning by exploring how the HRM role is defined is more critical for LMs to understand their role and to respond to competing pressures from organisational members. Further, realising the impact of LMs' HRM role implementation on the effectiveness of the HRM requires that LMs understand their HRM role expectations. However, there is a scarcity of research to investigate the LMs' HRM role implementation.

There is a gap in knowledge about how the LMs' HRM role is defined and enacted and this generalizable conclusion about LMs contribution to HRM and organisational performance cannot be made. This study strives to fill this gap using role theory concepts to explore the development of the LMs' HRM role based on perceptions of key members of selected organisations.

The research questions and means of answering them are outlined in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The aim of this chapter is to explain the methods employed in this study to explore the development of the LMs' HRM role, based on the perceptions of key members of selected organisations. First, the research questions are presented, then the research philosophy. A review of positivism, interpretivism and critical realism suggests that this study encompasses the essence of critical realism. A rationale for employing a qualitative research approach using a case study is then discussed. Following this is a detailed discussion about the three phases of the research process: preparation and development, data collection and data analysis. Prior to concluding, the background of the case study organisation is presented with the demographic characteristics of the participants involved in the study.

### **3.1 Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to answer the following research questions:

1. How is the HRM role of LMs defined?
2. How is the HRM role of LMs enacted?
3. What is the effect of LMs' HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness?

The above questions call for LMs and key organisational member involvement to understand the development of LMs' HRM roles. Of particular interest are the perceptions of LMs as role holders and influencers of the development of HRM LMs as role evaluators. In addition, the interpretation of the role evaluators is required to understand the effect of LMs' HRM roles on HRM effectiveness. Understandings of the LMs' HRM role development in this study are based on role theory concepts including role expectations, role taking, role conflict and role consensus.

### **3.2 Research Philosophy**

Exploring a research philosophy as a methodological reference is significant for a number of reasons. First, this assists researchers to determine an overall strategy that fits with

their research. This covers the process of choosing evidence types, the interpretation of data and its ability to answer the research questions. Second, an understanding of the research philosophy provides necessary information about a variety of methodologies and methods which may be appropriate approach to the research. Researchers choose an approach that is relevant to their research question. Third, this exploration brings ideas for the researcher to choose suitable ways of implementing their research. It may allow researchers to explore methods that are new to them (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2008).

For the purpose of this research, the research philosophy should be able, not only to answer ‘what’ the LMs’ HRM role is, but more importantly to explain ‘how’ the LMs’ HRM role is developed in organisations. Epistemological paradigms are explored to understand the process of LMs’ HRM role development in an organisation. Epistemology refers to ‘the general set of assumptions about the best ways of inquiring into the nature of the world’ (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2008, p. 60). Different authors describe their assumptions regarding belief systems differently. Some authors concentrate simply on quantitative and qualitative paradigms. However, this focuses only on the data rather than the belief system and assumptions regarding knowledge acquisition (Willis, 2007). Three major epistemological paradigms that often guide researchers in the social sciences are positivism, interpretivism and critical realism.

### **3.2.1 Positivism.**

Positivism is the dominant epistemological orientation in research within management disciplines, despite differing views on its suitability to address the increasing demands of quality research (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Positivists view the world as ‘objective’; it should therefore be studied through measurable rather than subjective criteria, such as human beliefs and interests (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2008). The knowledge gained is used to demonstrate causality, which is produced through hypothesis development and deductions.

Positivism is often associated with using techniques such as questionnaires for data collection and statistical analysis (Gelo, Braakman, & Benetka, 2008).

### **3.2.2 Interpretivism.**

In contrast to positivism, interpretivism suggests that reality is not 'objective' and externally existing but is socially constructed by people (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2008). Interpretivists appreciate the construction of knowledge from different perspectives through people's experiences. This paradigm is to extend understanding of people's behaviours in specific contexts. Research in this paradigm mainly employs qualitative data collected in case studies for example (Gelo, et al., 2008).

### **3.2.3 Critical realism.**

While research paradigms continuously evolve, the development of critical realism seeks to overcome the limitations of other philosophical paradigms (Syed, Mingers, & Murray, 2009, p. 73). Critical realists see the world as influenced by human agents and social structures, such as institutions, mechanisms and rules (Hesketh & Fleetwood, 2006). Critical realism argues that knowledge is gathered through a combination of theoretical elements and empirical evidence (Koslowski, 2010). Theoretical elements reflect the assumption of these mechanisms' existence, while empirical evidence determines whether or not the mechanism is operative. Similarly, Sayer (1992) describes the combination of knowledge gathering sources as 'subject' (knowing-subject) and 'object' (thing being studied). Knowledge and practice is interdependent, in that it depends on people's self-understanding and is socially produced. In discussing this, Sayer (1992, p. 43) suggests that 'changes in this self-understanding are coupled with changes in society's objective form, that it becomes possible to see how knowledge can simultaneously be not only explanatory and descriptive, but also evaluative, critical and emancipatory'. Therefore, while the development of knowledge is produced and reproduced by people, critical realists accept the existence of different structures and materials

in developing knowledge. Moreover, critical realists view the association between structure and agency as interdependent, where structure influences the understanding of agency in developing knowledge and vice versa.

Critical realists believe that the exploration of knowledge is a continuous process because it involves the interaction between micro and macro factors, known as agency and structure. The continuous process occurs due to changes in these factors that influence people's reactions and understanding about real things happening around them. For instance, social position influence people's way of thinking and may explain differences of the understanding between people with different status. Critics of critical realism however suggest the validity of people's judgement may come into question due to their personal biases. In fact, Hammersley (2009) argues that where the possibility to make false assumptions exists, any knowledge found needs to be justified thoroughly and cannot be accepted at "face value". In conjunction with that, studies drawing on critical realism use different research methods to evaluate structures and materials, often by employing mixed-method research (Syed, et al., 2009).

A lack of definition in the LM HRM role suggests the necessity of exploring the structures that influence the role's development and the role of agency within those structures. Thus, a critical realist paradigm informs this study. Attempts are made to deliver benefits in terms of theoretical and practical contribution by exploring LM's HRM role development in organisations.

#### **3.2.4 The research context.**

Despite significant attention given by researchers to LM involvement in the HRM activities, it is apparent that exploration of this topic is limited to Western countries. It is important to focus attention on developing countries to understand HRM role development in different parts of the world. As previously reviewed in Chapter 2 (literature review), a gap in

HRM literature on LMs' HRM role has been identified regarding important emerging countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand (Rees & Johari, 2010). This research will be conducted in Malaysia.

Choosing Malaysia as the focus of the study may provide a different platform to enhance understanding of the LMs' HRM roles in organisations, and fill this gap in the literature. Malaysia is a unique multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. It consists of Malays, Chinese, Indian and many other ethnic groups. Malaysia has 13 states and three Federal Territories, with 11 states and two Federal Territories located in Peninsular Malaysia and others in East Malaysia (Sarawak and Sabah). Malays are the predominant ethnic group in Peninsular Malaysia, while Ibans are the largest ethnic group in Sarawak. Kadazan/Dusun are the major ethnic group in Sabah. Every ethnic group has its own culture, which creates a variety of customs, arts, celebrations and cuisine. Malaysian citizens consist of the following ethnic groups: Bumiputera (67.4%), Chinese (24.6%), Indians (7.3%) and others (0.7%).

Islam is the official religion of Malaysia and is the largest professed religion among the Malaysian people. Malaysia, along with other Asian countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh, has a large Muslim population (Hashim, 2010). However, as a multi-religious society, other religions are freely practised. Current statistics show that other religions embraced by Malaysians include Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%) and Hinduism (6.3%).

Malaysia offers a different perspective on HR management. It is vital to explore this, as the adoption of HRM practices in Malaysia is characterised by a slow and cautious development.



### **3.2.5 HRM in Malaysia.**

Some researchers suggest that people management in Malaysia is still in ‘personnel management’ mode (Rowley & Abdul-Rahman, 2007). This can be seen in the behaviour of organisational members reacting to people management issues. Senior management in some organisations still adopt low cost strategies in terms of investing in employee development. This reflects senior management’s perception of employee development programmes as a short term cost, instead of a long term investment that would benefit employees and the entire organisation. However, this situation does not describe all organisations, as some have gradually begun to emphasise HRM practices (Hashim, 2010). In fact, a recent study by Yusoff, Abdullah and Baharom (2010) has brought new perspective to the understanding of people management approaches in Malaysian organisations. In their study about the HR department’s role, they reported that low emphasis was given to the administrative expert and employee champion roles, and suggested that the people management approach no longer concentrated on the operational tasks of personnel management. Instead, the role of HR in Malaysian organisations is moving towards being strategically oriented, which emphasises HR managers as a strategic partners and change agents.

Changes in the Malaysian workplace affect the development of the LMs’ HRM role, because the changes have important implications for the organisation’s management and structure. This may result in changes to the HR role priorities, and marks a new challenge for LMs. Attention to the definition and redefinition of the LMs’ HRM role and adaptation to the new changes is required in organisations. Some researchers posit that greater clarification of the contribution and effectiveness of HRM in Malaysia is needed, particularly by exploring LMs’ understanding about the HR function under different contextual situations (Rees & Johari, 2010). Contextual situations include radical change, hierarchical management

structures, ethics and spirituality's influence, which may reveal significant differences from western organisations (Rees & Johari, 2010, p. 518).

#### ***3.2.5.1 Workforce diversity.***

Malaysian HRM practices have an ethnically oriented value, as the diverse Malaysian workforce consists of Malays, Chinese and Indians. The workforce also differs in terms of religion and language. Regarding age, most of the workforce consists of young workers (Aminuddin, 2008). These factors can affect employees' behaviour and influence the way organisations are managed as well as HR issues that arise. Each group of workers have their own needs and different perceptions of workplace issues. As conflict is more likely to happen in this diverse environment, researchers believe that employer awareness regarding the needs of each group may help to reduce workplace conflict (Aminuddin, 2008). Apart from that, researchers also found that workforce diversity in Malaysia influences the way managers think. More importantly, it is reported that different ethnic managers value different skills for managing in the workplace (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2006). There is a need for study of the cultural impact of organisational behaviour which is under researched in ASEAN countries (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2006; Varma & Budhwar, 2013).

Workforce diversity has important implications for the study of LMs' HRM role development because this diversity affects the way employees are supervised by managers, especially in terms of evaluating employee performance. Specifically, this is an important factor to be considered because the understanding of LM HRM role development is developed through the perceptions of an organisation's members that are closely related to the role.

#### ***3.2.5.2 Religion.***

The role of religion has attracted research attention to determine its influence on the management of Malaysian organisations. Islamic values are identified as influencing HRM practices in Malaysian organisations, which in turn influences the commitment of employees

(Hashim, 2010). The values of honesty, trustworthiness and concern for others are more likely to influence employee behaviour at the workplace. As a significant percentage of the Malaysian workforce is Muslim, this can affect the construction of HRM practices in organisations. Importantly, Hashim (2010) contends that these values not only affect Muslim employees, but also influence non-Muslim employees. This means that non-Muslim employees may have a better understanding of their Muslim counterparts in performing their roles. Despite the findings that spirituality is viewed as a key HRM concern in Malaysian workplace, senior management prefer to view this as a universal value, rather than linking values with particular religions (Rees & Johari, 2010). This reflects the understanding of senior management of the integration of Islamic work ethics in relation to the HRM practices, when the organisation is not totally composed of Muslim employees. They also need to consider the acceptance of non-Muslims in the workplace. While integration requires care as a sensitive issue, it is evident that it has been successfully managed by many Malaysian organisations (Budhwar & Fadzil, 2000). A study has found that organisations that incorporate Islamic values have succeeded in their operations and report more competence compared to others, regardless of the situation, even during turbulent times (Budhwar, 2000).

While Islamic values have been noted to influence behaviour of the Malaysian workforce, they may also affect the perceptions of LMs and their role evaluators on LMs' HRM roles.

### ***3.2.5.3 Culture.***

Malaysia shares characteristics with other Asian countries, including: high power distance, high collectivism, moderate level of uncertainty avoidance, higher masculinity and long term orientation (Rowley & Abdul-Rahman, 2007). These characteristics describe the values held by Malaysian people, emphasising family values in their behaviour within the family, in society and also in the workplace. While some writers believe that national cultural

differences are not a sufficient basis for understanding work behaviour, other context specific criteria should be taken into account (Ripley, Hudson, Turner, & Osman-Gani, 2006).

Regarding Malaysia, researchers argue that problems in Malaysian organisations stem from its multi-ethnic population (Gomez & Jomo, 1997). This demonstrates the need for managers to deal with employees from diverse backgrounds, who have their own ways of thinking about and judging particular policies when they are enacted in the organisation. Since the diversity of the workforce has not been given due consideration in understanding employee behaviour, researchers raise that such neglect may be problematic in people management, particularly in policy making and its implementation (Bhopal & Rowley, 2005). It is believed that the issue of ethnicity as problematic in HRM should be explored to avoid dysfunctional effects on employee behaviour in the future. Considering the future competitiveness of Malaysia, as it moves towards becoming a high income nation, assertions have been made regarding the importance of effectively managing the workforce through the implementation of HRM to ensure a positive impact on company performance (Osman, Ho, & Galang, 2011). Scholars point out that the characteristics of Malaysian society necessitate appropriate solutions are implemented in people management (Rowley & Abdul-Rahman, 2007). In this study, Malaysian culture may influence the enactment of LM HRM roles by influencing how LMs perceive challenges, and their understanding about HRM policies and practices in performing the HRM role.

### **3.2.6 Research paradigm.**

In conjunction with the characteristics of Malaysia, a suitable paradigm for this study will corroborate the purpose of identifying the structures that influence how the LMs' HRM role is defined and enacted in Malaysian organisations. The critical realist framework is the best option for this purpose because it explores the real structure or mechanisms that underlie a particular event and identifies factors that contribute to whether the event happens or not.

Through the ‘explanatory critique’, critical realism suggests that knowledge is evaluative by explaining the event in its particular context. This works in Malaysian situations to discover the underlying structures that form the beliefs and understandings of its people, particularly in shaping employee attitudes about their role in an organisation.

Critical realism is also suitable to achieve the theoretical and practical contributions of the study, as it delivers research findings comprehensively; specifically, to the researcher’s field and to research users in general (Brannen, 2005). In the former, as little empirical evidence is available to give a clear understanding about how LMs’ HRM roles are defined and enacted in the organisation, this provides justification for exploring the topic in detail. The structures that generate the HRM role are likely to exist, as there is a trend of changes in the allocation of HRM activities in organisations. LMs are increasingly responsible for these HRM activities. This suggests the need to evaluate the underlying factors that are associated with the development of the role, and the critical realism paradigm offers a suitable approach for this by exploring what is actually happening (or not happening) and underlying structures that cause it to happen in a particular way (Syed, et al., 2009). This approach may be useful in evaluating the process of defining the LMs’ HRM role and to extend understanding of how LMs enact that role.

With respect to the practical contribution, commentators point out that academic research has lacked in relevance, even though it is rigorous (Syed, et al., 2009). This implies that findings from some studies are recognised academically, but do not work in practice. Therefore, efforts have been made to ensure that the researcher considers the facts of real world problems to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice. The uniqueness of Malaysia may create different structures that influence how the LMs’ HRM role is defined and perceived by different members of the organisation. The Malaysian workplace that predominantly consists of Malay Muslims may add to the differences in understanding the

underlying causes of action in Malaysian workplaces. This may be particularly evident in perceptions of LMs' HRM role. Therefore, critical realist assumptions can guide this study to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice, because this philosophy attempts to evaluate a situation within contextual boundaries, rather than simply describe it. This enables critical realists to increase the relevance of knowledge to be used in practice.

Reflected by critical realist assumptions, the methodology is explained in the next section. It will guide this research process and enable the exploration of the LMs' HRM role in Malaysia.

### **3.3 Methodology**

Methodology has been interpreted as 'a combination of techniques used to enquire into a specific situation' (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2008, p. 60). This collection of techniques includes concepts, designs, methods, instruments and analysis that guide the work of a study.

As the study of LM involvement in Malaysia is still under researched (Yusoff, Abdullah, & Ramayah, 2010), this requires the exploration of the structures and rules that influence how the HRM role of LMs is perceived by members of Malaysian organisations, so an assessment of LMs' involvement in HRM can be made. Likewise, this condition has influenced the choice of a qualitative research design, to investigate the process of LM HRM role development in this study.

### **3.4 Research Design**

A review of studies on HRM in Malaysia shows that predominantly quantitative approaches and designs have been used. For instance, Hashim (2010) employed a self-developed questionnaire to gather information about the Islamic approach in HRM practices and its impact on organisational commitment across 8 Islamic organisations in Malaysia. Data for the study on the relationship between HR practices and firm performance by Osman et al. (2011) was gathered in a questionnaire involving HR managers and top executives of

Malaysian firms. Similarly, Yusoff et al.'s (2010) study of the relationship between HR department roles and HRM effectiveness used a mailed survey questionnaire in their study within large Malaysian firms.

While researchers believe many factors influence the selection of an appropriate research design, the nature of the research issue was found to be the most important factor in this consideration (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2003). In discussing the research issue of this study, the scarcity of research about LM involvement in Malaysia was an important gap to be filled, for theoretical and practical contributions (Yusoff, et al., 2010). Many elements need to be discovered regarding the uniqueness of Malaysian characteristics that may influence the development of the LMs' HRM role in organisations. Therefore, an in depth understanding of the issue is needed to judge the effectiveness of people management in Malaysia through the implementation of HRM. These conditions suggest the use of qualitative research as it serves to achieve a deeper understanding of the research issue by exploring attitudes, behaviour and experiences in a specific context (Dawson, 2006). In addition, qualitative research is appropriate for this study as it focuses on words rather than numbers (Maxwell, 2005). Exploration towards an in depth understanding of the research issue is made by using the meanings expressed by participants involved in the research, to understand why certain events are happening or not happening in the context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

From the many qualitative research approaches available, a case study approach was selected for this study. This is in line with the critical realism paradigm used in this study as a case study approach enable the explanation of the development and implementation of the LMs' HRM role through the understanding of the real influence within the Malaysian context.

### **3.5 Case Studies**

Case studies are comprehensive inquiries conducted in the field with a particular instance or setting (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). The case study approach was selected for this

study as it offers opportunity to understand the LMs' HRM role in the specific context of the Malaysian airport industry. Additionally, due to its capacity to disclose the operation of mechanisms or rules in the organisational system, case studies are the primary research design in critical realist studies (Koslowski, 2010). Case studies offer a platform for the researcher to gain in-depth data through many forms of data collection such as observations, interviews and focus groups. Case studies are chosen for this study because of their ability incorporate multiple data to answer the "how" and "why" questions (Yin, 1994). This is important especially for a complex issue where the researcher has limited control of the situation to be studied such as the LMs' HRM role in the Malaysian context.

The disadvantage of using case studies is that the findings cannot be generalised to other cases. However, some writers suggest that the problem of generalising from case study design can be alleviated by using more than one case study (Tharenou, Donohue, & Cooper, 2007). Thus, three case studies have been used here to improve research quality and increase the potential generalising potential of the findings from the sector involved. Using a contextual or theoretical application such as role theory is fundamental to understanding the development of LMs' HRM roles in organisations may also allow the researcher to achieve greater capacity to generalise (Brannen, 2005).

The case studies were drawn from the service sector because of this sector's importance to the Malaysian economy. Multiple case studies were conducted with three airports to investigate the causal link of the understanding about the LMs' HRM role which may be complex for one single case study. A single-industry study has been chosen because it offers a consistent background and contextual factors, so that the development of the LMs' HRM role and its influence on HRM effectiveness can be observed. This can also be tailored to assess the strategy used by the organisation in implementing HRM policies and practices to achieve organisational goals, improving the management of human resources.



### 3.6 Research Process

In answering the research questions, Figure 3 (as explained in Chapter 1 (Introduction)) provides a framework that represents the role theory concepts influencing the development of the LM HRM role towards achieving HRM effectiveness. This framework also summarises the links between the research method and the framework concepts, with sections A, B and C referring to the data collection instrument (Interview guide; Appendix 1 and 2).

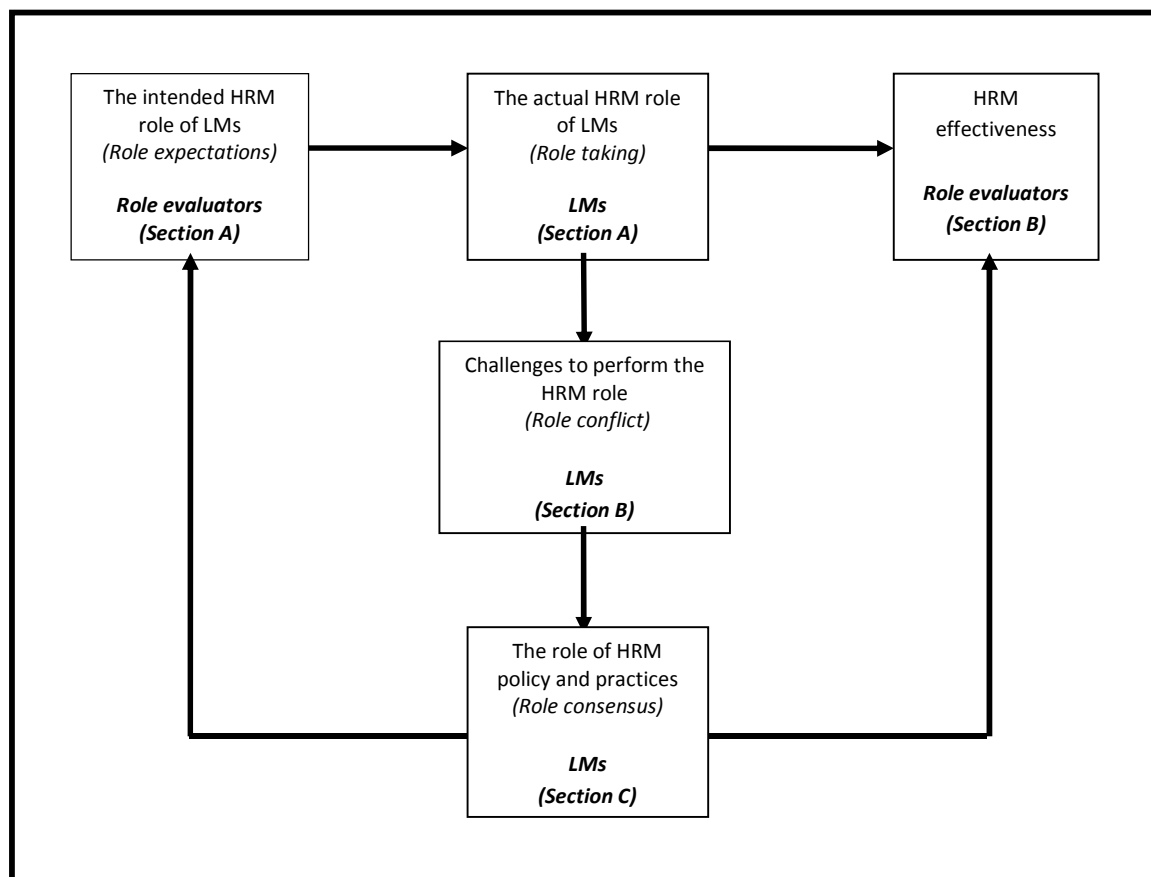


Figure 3. Research framework and links to research method.

The research process was conducted in three phases, outlined in the following section and summarised in Appendix 3.

### **3.6.1 Phase 1: Preparation and development.**

The first phase of the study involved clarification of the research process and development of research tools. In essence, the literature review highlighted the need to reconceptualise role theory to accommodate modern organisations. The dynamic nature of modern workplaces and the diversity of the workforce indicated increased levels of cultural and age difference. These were not previously considered and this may have contributed to the identified limitations of role theory concepts.

Once the research scope was established, potential organisations were approached to obtain permission for conducting the study. A letter was sent to three different service sector organisations requesting access to conduct the research. This was followed by a telephone call. A positive response was received from the airport managing organisation and access was arranged to 3 airports.

#### ***3.6.1.1 Development of interview questions.***

##### **RQ1: How was the LMs' HRM role defined?**

The first research question aim to investigate the intended LMs' HRM role from the perspective of those who evaluate this role. Qualitative data were needed to answer this question. Data about the intended LMs' HRM role were gathered from interviews with HR representatives and senior managers to whom the LMs reported. This question applied the role expectation concept to understand the perceptions of key members of the organisation towards the LMs role. It was important to identify the requirements set by role evaluators in assessing the performance of LMs in delivering their HRM role which reflect the real influence to explore the development of the LMs' HRM role. Understandings of the LMs' HRM role were measured through their involvement in HRM activities and their HRM function. This investigation allowed for the identification of macro and micro sociological factors that may explain the implementation of the LMs' HRM role which represent the

structure and agency applied in the critical realism. Further, this study aimed to move beyond the dominant approach in investigating LMs involvement, which is based on one single HRM activity or several activities decided earlier by the researcher. Instead, participants in this study would be asked to define the LMs' HRM activities from their own perspectives.

Regarding HRM function, the HRM typology as developed by Conner and Ulrich (1996) has been used; many researchers have found it extends useful insights in redefining the HRM role. This involved three functions, namely administrative expert, employee champion and change agent. This typology is comprehensive in explaining the LMs' HRM role in the Malaysian environment, where the development of HRM is slow and unclear. This makes Conner and Ulrich's (1996) typology appropriate for this study, as it considers the changing tasks and responsibilities of LMs over time.

#### **RQ2: How was the LMs' HRM role enacted?**

The purpose of this research questions was to obtain a full picture of the actual HRM role enacted by the LMs (role holder). Qualitative data addressed these questions. The data were gathered from interviews with LMs, together with an analysis of company documents such as LMs' job descriptions and organisational charts. Three role theory concepts will help to answer this research question: role taking, role conflict and role consensus.

First, an exploration of the actual LMs' HRM role requires understanding LMs' perceptions of their HRM role and their experience in performing this role (role taking) as to explore the real situation on the enactment of the LMs' HRM role. The actual LM HRM role was measured similarly to the intended LM HRM role by examining LM understandings of their HRM activities and function. The same questions were posed regarding the LMs' intended and actual HRM role to make a comparison between perceptions of different respondents, namely the role holder and their role evaluators.

Second, LMs' current performances were further explored by investigating challenges faced in performing the HRM role (role conflict). The information was gathered by highlighting the factors that LMs thought aided or impeded their HRM role enactment in order to explain further on the structure and agency that influence the implementation of the LMs' HRM role. The challenges were grouped, as recommended by Nehles et al. (2006) in terms of desire, capacity, competencies, support, and policy and procedure, shown in Table 2. Desire encompassed factors related to the willingness of LMs to perform the HRM role. This was associated with motivation, incentives provided by the company and the task type given to LMs. Capacity covers factors related to the time provided to undertake HRM tasks. To perform the HRM role well, LMs required proper training to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to manage HR related matters. This was included in the competencies factor. Nehles et al (2006) suggested support from HR specialists influences HRM role implementation by LMs. However, as this company emphasised teamwork as part of their shared values, support was viewed from a broader aspect. This consisted not only of support from HR specialists, but also from the unit head and the LMs' subordinates. The last factor related to the company's HRM policy and procedures. Clear policies send messages to LMs about the HRM role expectations. The LMs' interpretation of the message sent through company HRM policy and procedures was an important influence on their performance; therefore, the HRM policies developed by the company would be expected to be interpreted similarly among LMs and role evaluators, to achieve role consensus.

Table 2

Items adapted from Nehles et al. (2006) for LMs Challenges

Challenges	Description
Desire	Willingness to undertake and perform the HRM role
Capacity	Time provided to perform the HRM role
Competencies	HR knowledge and skills to perform the HRM role
Support	Support from HR specialists, superiors and employees
Policy and procedures	Clarity of HRM policies and procedures

Third, LMs' perceptions of company HRM policy and practices were examined to understand the effectiveness of the HR strategies developed by the role evaluators in sending messages about HRM role expectations to LMs (role consensus). This was measured through LMs' perceptions of HRM policy and practices in communicating the desired HRM role behaviour required by role evaluators. To gain the participants' own perspective on the value of HRM policy and practices that were implemented in the company, questions for this section were open to participant understanding of any HRM policy and practices they perceived as important in delivering the HRM role expectations required by role evaluators.

### **RQ3: What is the effect of LMs HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness?**

The third research question explored the contribution of the HRM role of LM to the company and comprised questions posed to the role evaluators. HR roles are reported to evolve, and the importance exploring the effects of this will be evident in the way LMs assist in improving the company's HRM effectiveness. Rather than focusing on financial measures, this study concentrated on the contribution to HRM effectiveness as perceived by role evaluators. This aspect of value addition has received little attention from researchers. Researchers believe that HRM effectiveness now matters more than ever, as organisations have recognised the importance of HR functions in delivering value and achieving organisational goals, especially while dealing with the constant pressure of organisational environments (Ulrich, et al., 2012). This is particularly relevant with LM contributions, as one

of the main reasons for devolving HRM activities was to allow immediate attention on HR related matters by LMs (Budhwar, 2000). For the purpose of this study, HRM effectiveness was measured by adopting items established by Wright et al. (2001) on HR services. However, modifications were made based on input from senior managers to reflect context specific conditions. The focus was on HR services because HRM functions were considered a service function in organisations (Schneider, 1994). Data for this question were gathered from interviews with senior managers and HR representatives. This required participants to provide their opinions and assessments based on what they experienced with the delivery of HRM services by LMs to understand the real influence of LMs contributions and identify the structure and agency around that.

#### ***3.6.1.2 Ethics and confidentiality.***

In Phase 1, clearance was obtained from the ECU Human Ethics Research Committee. This study (Reference number: 7852 NIK MAT) met the requirements of the National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research. This approval allowed the researcher to proceed with the recruitment of participants and commence the data collection process and ensured that all procedures involved in the data collection process followed the required code of conduct. All participants involved in the study were asked to give their consent on participating in the study by signing the consent form and returning the form to the researcher for the record. Participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary; with no consequences should they prefer to not participate in this study. This was to ensure that participants were willing to give their responses freely without any pressure.

#### **3.6.2 Phase 2: Data collection.**

Data were gathered through interviews and document analysis of related publications, namely company documents and websites. Documentary sources such as websites and related publications were analysed to support the findings from interviews, because these provided

general information about the company's background and achievements. Documentary analysis was also useful to make comparisons and confirmations with the interview findings.

### ***3.6.2.1 Interviews.***

Interviews are a basic mode of inquiry that elicit data to help understand people's experiences and the ways they evaluate those experiences (Seidman, 1998). Interviews have several advantages, including: enabling researchers to establish rapport and motivate participants to answer the questions; obtaining data richness; enabling the researcher to read nonverbal cues that may extend understanding of certain issues; and clarifying questions when required (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). Some weaknesses include: greater costs when participants are located across a wide geographic region; issues of confidentiality may affect the information given by respondents; and there is potential for respondents to terminate the interview at any time (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009).

Interviews were the primary method of collecting data. Semi-structured interviews were employed because they enabled the use of both open and close-ended questions (Tharenou, et al., 2007). Using these types of questions was important to investigate the meaning of responses thoroughly. The questions for interviews were guided by the theoretical framework underpinning this study (Figure 3). The main elements explored in the interviews were the LMs' HRM role definition, the LMs' HRM role conflict and consensus, and the effects of the LMs' HRM role on HRM effectiveness.

Before conducting interviews, the researcher met with two senior managers (unit heads) and the HR representative at one international airport to discuss broad HRM implementation in the parent company. Representatives from this airport were chosen due to the role of the airport as a regional centre, which was responsible for overseeing the operation of other airports. The meeting provided a platform for the researcher to understand the context and assisted in the interview sessions.

A total of 36 interviews were conducted in the three airports, and each interview session lasted approximately one hour. To accommodate the participants' requirements, interviews were scheduled both during office hours and over the weekend. All participants willingly cooperated in the interviews, including some participants who came to be interviewed on their rest day, of the 36 participants, 33 agreed to the interview being recorded and three declined. As well as recording interviews, the researcher took notes and maintained a reflective diary of the interview process to assist with the subsequent analysis of transcripts.

#### ***3.6.2.2 The interview questions.***

The interview questions were organised according to the concepts in the research framework, shown in Figure 3. Two sets of interview questions were prepared for these two different groups of respondents: role holder (LMs) and role evaluators (senior managers and HR representatives).

The first set of interview questions aimed to gather information from the role holder, and was divided into four sections (see Appendix 1). Section A investigated the actual implementation of the LMs' HRM role. Section B discussed challenges in performing the HRM role. Section C was designed to explore LMs' perception about HRM policies and practices available, to assist them in understanding the expectations of their HRM role. Section D examined participants' demographic backgrounds, such as age, tenure, educational and employment background.

The second set of interview questions was developed to capture the role evaluators' views and was divided into three sections (see Appendix 2). Section A attempted to discover the role evaluators' perception of the intended LMs' HRM role. Section B investigated their perceptions of the impact of the LMs' HRM role of overall HRM effectiveness. The second set of the interview questions ended with the participant's demographic background, Section C.



### ***3.6.2.3 Document analysis.***

Document analysis is the method of using relevant documents significant to the study (Altheide, 1996). Three types of documents may be relevant to researchers: primary, secondary and auxiliary documents. Primary documents are related to the study object; these documents are the major source of information to study a particular topic. Secondary documents are the records associated with the primary documents. Auxiliary documents are supplementary sources of the data; they are not referred to as the main source for the overall investigation, but provide relevant information about certain parts of the study (Altheide, 1996).

The document analysis conducted for this study drew on auxiliary documents, which were used to provide general and background information about the parent company and each of the selected airports. The information was gathered through company websites, annual reports and other company documents:

- i. company web site
- ii. organisational chart
- iii. job descriptions
- iv. news archive
- v. annual report 2011
- vi. annual report 2010.

Comparisons were also made between the parent company documents (organisational chart, job descriptions) and the responses provided by the participants to clarify the work flow and design. This provided insights into overall HRM policy and practices as they provided general information about the organisation and the structure, which were used to develop a role and allocate tasks to employees.

#### ***3.6.2.4 Potential issues in the data collection process.***

An important issue with using interviews can be gaining participants' trust. For this study, one-off interviews were conducted by the researcher with participants who had not been met. The data for the study was gathered in single meetings with each of the participants. To ensure there was time in the interviews to explore issues, arrangements were made with the airports to schedule interview sessions according to participant availability and thus, providing a pressure-free environment for all interviews. Arrangements were also made to inform the participants in advance, so they were more prepared for their interview. All participants also provided their contact details to the researcher if further information or confirmation of the responses was needed after the meeting.

#### **3.6.3 Phase 3: Data analysis**

The last phase of the study was data analysis. This study relied on the theoretical propositions drawn from role theory concepts to guide the data analysis process. This enabled the concepts of role definition, role taking, role conflict and role consensus to emerge from the data. By applying this strategy, an underlying factor explaining the actions of the LMs towards their HRM role in Malaysian airports could be explored, while investigating how the LMs' HRM role influenced overall HRM effectiveness. Unexpected results could also be identified: these have not yet been defined from role theory concepts. Towards the end, the results composition included quotations to reflect the unique content of each interviewee and case study.

Analysing qualitative data generally involves five phases: compiling, disassembling, reassembling (and arraying), interpreting and concluding (Yin, 2010). In this study, the analysing process began with interview transcriptions. Tape recordings from the interviews were transcribed by the researcher into a Microsoft (MS) Word document. Notes taken during the interviews were also added to the document to gain a whole picture of each interview.

Individual respondents were identified with a numbered code. With the assistance of Nvivo software, all data were housed in one place to assist the coding process. Data were then coded and grouped into themes by the researcher, based on the research framework. The coding process was continued for the data gathered in all case studies. Although the interview questions were developed in both English and Malay, 35 of the 36 participants preferred the interview to be conducted in Malay. Participants indicated the use of Malay would ensure they were able to understand the questions well and give appropriate answers. Since the majority of interviews were conducted in Malay, the transcribed scripts were translated into English prior to data analysis. Upon completion of the transcribing process, two transcripts were professionally translated and compared with the translations prepared by the researcher to confirm accuracy. Comparison between translations showed no significant differences.

Content analysis, which involves investigating texts by identifying specific features, was employed in this study to analyse data gathered through interviews (Druckman, 2005). Themes emerged from the interview data were identified and used to form the content of each case study. Content analysis was chosen because it enabled the researcher to investigate the data for ideas or information based on a selected theory (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2008). As this study applied role theory concepts, content analysis was appropriate for describing the content of written documents (the company documents) and spoken material gathered from interviews. This approach allowed the researcher to relate all the data from interviews and the key features of the role theory concepts.

### **3.7 Initial Document Analysis of the Company**

#### **3.7.1 Historical background.**

The case studies were conducted in the Malaysian airport sector, which comprises 39 commercial airports operated by one parent company. The parent company was originally established as a government agency and was re-established as a private enterprise in 1992.

These changes meant that the company was no longer the regulatory body responsible for the airports and aviation industry. Instead, its new focus was on three main activities at each airport: operations, management and maintenance. Airports in Malaysia cater to airlines servicing 16 domestic and 113 international destinations. The sector employs approximately 7,000 employees across the 39 airports. The airports consist of five international terminals, 16 domestic terminals and 18 short take-off and landing (STOL) ports.

A multiple case study approach was conducted using three airports selected on the basis of airport category and size. The three airports reflected a range of sizes and functions, and they were differentiated by their connectivity to a number of destinations offered to customers and their size of operation. The case studies comprised one international airport and two domestic airports. The international airport was larger in both size and operation, having a higher capacity to accept large aircrafts and offer connectivity to other countries. The domestic airports were smaller in size and provided services for passengers within the country. They had capacity to receive smaller sized aircraft unlike the international airports.

Malaysian airports are located in four regions: central, northern, Sarawak and Sabah. The airports involved in this study represented two regions, the northern and central region of the Malaysian Peninsular. These regions offered diverse airport categories for the study, and were chosen for ease of access and their willingness to participate.

### **3.7.2 The airport sector core activities.**

The core activities of the Malaysian airport sector include management, operation, maintenance and development. The main focus of activities was on customer satisfaction, which included operational efficiency, passenger safety and security, cargo and aircraft operations. The structure of each airport was designed to match its operation. Airport structures differed according to airport category and number of employees, focusing on operational effectiveness and profitability. Thus, the international airport was not only bigger

in size and operation, but also in terms of the number of employees compared to the two domestic airports studied.

Airport revenue came from two sources: aeronautical and non-aeronautical.

Aeronautical revenue was gained from activities such as landing fees, aerobridge charges, check in-counter charges, parking fees and passenger service charges. Non-aeronautical revenue was generated from commercial activities offered to customers, including the operation of duty free shops, hotels, parking facilities and commercial space leasing.

Aeronautical revenue was the major revenue stream and may influence non-aeronautical revenue. This indicated that the greater the number of aircraft that lands in an airport, then the higher the revenue. In turn, this attracted more businesses and customers to commercial activities. Thus, emphasis was given by the parent company to aeronautical revenue to ensure the quality of services provided to airlines, passengers and contractors, to generate more demand and activity at each airport.

### **3.7.3 Shared values.**

As a service company, a good working culture was important to support the parent company's vision to become a world class airport business. This mission was achieved through managing cost effective operations and providing services beyond customer expectations. This was important as the airports had to meet the changing demands of customers, airline companies, employees, shareholders and other stakeholders. The vision was interpreted through five shared values:

- market driven (responsive to market needs and market focus)
- customer focused (provide quality, innovative and competitive services in a safe and secure environment)
- teamwork (work together towards achieving the group's vision; share knowledge to enhance group synergy and care for employees' wellbeing)

- strive for excellence (observe good discipline and be proactive with a sense of pride in all our endeavours; uphold integrity, honesty and trustworthiness)
- loyalty (committed and dedicated for the group's wellbeing)

These values were promoted to guide the attitudes of employees and their understanding of how work should be done. The purpose was ensuring that all employees were aligned with the company goals and knew how they could contribute towards their achievement. As a service provider, it was understood that airport revenue was not only determined by good management, but also the attitude of individual employees on the floor. Employees were responsible for ensuring customer satisfaction, as they dealt directly with passengers, airlines companies, contractors and public entities. A range of training programmes were provided to communicate these values to all employees throughout the airports.

#### **3.7.4 Participants involved in the study.**

Three out of 39 Malaysian airports participated in the study. To maintain confidentiality, the airport names are de-identified. While previous studies of the involvement of LMs in HRM mostly concentrate on the HR specialists' views, the decision to involve LMs and senior managers was based on the need to consider the view of organisational members as well as HR specialists. This approach is recommended for developing an understanding of HRM role distribution in organisations, using role theory concepts (Valverde, et al., 2006). A request was made to the selected airports to interview a number of employees representing LMs, senior managers and HR representatives. This was in line with the study's purpose: to explore the understanding of LMs HRM role from the perspectives of both role holder (LMs) and role evaluator (senior managers and HR representatives).

LMs in this study were those first line supervisors at the lower hierarchical level in the organisational structure to whom individual employees reported directly, and who had

responsibility to the unit head for employees under their supervision. The views of LMs were important in this study as they represented the role holder's perspectives on the HRM role they undertook. Senior managers were those managers who were responsible for defining the LMs' HRM role, evaluating LMs' performance and influencing the way the LMs perform their HRM role. Senior managers were the heads of each unit that participated in the study. These senior managers represented the role evaluators' views of the HRM role of LMs. They were an important source of information as they directly monitored LMs' work and evaluated their performance. HR representatives were defined as those involved in managing HR related issues, particularly with regards to HRM policy and practices throughout the organisation. As HR practitioners, it was assumed that they understood all the HRM processes and procedures and were the referral point for LMs on any issue related to HRM activities.

As mentioned earlier, airport structures differed on the basis of airport category: international or domestic. At the international airport, there were seven functional units, four main units (operation, engineering, security, and fire and rescue services) and three support units (HR, finance and commercial). Meanwhile, the domestic airports had five functional units made up of four main units and one support unit. The main difference in the airport structure between the categories was that support units in the international airports were designed separately to cover HR, finance and commercial functions, while three functions were combined under the same unit in the domestic airports. However, the participants for this study were drawn from the same unit, involving three main units (1, 2 and 3) and one support unit (4). In Table 3 are the characteristics of participants.

Table 3

Participants' demographic backgrounds

No.	Factors	Airport X		Airport Y		Airport Z		Total
		LMs	REs	LMs	REs	LMs	REs	
1.	Gender	Male	12	3	6	3	3	30
		Female	1	1	0	2	1	6
2.	Age	30–39	1	2	0	1	0	5
		40–49	2	0	0	2	0	5
		>50	10	2	6	2	4	26
3.	Ethnicity	Malay	11	4	6	5	4	34
		Chinese	2	0	0	0	0	2
4.	Religion	Islam	11	4	6	5	4	34
		Buddhism	2	0	0	0	0	2
5.	Education	Secondary school	11	1	6	3	4	27
		Certificate/Diploma	2	0	0	1	0	5
		Bachelor	0	3	0	1	0	4
6.	Tenure	<10	0	2	0	0	0	2
		10–19	2	0	0	1	0	4
		20–29	1	0	2	3	0	7
		30–39	10	2	4	1	4	23
7.	Unit	Unit 1	4	1	2	1	1	10
		Unit 2	4	1	2	1	2	11
		Unit 3	5	1	2	1	1	11
		Unit 4	-	1	-	2	-	4

LMs = Line managers

REs = Role evaluators

Out of four main units common to each airport, only three were included in the study.

The airports did not wish to involve one unit critical to airport operations, as its function included checking aircraft conditions. The remaining support units were not included in the study as they were small in size, with only a few employees each. Additionally, these units did not have LMs with work monitored directly by the unit heads. A total of 36 interviews were conducted with 23 LMs and 13 role evaluators. The composition of respondents in each airport is illustrated in Table 4.



Table 4

Participants

Airport	Participants		Total
X	LMs	13	17
	Senior managers	3	
	HR	1	
	representative		
Y	LMs	6	11
	Senior managers	3	
	HR	2	
	representative		
Z	LMs	4	8
	Senior managers	3	
	HR	1	
	representative		
Total			36

### 3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided detailed information about the methodology and approaches used to answer the research questions. An overview of research paradigms identified that critical realism could accomplish the study's objectives of making theoretical and practical contributions. This paradigm supported the selection of a qualitative research design through multiple case studies in Malaysia's airport sector. Three cases were selected based on access and willingness to participate. Two groups of participants were involved in this study, role holders and role evaluators. Role holders were LMs, while role evaluators comprised senior managers and HR representatives. Interviews were used for data collection while documents were also analysed. This chapter also provided a brief explanation of the background of the Malaysian airport sector, an overview of the airports involved in this study and the demographic background of participants.

The following chapter reports the interview results of the first case study airport (Airport X).

## **Chapter 4: Case Study 1–Airport X**

The previous chapter outlined the research method. In this chapter, the interview results of the first case study airport (Airport X) are presented. It provides background information about the airport and the participants involved in the interviews. The interview questions are framed to cover the understanding of LMs' HRM role amongst key members of the airport: role holder and evaluators. In addition, the role evaluators' understanding of HRM effectiveness and its relationship with the LMs' HRM role is also explored.

### **4.1 Background to Airport X**

Airport X is one of the international airports located in the northern region of the Malaysian Peninsular. It is a medium sized airport and employs 469 staff in seven functional units. As an international airport, Airport X acts as a regional centre for four main functions, comprising maintenance, security, fire and rescue services and finance for the northern region of the Malaysian Peninsular. Based on its function as the regional centre, the managers at this site are responsible for overseeing operations at other airports in the region. Operating as an international airport allows Airport X to offer attractive connectivity of destinations to major cities around South East Asia. This attracts passengers, especially those from the northern region of the Malaysian Peninsular. This is evident in the number of passenger traffic in the airport, which has increased from 3.2 million in 2009 to 4.6 million in 2011.

Airport X has seven functional units comprised of four main units and three support units (see Appendix 6). The main units include operations, fire and rescue services, security, and engineering. The support units are designed to cover three functions: human resources, finance and commercial.

### **4.2 Participants' Demographic Backgrounds**

At this site, interviews were carried out with 13 LMs and four role evaluators, representing three main units and one support unit. Of the 13 LMs, five were from the

security unit and four were from both the fire and rescue services unit and the operations unit. A single role evaluator was used from the security, fire and rescue services, operations and HR units.

The LMs were male (12 males and one female) and over 50 years of age. Eleven LMs had secondary school education, while the remaining two achieved a diploma. Eleven LMs were Malaysian and were practicing Muslims. All LMs had long tenures with the organisation, reflecting their employment history. That is, the LMs have gone through the company's change from a government agency to a private organisation.

The role evaluators differed predominantly in terms of education. Three role evaluators had bachelor degrees, while only one was educated to secondary school level. Three role evaluators were male. Two evaluators were between the ages of 30 and 39, while another two were over 50 years of age. All role evaluators were Muslim Malays. Two role evaluators had less than ten years' tenure, while the other two had between 30 and 39 years. As a result, half of them were with the company during the company's development phases, while others were employed after privatisation.

### **4.3 The HRM Activities of LMs**

Role evaluators were asked about the HRM activities in which LMs were expected to be involved: LMs were asked the same question. Interviews revealed that LMs and the role evaluators agreed on five HRM activities: performance management, reward management, managing employee attitudes and disciplinary action, work arrangement and training. While the responses were generally similar on four activities, training was the only HRM activity reported to be different between units. Differences in training were related to the unit's function, where units associated with the uniformed bodies were required to attend specific training. The training was due to their association with local authorities, such as Malaysia's Fire and Rescue Department and the Royal Malaysia Police, which requires obedience to

certain regulations. For that reason, LMs in these units had more involvement in training activities compared to other units. LMs' involvement in HRM activities was important because the unit heads were highly dependent on LMs' contribution to managing employees. The frequency of an activity mentioned by LMs and the role evaluators is reported in Table 5. Each HRM activity is discussed below.

Table 5 Comments on line managers' HRM activities at Airport X

No	Themes	Activity	
		Line managers	Role evaluators
1.	Performance Management System (PMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update the merit and demerit form</li> <li>• Conduct three (3) sessions per year (at the beginning, mid and end of the year) with employees</li> <li>• Justify the marks given to the employees</li> <li>• Ensure that questions regarding the evaluation from employees are answered to their satisfaction</li> <li>• Record evidence related to employee performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete the merit and demerit form as evidence for employee' performance evaluation</li> <li>• Conduct three (3) sessions per year (at the beginning, mid and end of the year) with employees</li> <li>• Justify the evaluation given to the employees where necessary</li> <li>• Evaluate employee' performance</li> </ul>
2.	Reward management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides recommendation in reference to the PMS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remark that performance evaluation has a major impact to employee rewards</li> </ul>
3.	Managing attitudes and discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor employees' attendance</li> <li>• Ensure all information provided by employees is in line with the document given</li> <li>• Monitor employee appearance</li> <li>• Conduct inspection at the employee's work station</li> <li>• Advise employees on any misconduct</li> <li>• Remind employees on the effect of any misconduct on their performance evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Record employee' attendance</li> <li>• Monitor employees' discipline</li> <li>• Take disciplinary action if necessary</li> <li>• Maintain proof and evidence of employees' misconduct</li> <li>• Inform the head of unit concerning any serious problem of employee' discipline</li> </ul>
4.	Work arrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan monthly rosters</li> <li>• Monitor manning lists</li> <li>• Ensure the number of employees at every work stations is sufficient</li> <li>• Arrange for substitutes if not enough employees are present</li> <li>• Manage and record employees leave</li> <li>• Forward the leave application to the head of unit</li> <li>• Investigate and maintain details on those who take emergency leave</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead the shift</li> <li>• Organise the roster and manning</li> <li>• Ensure the number of employees are sufficient in each shift</li> <li>• Arrange for the substitute if not enough employees are present</li> <li>• Manage employee leave application</li> <li>• Forward the leave application to the head of unit</li> <li>• Monitor overtime, sick and</li> </ul>

- |             |   |  |
|-------------|---|--|
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage clearance for those who involve in any training</li> <li>• Prepare monthly reports</li> <li>• Inform the head of unit about the workforce shortage</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• emergency leave</li> <li>• Administer related documentation</li> <li>• Inform the head of unit about the workforce shortage</li> </ul>  |
| 5. Training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct roll call</li> <li>• Conduct knowledge sharing sessions (KSS)</li> <li>• Conduct classes and lectures</li> <li>• Plan for suitable training according to the situation</li> <li>• Conduct physical and fitness training</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct roll call and training</li> <li>• Conduct lectures and KSS</li> <li>• Suggest any training that is necessary for the unit and forward to the head of unit for consideration and approval</li> </ul> |

#### 4.3.1 Performance management.

The most mentioned HRM activity was performance management. The way respondents described their performance management activity reflected their understanding of the importance of this activity. LMs' understanding of this activity was consistent with the role evaluators. LMs agreed that performance management was an important HRM activity as it was about monitoring employee's work and performance in the unit. As LMs worked directly with employees, they were able to monitor and evaluate employee performance. Although the airport's performance management system kept changing, LMs believed they could cope with the changes, because their role in monitoring employees' work remained the same. This was encapsulated in the following response:

Part of our job is related with the performance management. Before this we implement human performance management (HPM), but now we have a new system called performance management system (PMS). In this new system, the top management set the key performance indicators (KPI) for each employee. So, as a leader we will assess our employees based on that KPI. (LM 2, Unit 1)

Role evaluator understandings of performance management were summarised in this statement:

We have Performance Management System (PMS) every year and the LMs are expected to evaluate employees under their supervision. Management has set the KPI for employees at the beginning of the year. By the end of the year, we expect that the whole evaluation process to be completed. (RE 1, Unit 1)

Three of the four role evaluators indicated that unit heads were dependent on a LM's ability to oversee performance management processes in the unit. Role evaluators expressed their confidence in LM capabilities to monitor these processes. They believed that LMs knew better what was happening as they were directly involved with employees and had better knowledge about employees' work. Moreover, a LM's experience and tenure with the company also contributed to this understanding. Indeed, 10 of the 13 LMs were familiar with the processes as they had seen how performance management was conducted by their former leader.

The performance management activity was viewed by LMs and role evaluators to include two main activities. First, LMs were involved in conducting performance evaluation sessions:

I am doing the review every year. My part is to communicate their KPI,,,I give a copy of the KPI to employees and they have to read through, if they don't understand, we will discuss. Mid-year is the time when we assess them before the end year (evaluation)...so, if there are irregularities or they don't understand what they supposed to do, we remind them or just like a knock at the back so they wake up and aware of what should be done. End year is the scoring part. (LM 12, Unit 2)

Second, LMs said that their involvement in conducting performance evaluation sessions also required them to manage the related documentation. An important part of this documentation was to update merit and demerit forms:

For PMS, we have merit and demerit forms and these forms need to be updated because we will evaluate them based on this evidence. (LM 1, Unit 1)

The merit form was a document designed to record an employee's job related performance. This achievement includes any valuable contributions made by an employee other than their routine tasks. In contrast, the demerit form was a document for recording any employee wrongdoing. Other performance management documentation included the performance evaluation form. In managing this form, LMs were trained to use the form and the method of evaluating employee performance. This training was organised by the parent company and was attended by all LMs and their unit heads. Further training sessions were conducted by the HR unit at the airport, to encourage better understanding of managing the performance evaluation form.

LM involvement in performance evaluations sessions demonstrated that they were active participants in the performance management activity. This was evident through their participation in all aspects until the end of the performance management process. Moreover, every performance evaluation session required them to deal personally with employees without the presence of the unit head. This allowed them to manage the documentation involved in the performance management process, as they had the information needed to complete the related forms.

Their active participation in performance management processes was also evident in their understanding of the attention required for each activity's implementation. The activities entailed in the PMS differed based on the frequency of the activity conducted. Performance management sessions were conducted three times a year and consisted of a discussion of the KPIs at the beginning of the year, the mid-year employee performance review and the final end-of-year review. These meetings were held on an individual basis so that every employee was aware of their performance targets and aware of their mid-year performance standards.

This allowed employees to improve or maintain their performance. In addition, updating merit and demerit forms needed to be done over the entire year. These forms needed to be continuously updated to monitor any changes in employee performance. LMs further explained that the importance of this record lay in its function to determine employee achievement that differed between employees. By referring to this record, it was less likely that employees would question their performance evaluation result, because the record acted as evidence for LMs workplace actions. Merit and demerit forms were applicable when justification was required by senior management.

Role evaluators' responses of LMs' involvement in the performance management activity were consistent with LMs' responses. Although LMs were involved in most of the performance management processes, consensus was achieved: heads of unit had the final say on employee's performance. The unit heads could request detailed information about employee performance to justify the evaluations made by LMs. Often, the unit heads were satisfied with LMs' evaluation, because it was supported by sufficient evidence and records.

There was a strong agreement between LMs and role evaluators that performance evaluation was linked to other HRM activities, including the management of rewards, attitudes and discipline, and training. LMs voiced that results from the performance evaluation would determine rewards given to employees. Nine of the 13 LMs indicated that the end-of-year performance evaluation feedback session was the most stressful: employees were waiting for their results, which reflected the rewards they would receive. Employees often compared their result with others, especially those who had been evaluated by other LMs. Their dissatisfaction with evaluation results was often expressed only among employees and was rarely brought forward to the LMs or senior management. However, LMs did not view employee dissatisfaction with performance evaluation to be a severe problem, because it involved only a minority of employees. Moreover, the complaints were more likely to happen



when bonuses were paid and did not persist. More generally, the dissatisfaction had no negative effect on employee performance afterwards, because employees remained committed with their work and listened to the LMs' instructions as usual.

#### **4.3.2 Reward management.**

There was agreement between LMs and their role evaluators on LMs involvement in reward management. This was described in relation to their active participation in performance management processes, which enabled LMs to recommend the rewards to be given to employees.

The reward management activity was defined as providing recommendations based on the performance evaluation result. This was described in the following statement:

For rewards, we refer to the PMS. If employees perform well, they deserve to get good rewards. It means that the rewards are highly based on the marks that we give in the PMS. (LM 5, Unit 3)

According to LMs, their participation in the performance management processes was the main contributor that enabled them to recommend an employee reward. This recommendation included bonuses, promotion and training. To perform this task required LMs to have better knowledge about employee KPIs, while monitoring their performance over the year. LMs mentioned that the difference between rewards was dependant on the extra work that employees did, which was recorded in the merit form. This reflected the situation where employees work beyond their compulsory routine tasks; extra work justified more rewards. Several LMs stated:

Every LM will monitor their employees' performance. If employees do extra work, we will record it in the merit form and this will justify why certain employee get better than others. (LM 5, Unit 3)

Some of my employees try to solve the problem with the machine that we used in the unit without waiting for the engineering unit to come down...fortunately the problem solved. I will take note on this effort and this may influence their evaluation later. (LM 4, Unit 1)

Although the negative responses of the performance evaluation directly influenced the recommendation for rewards, such cases rarely occurred in Airport X. This was due to the fact that there were no serious cases involving their employees that affected employee performance evaluation since they had been appointed as LMs.

For the role evaluator, LMs' involvement in rewards management was influenced by the performance management activity. This was described in the following statement:

PMS has a huge impact on the rewards. If the leader gave employee excellent in two consecutive years, the employee's grade will be directly upgraded. (RE 2, Unit 2)

The performance management processes were conducted thoroughly by LMs and closely monitored by the unit heads, as both realised the importance of evaluation in determining employee rewards. Both LMs and role evaluators agreed that although LMs made the recommendation, the final decision was dependent on the unit heads. However, LMs' suggestions were often taken into consideration by the unit heads.

LMs and role evaluators believed reward management was the most important HRM activity associated with performance management. Based on its importance to influence employee satisfaction and motivation, both parties agreed that LMs had the right to make recommendations about employees who have performed well because LMs were closer and knew better than others about their employees' performance.

#### **4.3.3 Attitudes and disciplinary management.**

LMs' understandings of managing attitudes and disciplinary activity were consistent with those of role evaluators. This activity entailed monitoring employee attendance and

appearance, advising of misconduct and maintaining documentary evidence. Of the 13 LMs, 11 LMs expressed the same opinion in describing the management of attitudes and discipline.

One LM stated:

We monitor employees' attendance, if they come late, their appearance and others. We will record everything that employees did, if there is misconduct, then we record that in the demerit form, so we can use the record to evaluate their performance later. (LM 1, Unit 1)

According to LMs, their capability to monitor employee attitudes and detect any disciplinary problems in the unit was enhanced by their direct working relationship with employees. This enabled them to supervise employees closely and identify worrying attitudes immediately. As they were familiar with the needs and requirements of employees' work, they felt that monitoring employee attitudes was part of their HRM role. Attitudes and disciplinary management also covered coaching. As LMs were responsible for communicating employees' KPIs, LMs expressed that they often reminded employees about their performance targets and guided employees to achieve that target.

Role evaluators also highlighted their understanding of LMs' authority to take action on minor employee misconduct. Role evaluators believed that immediate action should be taken to alert employees to their mistakes and make them aware of consequences if they continued the practice or behaviour. However, role evaluators mentioned that if employees were guilty of major misconduct or repeated misbehaviour, it was the LM's responsibility to forward the problem to HR for further action. In this case, three of the four LMs admitted that LMs' role were still needed in terms of providing the related evidence for misconduct or assisted in the domestic investigation if necessary.

#### **4.3.4 Work arrangement.**

For the work arrangement activity, LMs' and role evaluators' understandings were consistent. All responses revealed that work arrangement activities included tasks such as managing staffing levels and providing regular reports and documentation, ensuring the unit functioned effectively. LMs described these activities as in the following:

First thing that I did when I start my shift is to check on manning...whether employees are sufficient or not. If it is not enough employees in place, I will contact the on call employees and make sure the required strength is fulfilled. That's why we have to plan for employees' leave so that it is easier for us to find substitute especially to replace those who takes the emergency leave or sick leave. (LM 3, Unit 1)

LMs and role evaluators agreed that LMs' involvement in the work arrangement activity was important, especially in the absence of senior management. This ensured the unit functioned properly. First, LMs noted their responsibility in planning the monthly roster and checking staffing in every shift. LMs said that these tasks enabled them to manage the number of employees and to monitor employees' work at all stations. This was expressed in relation to the identification of those responsible for each work station and the tasks required from employees at that particular place.

Second, LMs involvement in work arrangements required them to provide regular reports and documentation for employees in their unit. This included managing employee leave to ensure that each shift had a sufficient number of employees. LMs expressed their understanding about the required number of employees in every shift to ensure effective airport operations. LM responded:

For employee planning, we know that every shift needs to have at least 11 people because that is the minimum strength stated in the SOP (standard operating

procedures), whatever it is we will make sure we have 11 employees in our shift. (LM 2, Unit 1)

The requirement for a certain number of employees in every shift was identified as a factor that influenced the way LMs managed employee leave. Whenever employees applied for leave, LMs checked the roster and only supported applications that did not affect the schedule. LMs noted that although a monthly roster had been prepared to assist employees in planning their leave, the plan could change, especially because of sick or emergency leave. In this situation, they were responsible for finding substitutes until the minimum number required by the unit was reached. The minimum number of employees for units was determined by management based on the unit's function and the airport category. Eleven out of the total 13 LMs were confident of their ability to find substitutes immediately, because other employees were cooperative.

In addition to managing employee leave, LMs also mentioned their responsibility was to manage other documents, such as monthly reports and employee overtime claims. The unit heads relied on LMs to prepare monthly reports, as LMs were responsible for keeping all the records on unit related activity. These reports were important for the unit heads to monitor employee activities. The responsibility of LMs to lead every shift also enabled them to manage employees' overtime claims. The HR unit relied on LMs to confirm the information provided by employees before the claims were forwarded for further action.

Though each unit's function differed, LMs' involvement in the work arrangement was similar across units. The only difference between units was related to the responsibility for giving clearance for employees who were involved in routine training. The uniformed units (security and fire and rescue services) were required to undertake specific training, which consisted of regular physical and fitness training. LMs in these units mentioned they were responsible for giving clearance to those employees who needed to attend training and for

keeping records on employee attendance at training. LMs in other units, which were not required to perform the training, did not have to undertake this task.

#### **4.3.5 Training.**

LMs' and role evaluators' responses on training differed between units. As mentioned earlier, several units were required to conduct specific training, namely roll call and fitness training, due to their association with local authorities. LMs in these units mentioned their involvement in conducting that training. This differed from other units that did not have the same requirement. LMs in the other units responded:

We don't do training. Our part is to nominate employee who should attend the training offered by the company. (LM 12, Unit 2)

Other than that, LMs in all units were involved in knowledge sharing sessions (KSS), which they believed were good for delivering information from senior management to employees. In KSS employees were also reminded about their KPIs and other company requirements. LMs conducted KSS by themselves without the presence of unit heads. Therefore, the LMs in Airport X believed that conducting KSS was an important task in the training activity, as it would determine information from senior management was clearly delivered to employees.

The types and amount of training offered by the parent company was determined by headquarters, and employees were nominated to attend based on a rotation system. In most cases, LMs said they referred to the training list and nominated employees based on their training record. This understanding was encapsulated in the following statement:

We nominate employee to attend the training offered by the company based on employee training record. Employee who has attended certain training will not attend the training again until everybody in the unit have been nominated. (LM3, Unit 1)

The role evaluators' responses in the training activity differed on a single point: physical and fitness training. They suggested that LMs' involvement in training activities were based on

the unit's requirement. The uniformed units (security and fire and rescue service) needed physical and fitness training as part of their job requirement. LMs in these units were more directly involved in conducting this regular training for employees.

LMs generally agreed that training lists were fixed by headquarters and they only followed what had been provided. However, they had the opportunity to suggest any training necessary for their unit. For half of the LMs, some of the training they thought necessary (and had been conducted prior to privatisation) was not offered any more. LMs made suggestions for the company to offer the same training again, but to date, no further action had been taken by management. In explaining this matter, 10 of the 13 LMs were unsure of the reason for this, but suggested that budgetary factors may be the key contributor to the situation.

#### **4.4 The Intended HRM Role of LMs**

The intended HRM role of the LMs represented a set of behaviours expected from the role evaluators for LMs to contribute to the company goals. The role evaluators' expectations were grouped using Corner and Ulrich's (1996) typology, as presented in Table 6. The role evaluators' expectations fell into the following roles: administrative expert, employee champion or change agent. Although LMs were expected to be involved in all HRM role functions, most role evaluators said that LMs' current performance were identified as two HRM roles, namely the administrative expert and employee champion. Role evaluators had mixed responses to LMs undertaking the change agent role. However, there was agreement that more improvements in performing the change agent role were needed. Detailed information about each of the intended HRM roles perceived by role evaluators are presented below.

Table 6 Intended line managers' HRM role themes at Airport X

No	Themes	Comments from Heads of Unit and HR Representative
1.	Administrative expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administer the work flow</li> <li>• Ensure that the records are up to date</li> <li>• Verify that all information provided by employees in line with the record and evidence; claim for overtime, sick leave and emergency leave record</li> <li>• Monitor employees all the time by monitoring employee attendance</li> <li>• Conduct the performance review sessions three times a year</li> </ul>
2.	Employee champion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LMs are an important intermediary between management and employees because whatever LMs say will influence their staff</li> <li>• LMs ability to communicate messages will determine employee understanding and acceptance on the company's new policy and regulations</li> <li>• LMs should be able to identify employee problems and inform to the top management</li> </ul>
3.	Change agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LMs have an important role in shaping employee attitudes</li> <li>• LMs should be an example to employees</li> <li>• LMs should advise employees before problems get worse</li> <li>• LMs need to think how to cut operational costs</li> <li>• LMs have to deal with employee shortages wisely- reduced overtime</li> <li>• Whatever LMs deliver should in line with company needs</li> <li>• LMs need to be thinking positively no matter what changes happen in the company</li> <li>• LMs have to develop their personality in keeping with the changes in the company</li> <li>• As an intermediary, LMs have to be able to increase satisfaction of both employees and the company</li> <li>• LMs have to support the company goals, not just think about personal benefit</li> <li>• LMs need to contribute to the company, not just make sure the job is done</li> <li>• We don't deny their role but we still can't see any contribution that can add value to the company</li> <li>• LMs rely much on the head of unit</li> </ul>

#### 4.4.1 Administrative expert.

Activities defined by the role evaluators in relation to the administrative expert role consisted of administering work flow and managing documentation of HRM activities. LMs were expected to manage the unit roster, prepare monthly reports, monitor employee leave and conduct performance reviews. These activities were related to two main HRM activities, namely work arrangement and performance management activity. For work arrangement, LMs were involved in managing the monthly roster for the unit to ensure that every shift was



scheduled with a sufficient number of employees. Role evaluators further explained that managing the roster required LMs to manage employee leave accordingly. Therefore, only employee leave applications that were supported by their LMs would be forwarded to unit heads for approval. As a role evaluator commented:

LMs have to plan the monthly roster. At the same time, they have to manage employees' leave accordingly so it won't affect the roster. We just monitor what has been done. (RE 1, Unit 1)

Another role evaluator also mentioned the role of LMs in the work arrangement processes:

They have to monitor employees' overtime and claims. Also in terms of annual leave and sick leave. For some LMs, they will check on whether the medical certificate provided by their employees was tailored with what has been said by the employee. For emergency leave, they make sure that employees have a strong reason to take the leave. (RE 4, Unit 4)

Three of the four role evaluators stated that LMs were responsible for ensuring the information provided by employees in their application was true. This was mentioned in relation to sick and emergency leave applications. Role evaluators agreed that it was important to monitor these records, to ensure employees provided accurate information provided and to avoid fraud. Half of the role evaluators observed that some LMs were very particular about the information given by employees and investigated that information.

Role evaluators said that the same commitment shown by LMs in managing employee leave applications was expected from LMs in managing employee claims. Role evaluators noted that good LMs were the ones who always referred to the HR unit if they were unsure about items in a claim document. Therefore, three of the four role evaluators were confident with the information provided by LMs.

The administrative expert role in relation to LMs conducting performance management review sessions was expressed as follows:

They are responsible to administer the performance management reviews. January is when we set the KPI, LMs are supposed to involve in this process but at this moment I am the one who did that. They also have to conduct the mid-year reviews in July and the last session at the end of the year. (RE 2, Unit 2)

To meet this expectation, role evaluators mentioned that LMs were required to understand the requirements and purpose of each review session before the meeting was held with the employee. A minority of role evaluators stated that some of the expectations were not fulfilled, particularly when KPIs were set at the beginning of the year. As LMs were directly involved with employees, they were expected to identify requirements that may result in more effective work. However, LMs failed to perform this task, instead communicating the KPIs, which had been set by the unit heads. The remaining performance review sessions (mid-year and end-of-year) received positive responses from role evaluators because they believed that LMs had completed those sessions well.

Apart from conducting performance review sessions, all role evaluators also highlighted the need for LMs to prepare documentation for the PMS. This comprised updating the merit and demerit forms, and completing the performance evaluation form. LMs were expected to perform these tasks well, because they were provided with specific training before the new performance system was implemented. Role evaluators concluded there should be no issues for LMs dealing with performance management documentation because the necessary support was already in place.

The ability to manage roster and employee leave allowed LMs to monitor employees at the workplace. This concern was raised in relation to the requirement for LMs to monitor employees in the unit:

In the HR unit, it is difficult for us to monitor all employees because we did not directly in touch with employee work, so we rely on LMs. (RE 4, Unit 4)

This understanding suggested that LMs' administrative expert role was required by Airport X because it allowed the HR unit to monitor the implementation of work processes within units. This ensured that every unit performed accordingly, in support of airport operations. The large number of employees in the airport required the HR unit to rely on LMs to perform this task; it would have been impossible for the HR unit to monitor each and every work flow within units.

In general, although three of the four role evaluators gave positive responses regarding LMs' administrative expert role, they did agree that LMs needed to improve performance and fulfil senior management's expectations. In particular, the company needed to deal with the changing demands of the airport environment. This required LMs to be more flexible and adapt to current needs.

#### **4.4.2 Employee champion.**

Activities defined by the role evaluators entailing interaction between LMs and employees were grouped together and formed the employee champion role for LMs. These activities consisted of acting as an important intermediary between top-level management and employees and responding to employee problems. This is described in the following statement:

LMs are an important intermediary because they are very close with their employees. They spend most of the time with their employees and everything that they said may have a great influence on employees' perception about the company. (RE 3, Unit 3)

For role evaluators, LMs played an important role as an intermediary between senior management and employees, and vice versa. The close relationship between LMs and employees allowed LMs to be a good channel for providing information from top-level

management to employees. This was often expressed in relation to communicating new policies or regulations introduced by the company. Although other approaches were available, including briefings with senior management and posting information on the company website, role evaluators observed that employees rarely referred to those sources and preferred to talk to their LMs. This observation contributed to the perception of the importance of LMs' employee champion role.

While half of the role evaluators mentioned the company's efforts to continuously improve employee satisfaction, some believed that LMs were able to communicate employee's needs or problems to top-level management. Half of the role evaluators suggested this was so because employees were more comfortable talking to LMs about their problems. Moreover, LMs had opportunities to listen to employee problems, because they spent most of their time on site with employees. This enabled LMs to be aware of potential problems that could influence an employee's work and allow him or her to solve the problem immediately.

The employee champion role was said to be important in relation to the attitudes and disciplinary management activity. More than half of the role evaluators believed that the close relationship between LMs and employees enabled LMs to monitor employees' attitudes and guide their commitment to achieving the company's goals. Half of the role evaluators expressed the need for LMs to act professionally rather than trying to hide employee mistakes. They thought LMs should assist the unit heads to develop employees' commitment towards their job and support the unit's operation. This could be done by correcting employee wrongdoing and guiding employee attitudes on the right way to perform their job, based on company policy and regulation. Role evaluators further explained that the company's regulations need to be complied with, regardless of particular situations.

In discussing how LMs could perform their employee champion role better, role evaluators highlighted the need for LMs to manage employee relationship. This was to ensure

that employees respected LMs as leaders and to not take advantage of them. This was described in the following comment:

Some of the LMs were too strict but others can be very friendly. Whatever it is, I told them that the relationship with employees needs to be wisely managed. (RE 1, Unit 1)

Differences among LMs in performing the employee champion role depended upon the LM's personality. Although maintaining a good relationship with employees was regarded as important, role evaluators believed there should be some distance between leaders and their subordinates. This was important to ensure that LMs could influence employees' commitment to their job and the company, through an effective employee champion role.

#### **4.4.3 Change agent.**

Role evaluators expressed the ability to act as a change agent was considered a critical component of the LMs' HRM role. This required LMs to deal with employee shortages, develop ways to cut operational costs and support company goals. Role evaluators related the change agent role with most of the HRM activities involving LMs, except for training. However, there were mixed responses from role evaluators about this LM role.

In terms of work arrangement activity, half of the role evaluators commented on a gap in LMs ability to meet with the role evaluators' expectations:

LMs should know how to cut operational cost because they manage employees in the unit and manage number of employees to work overtime. At this moment, I need to monitor closely about overtime work (OT), if not it will be many OT which can increase operational cost. (RE 1, Unit 1)

For role evaluators, LMs needed to contribute more with managing employee work in the unit, rather than merely ensuring the job had been done. By doing this, LMs would act on their own, instead of relying on unit heads. This related especially to the work arrangement activity, because LMs worked directly with employees. This meant that LMs could think

about better ways for employees to perform their jobs, reducing the need for overtime. While LMs actions may be limited to their own unit, such endeavours may provide a huge influence on the company because the success of the whole operation was dependant on the effectiveness of each unit's operations.

A minority of role evaluators provided positive responses regarding LMs' abilities to make changes to the performance management activity. This is encapsulated in the following statement:

Even though they use the same format prepared by the HR unit, but I can see some improvements in the way they do their work. In some cases, if there is problem with the unit's equipment that affected employee's jobs, usually they have prepared with details information and evidence on the problem before they forward the matter to me.

I think that's a good sign towards a positive attitude. (RE 1, Unit 1)

The ability to shape employees support of company goals was also mentioned in relation to the change agent role of LMs in relation to the reward management activity:

LMs need to understand the company's goals and everything that they do to guide employees achieve their KPI need to be in line with what the company want. No matter what benefit employees get, LMs are responsible to foster a positive attitude among employees towards the company. (RE 3, Unit 3)

According to the role evaluators, this ability was vital in developing employees' appreciation for their company's benefits; it ensured employees did not simply make comparisons with the benefits given by other companies. Employees were more likely to value the rewards and benefits given by the company based on financial remuneration such as bonuses and increment. They did not consider non-monetary benefits, such as job security, employee welfare and job satisfaction. It was LMs' role to bridge this disparity and provide awareness

to employees, so that they valued the rewards given by the company, either in the short or long term.

There were mixed responses to the attitudes and disciplinary management activity. A negative response, which related to LMs' abilities to make changes to this activity, was as outlined below:

When I start working here, I found out that attitudes of some LMs are still like a government servant. Their approach in dealing with employee...they act like a boss but not able to make a quick decision...but at the end of the day, employee will see this and get used to this type of approach. This needs some changes. (RE 2, Unit 2)

Role evaluators believed that LMs should think and act according to company changes. Role evaluators stated when the company privatised, LMs should have expected more challenges in their job, which required greater flexibility. This also meant that LMs should have been prepared to change their attitudes in line with the company's new regulations and procedures. With this vital flexibility, employees were able to reshape their attitudes and understand the new company expectations. Role evaluators considered this ability to be necessary for supporting the company goals, expressed in the following statement:

It is important for LMs to have a good personal attitude because it may influence the way they shape the right attitudes among employees. Their attitudes should always parallel with the company's mission. (RE 3, Unit 3)

While more than half of the role evaluators made negative responses regarding LMs' abilities to make changes, the rest were satisfied with LMs' change agent role in the attitudes and discipline management activity. One role evaluator responded:

I admit that LMs play an important role in shaping employees' attitudes. For me, we don't have problem about that in this airport. (RE 1, Unit 1)

Mixed responses from role evaluators on LMs' change agent role were attributed to differences in key elements used to evaluate the role. Half of the role evaluators assessed LMs' performance based on their ability to perform beyond routine tasks. Meanwhile, other role evaluators concentrated more on how the job was done by LMs; the difference was identified between younger and senior role evaluators. The younger role evaluators' understanding of the change agent role was measured on performing beyond routine tasks, while senior role evaluators concentrated more on the actual job done. Younger role evaluators were classified as managers who were employed after the company had been privatised, and had worked with the company for less than 10 years. Senior role evaluators were the managers who had been with the company for longer, particularly before privatisation. Most senior role evaluators have had a long tenure with the company, where they had been working for more than 30 years.

Findings about the LMs' HRM role, from the perspective of LMs as the role holder, are described in the following section.

#### **4.5 The Actual HRM Role of LMs**

The actual HRM role is a set of behaviours, exhibited by the LMs based on their perception of requirements to perform the HRM role. The HRM activities undertaken by LMs were grouped using Corner and Ulrich's (1996) perceived HRM role function and presented in Table 7. The interviews with LMs revealed that the actual HRM role perceived by LMs fell into two groups of Corner and Ulrich's (1996) typology: administrative expert and employee champion. Results showed LMs did not perform the change agent role because only a minority of LMs related their responsibilities to this role.



Table 7 Actual line managers' HRM role themes at Airport X

No	Themes	Comments from the line managers
1.	Administrative expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using existing formats or refer to other line managers to manage and record employees leave and claims</li> <li>• Develop new formats to manage employee leave</li> <li>• Update employees information and inform the HR department</li> <li>• Inform the HR department if employee are hospitalised and prepare details about the situation</li> <li>• Prepare the monthly report</li> <li>• Update the merit and demerit forms</li> <li>• Manage the performance evaluation review and documentation</li> <li>• Monitor and record employee attendance</li> <li>• React to any work needs</li> </ul>
2.	Employee champion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build good relationships with employees</li> <li>• Spend time with employees to understand their problems</li> <li>• Get to know employees and their family to identify employee problems</li> </ul>
3.	Change agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advise employee on their work and performance in line with the company goals</li> </ul>

#### 4.5.1 Administrative expert.

LMs defined their administrative expert role as documenting HRM processes and reacting to any work required to complete HRM processes. LMs saw themselves in the administrative expert role in relation to most HRM activities in which they were involved. The most often mentioned HRM activity associated with the administrative expert role was the work arrangement activity. The following quote summarises LMs' experience in performing the administrative expert role in the work arrangement activity:

I can decide not to approve employee leave, but for emergency leave I have to study the case (to ensure employee really has a strong reason to take leave)... We can release employees from the work station if they have to attend any physical and fitness training and keep the record, so that we can monitor where they are and what are they doing....we also responsible to update employee personal information... We plan for the roster and manning... As a LM, we have to submit the monthly reports to the head of unit. (LM 4, Unit 1)

LMs' involvement in HRM processes meant they saw their administrative expert role as important to the work arrangement activity. Nine of the 13 LMs believed that the unit heads relied on them for managing all documentation and ensuring process continuity. In managing the documentation, these LMs stated that they often used existing formats prepared by the HR unit. Only a minority of LMs developed new formats, indicating LMs' preferences to follow routine rather than developing more other processes to manage HRM activities. However, all LMs agreed that information regarding HRM activities in the unit were important because this information needed to be delivered to the unit heads for further action. This related to decisions made by the unit heads regarding HRM issues. Some of the information was forwarded directly to the HR unit for their attention and action. This was mentioned in relation to the employee welfare, such as hospitalisation and employee benefits.

LMs also saw their administrative expert role in the performance management activity. Nine of the 13 LMs were concerned about the role of merit and demerit forms in employee performance evaluations, because of the effect on the performance evaluation result. For this reason, LMs mentioned that they updated employee merit and demerit forms carefully, so that they would not affect employee satisfaction regarding the company PMS.

LMs also associated this task with the attitudes and disciplinary management activity. This was expressed in relation to the content of these forms, which reflected employees' attitudes and discipline at work, as they addressed the company's performance targets. For instance, if LMs identified problems in employee attitudes, immediate action was taken to make the employee aware of the wrong attitudes and remedy the situation. After that, LMs observed the results from the initial action; if they satisfied with the improvement made by the employee, no record was made on the demerit form. However, if there was no improvement after the first advice, LMs were responsible for recording that in the demerit form. LMs

believed that merit and demerit forms needed wise management to give employees opportunities to be made aware of, and correct, their mistakes.

Almost one third of LMs associated the administrative expert role with attitudes and disciplinary management and with monitoring and documenting employee attendance. The following statement addressed this:

We can monitor employee attendance because we have a roll call and we keep record for every session. So, if any employee absent for the roll call for the first time we will call them and ask why they absent. If it happens again and again after we've call, then I'll issue a show cause letter. (LM 6, Unit 3)

This response was expressed by LMs who were responsible for regular physical or fitness training required for their units. LMs in these units were responsible for noting employee attendance at every training session. As this training was a requirement for the unit, LMs emphasised the importance of attending this training as part of an employee's tasks. LMs in the other units kept records of employee attendance through morning briefing sessions and regular inspections of employee work stations. This ensured that every work station was occupied with a sufficient number of employees, based on the roster. The record was used to monitor employee availability during working hours, which was part of employee performance evaluation.

The administrative expert role was also associated with responding to the unit's work needs. When discussing this, LMs mentioned that apart from managing the documentation, they were responsible for informing the unit heads about the need for equipment or any issues that affected employee performance. LMs expressed that the ability to identify the unit's work needs was based on their understanding of the unit's function, and the nature of their work, which directly related to employees' work. This was often mentioned in relation to the

introduction of a new policy or work system by senior management, which required specific equipment or infrastructure to realise those policies and systems in the unit.

LMs agreed that the administrative expert role was important, as top-level management depended on the records and documentation to perform HRM activities for the units.

#### **4.5.2 Employee champion**

The employee champion role included activities such as building good relationships with employees by listening to their problems, and increasing employee commitment to their work by providing necessary assistance. These activities were mentioned in relation to two main HRM activities: attitudes and disciplinary management, and the performance management activity.

For attitudes and disciplinary management, LMs agreed that good relationships with employees helped them build employee trust, which encouraged employees to approach them when problems arose. According to LMs, this helped to manage employee attitudes and discipline because it prevented employees from making mistakes that affected their attitude towards their job. A LM stated:

Sometimes, I don't give much pressure to my staff but just joking with them on what they did...indirectly they realise they make mistakes. I do it that way so it will be much easier for them to accept our advice and never reluctance to see us again whenever they have problems. (LM 13, Unit 2)

Although 10 of the 13 LMs admitted that the HR unit knew more about HRM policies and procedures, when it came to managing employee problems, LMs believed that they performed better as they worked directly with employees. Ten of the 13 LMs also agreed that their understandings of the unit, and their closeness with employees enabled them to respond to

employee problems accordingly. They could give advice or forward problems to the unit heads if they were not able to handle the problem. One LM responded:

This is my personal view since I've started from the bottom before being a LM...all matters regarding the managing employee problem cannot be passed to the HR people. They don't know about employees...the leader (LM) knows their employees better than anybody else. This should be continued as it is. (LM 11, Unit 2)

Out of the total 13 LMs, 10 LMs indicated that one way to build a good relationship with employees was to get to know them better:

Sometimes, we have a chat with employees. Ask about their family, their children. At least they know that we care. From there, if they have any problem, they will come to us. Then, we'll try to solve the problem and help them. By doing this, employees show more respect and it is easier for them to accept our instructions. Actually, we are like a family. (LM 3, Unit 1)

According to LMs, this relationship was useful for identifying and solving problems immediately. Often, LMs noted their assistance with problems came in the form of advice. This advice was offered by LMs because they knew the work situation and had been in similar situations. If LMs identified a serious problem, they were responsible for forwarding the problem to the unit heads before it worsened.

LMs perceived their employee champion role in the performance management activity as follows:

Employees are afraid of us because of the PMS. That's why it is much easier for them to follow our advice, especially when they realise that we know much about them. (LM 1, Unit 1)

LMs believed that their ability to increase employee commitment towards the job was mainly due to their involvement in performance management activity. As employees' actions were

monitored by their LMs, advice was more easily accepted. Moreover, LMs were responsible for guiding employee work and performance by delivering messages from senior management to ensure that employees were clear about company expectations of their work performance.

Overall, LMs agreed that they performed their employee champion role according to their experience. LMs also noted that they rarely referred to the HR unit in performing tasks for their employee champion role, because they received good support from the unit head.

#### **4.5.3 Change agent.**

LMs did not understand that perform the change agent role was part of their role. The main factor here related to their limited involvement in HRM activities. Eleven of the 13 LMs believed that although they had been involved in most HRM activities, unit heads were responsible for final decisions. Only four out of 13 LMs felt they were responsible for making decisions on HRM related issues at the operational level. This resulted from an understanding that the unit heads have a lot of work to do; these LMs believed they should assist tackling smaller issues that would not affect the operation as a whole.

Generally, LMs viewed their HRM role as providing input and information to the heads of unit and HR representatives for further action. A LM responded:

We don't involve in the decision making process, we just provide the related information to the head of unit or HR unit. (LM 5, Unit 3)

Eleven of the 13 LMs perceived themselves as administrators, and therefore they only followed decisions made by their superiors. The remaining LMs mentioned their initiatives to support the company change programme, and this was particularly related to efforts to improve employee attitudes towards the unit's jobs. This was mentioned in the following statement:

I think we can help company to achieve the mission. Number one is from our character. We have to show our employees that we are working in line with the

company rules and regulations. If there is resistance from employees on the company policy, we need to change ourselves and prove to employees that whatever happens, we need to obey to the policies. (LM 13, Unit 2)

In terms of attitudes towards changes, 10 of the 13 LMs adapted to the changes, although this was limited to their individual sense of achievement, and not to employees, the unit or the company. Eleven of the 13 LMs mentioned that they could not overrule their unit head, and every action was considered after consulting with their head. This was a key factor affecting LMs' attitudes toward change and they were more comfortable doing what they were asked to do by top management.

While the actual implementation of LMs may have been influenced by certain factors, interviews explored the challenges faced by LMs in performing their HRM role. This is discussed in the next section.

#### **4.6 LMs' Challenges to Performing their HRM Role**

Challenges in performing the HRM role have been grouped into five categories: desire, capacity, competencies, support, and HRM policy and procedures. Surprisingly, the majority of LMs revealed they did not have any major challenges in performing their HRM role. Their confidence to resolve problems during the implementation of their HRM role was expressed in relation to their experience with the company and employees. The remaining LMs highlighted two factors that hindered their implementation: support, and policy and procedures, as shown in Table 8. Moreover, a minority of LMs also voiced weaknesses in the working environment, associated with a lack of infrastructure required to implement new HRM policy. Each challenge is presented in the following section.

Table 8 Comments on challenges at Airport X

Factors	Comments from line managers
Desire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Never view difficulties in performing the HRM role as a burden</li> <li>• Take the HRM role as part of the responsibility for the company</li> </ul>
Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to manage time to perform all tasks</li> <li>• HRM tasks are manageable although situations keep changing</li> <li>• Rely greatly on experience</li> </ul>
Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rely on experience and observation from previous leader</li> <li>• Continuously updated the HRM knowledge to perform better</li> <li>• Take initiative to learn and further study to increase knowledge and skills</li> </ul>
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good support from the head of unit and HR unit</li> <li>• Good support from colleagues</li> <li>• Get assistance from employees to manage the operational tasks, but never pass the HRM tasks to employees</li> <li>• Sometimes the feedback from the HR unit is slow</li> <li>• The problem to manage HRM tasks comes from employees themselves</li> <li>• The feedback from the HR unit is inconsistent; certain people may get faster feedback compared to others</li> <li>• Some of the top management expectations were delivered indirectly or unclear; it is based on LMs own understanding and situations</li> <li>• Some of the approaches used to communicate with senior LMs are not suitable</li> </ul>
Policy and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The policies are all good, the only thing is on the implementation part: slow, no budget</li> <li>• Training policy: the rotation system takes time to get employees to the needed training, insufficient training for HRM</li> <li>• Lack of infrastructure; some of the policies should not be implemented because there is not enough infrastructure at the site</li> <li>• Lack of observation; some work designs are not observed, the responsible persons to manage certain areas are not doing their job</li> <li>• Favouritism; the implementation of the policies are not consistent</li> <li>• Inconsistent practices; the implementation of the policies differ based on individual understanding</li> <li>• Communication breakdown; message is not received by LMs when the shift changes</li> <li>• Transparency in the performance evaluation; clear and consistent processes of assessing employees' performance</li> <li>• Budget; some of the HR initiatives were postponed due to financial constraints, affected employees' motivation</li> </ul>

#### 4.6.1 Desire.

Overall responses towards LMs' desire to perform the HRM role were positive. LMs' willingness and commitment to perform the HRM role were expressed in words used as well as excitement in their voices when discussing their stories. This included the stories of improvements in both the unit and the whole company, and the support they had received



from their unit head. According to LMs, these factors contributed to their willingness to accept the HRM role as part of their responsibilities. LMs gained much experience working with the company and expressed their gratitude for being part of the company. This was the main factor that influenced their commitment to the HRM role. Indeed, LMs highlighted the benefits of working in the company compared with people struggling to find a job. LMs mentioned this in relation to the recent Malaysian job climate where opportunities were limited. For this reason, LMs viewed the challenges in performing the HRM role as part of their responsibility, instead of a burden hindering them from a full commitment. One LM responded:

Whatever difficulty we face, I know it is my job. I'll give my best to perform my responsibility (LM 13, Unit 2)

One third of LMs said their commitment to their HRM role was influenced by the attitudes of their unit head; they were very responsive to employee needs. The actions and efforts of their unit head ensured that LMs were provided with the necessary support to perform their HRM role. Thus, the unit heads' attitudes contributed to an increase job commitment and satisfaction. By mirroring the positive attitudes of unit heads, LMs were motivated to perform their HRM role to the best of their capabilities.

#### **4.6.2 Capacity.**

In terms of time provided for LMs to manage their HRM role, all LMs agreed that they did not have any problems. They had the ability to organise their work and perform tasks based on priorities. LMs stated:

We still can manage our time. During night shift we have more time because usually only few aircrafts landed at night compared to a day time. So, we can plan our work and settle our HRM related tasks. Thus, although we may be a bit busy with the

operational tasks during a day shift, it will be no problem for us because we already settled our HRM tasks during night shift. (LM 3, Unit 1)

HRM is not a problem for me to handle. I can do it well. Even if I struggle with so many works to do, I know what should be my priority. (LM 10, Unit 2)

The ability of LMs to identify work priorities based on the shift they were working allowed them to manage HRM related tasks well. Although in a day shift they were more likely to face operational tasks, this situation did not hinder them from completing HRM tasks. LMs mentioned that during night shifts they concentrated more on documentation and the completion of HRM tasks, as fewer operational tasks were necessary. The number of flights landing in the airport differed according to the time of day, which also contributed to this situation.

Eleven of the 13 LMs indicated that operational and HRM tasks were given the same priority, because these tasks were interdependent. Only a minority of LMs gave more emphasis to operational tasks compared to HRM matters. Although there were constant changes occurring in the parent company, which affected the system and management approaches in the airport, all LMs felt that their HRM tasks remained manageable. This was in relation to their experience working with the company, which had enabled them to perform work accordingly.

#### **4.6.3 Competencies.**

Experience was valued highly by LMs, as they all expressed similar opinions when discussing the competencies required for the HRM role. In addition to long tenure, LMs noted that the valuable experience they gained from observing the way their former leaders performed the HRM role provided guidance in dealing with HRM issues. Other LMs noted that their HRM skill and knowledge was gathered from their own studies. This effort and initiative helped LMs update their knowledge and develop their confidence to deal with HRM

issues in line with company changes. Although the parent company offered training for employees every year, there was a strong consensus among LMs that HRM training was insufficient. For that reason, a minority of them took their own initiative and registered with external courses at their own expense. In the words of LMs:

I learn through my own effort. There are a lot of reference and sources that we can get the new knowledge. The company only offered the basic courses. So, I need to learn by myself if I want to know more. (LM 13, Unit 2)

I request to attend more HRM courses, but sometimes they (the airport management) allow and sometimes not, because it depends on availability and rotation. So, those courses that they did not support, I will pay by myself. (LM 5, Unit 3)

According to these LMs, money was not an issue because the knowledge they gained from attending the additional courses (other than those offered by the company) was valuable to help them better perform their HRM role. They added that this effort gave them more satisfaction in performing their HRM role because they used the knowledge they learnt in practice.

#### **4.6.4 Support.**

In discussing support, two issues were revealed. First, although LMs were satisfied with the support given from the unit heads, interviews revealed differences in responses between older and younger unit heads. LMs supervised by older unit heads were satisfied with the support of their superiors because they were trusted to manage employees in the unit. However, over half of the LMs with younger unit heads were less satisfied with the management approach practiced by their superior, especially in regard to their communication style. According to these LMs, their superiors were unlikely to value their experience as a senior employee but were proud of their high qualifications. In some cases, this situation

created misunderstanding and dissatisfaction among LMs, as they believed in the value of their experience in performing their tasks.

According to LMs, the age gap between them and their unit head caused some differences in perceptions of how a job should be done. The younger unit heads were more likely to refer to the guidelines and expected more formality in dealing with employee issues. In contrast, the senior LMs preferred informal approaches to their HRM role. This situation sometimes caused a communication breakdown between LMs and their younger unit heads. When this situation happened, LMs reactions depended on their individual understandings and personal experience, which they believed most efficient in dealing with issues.

Second, almost one third of the LMs identified weaknesses of support due to dissatisfaction with the HR unit. The dissatisfaction was caused by slow and inconsistent feedback from the HR unit on certain procedures that were necessary for LMs to perform their HRM role well. This was often mentioned in relation to policy implementation, as described in the next section. For instance, delayed actions of HR staff affected LMs' ability to perform their job, and employees felt dissatisfied. This was particularly with tasks that required LMs to cooperate with the HR unit to ensure processes, such as managing employee needs, claims and welfare, were completed. A problem in HR could affect the whole process, and LMs bore the consequences as they worked with the employees on the process outcomes.

#### **4.6.5 HRM policy and procedures.**

Ten of the 13 LMs were unsure about judging the use of HRM policy and procedures in performing their HRM role. However, there was agreement among LMs that policies were merely guidelines, and their actions could be flexible and situationally-based. Only a minority of LMs said they depended on policy to perform their HRM role. Ten of the 13 LMs observed that HRM policy and procedures hindered performance of their HRM role. This was particularly so with the performance management activity. While a new PMS was well

accepted by employees, understanding of the system differed between LMs, which resulted in implementation inconsistencies. LMs compared how they implemented the system in relation to how other LMs evaluated employees in the unit. This was described by one LM:

Some people don't even care about the guidelines, instead they just give marks based on what they think is right. (LM 12, Unit 2)

According to LMs, individual understandings contradicted the guidelines given by the company. This caused inconsistencies in PMS implementation. Problems occurred when employees compared evaluations performed by different LMs. As a result, some employees expressed their dissatisfaction with the performance evaluation process because they believed it was unfair and inconsistent.

Others mentioned dissatisfaction regarding procedures for bonuses payment:

I think the main problem in performance management is during bonuses payment, I think the company is not that transparent in the sense that they reward employees. You have given them the point and then only you come out with the graft of how you reward them. I think the graft should come first, you should set the graft first and if let say I've got 90%, so I look at the graft and directly I know how much bonuses I will get for this year. Right now, we see the results first and only the graft comes out.

Another thing, they set like 80-88% will get the same reward. It may be good for those who got at the minimum rate, but it may slowly destroy the spirit of those who get the 88% because it is not easy to get 88% but at the end of the day you realise that you get the same as people who don't put such effort like you. (LM 12, Unit 2)

For LMs, the company's PMS could be improved as it influenced employee satisfaction at work. Although each LM believed they had followed policy, the processes involved in implementing the policy were sometimes unclear. As employees realised that LMs were

responsible for evaluating their performance, they simply blamed LMs instead of accepting that LMs had performed the process based on the company's policy.

The inconsistency in feedback received from management and the HR unit also contributed to the perception that HRM policy and procedures were a hindrance to performing the HRM role. As LMs were responsible for managing employees in their unit, and for delivering necessary information to the HR unit, they expected the necessary support to be in place to effectively perform the role. However, their job was often affected by slow and inconsistent feedback from management. For instance, while LMs believed they had given the necessary information to the HR unit for certain processes, the feedback they received was inconsistent with the request they had made:

We already submit the right sizes of our employees' uniform, but sometimes they (HR unit) gave the wrong sizes to us. So that means we have to send it back and make a new request. It means that employees need to wait longer. (LM 10, Unit 2)

While LMs tried to improve employee satisfaction by responding to employee needs in time, the slow and inconsistent feedback from HR affected their efforts. If the response provided by the HR unit was consistent, it was easier for them to explain the process to employees, rather than to let employees wait for outcomes of which they were uncertain.

#### **4.6.6 Work environment.**

Several LMs added another factor that influenced their HRM role implementation: the work environment. LMs referred to this in relation to a lack of infrastructure and equipment for the implementation of new policy or approaches. LMs felt ineffective when implementing policies. In some cases, although management had decided to implement new work approaches in the airport, it could not be implemented because there was no equipment available on site. This caused problems for LMs because the introduction of any new system was followed by evaluation and feedback regarding the system outcomes. LMs could be seen

to have failed in implementing the new system because they could not really implement it.

One LM stated:

I remember at one time the HR unit want to introduce a new way of managing employee leave by using different colour of forms for different type of leave. But sadly we were not provided with the sufficient colour paper at the unit. At the end of the day, we've got headache because all the record jumbled and we get back to the previous system. It's not that we resist changes, but you have to make sure that the necessary equipment was in place before the new policy can be implemented. (LM 10, Unit 2)

While LMs supported the company's effort to improve airport operations management (specifically in implementing more effective ways to manage HR), they mentioned that senior management had to ensure that necessary infrastructure and equipment was in place for effective policy implementation. The pressure would be on LMs, as they were the intermediaries between top-level management and employees.

#### **4.7 The Role of HRM Policies and Practices**

Interviews discussing HRM policies and practices aimed to capture LMs' perceptions how effective those policies and practices were. Comments on the company's HRM policies and practices are illustrated in Table 9. Generally, LMs understood the company's HRM policies and practices to consist of: job description, training, rewards and benefits, and work design. Positive responses were reported on two HRM policies and practices: reward and benefits, and work design. Job description and training received negative responses. The results of each HRM policies and practices are presented below.

Table 9 Comments on HRM policies and practices at Airport X

Factors	Comments from line managers	Participants' percentage (%)
Job description	• Did not include information about HRM role	46
	• Only as a guideline because the information about the HRM role is provided in general	54
	• No manual for HRM role	38
	• CA (collective agreement) was referred for related matters such discipline and benefits	23
	• Rarely referred to the work manual or SOP, perform HRM role through experience	38
Training	• Training is sufficient	15
	• Training is insufficient specifically in HRM	54
	• Training is provided by rotation; have to wait, not updated	31
	• Take initiative to learn and develop the HRM skills	23
Rewards	• The same post, but differs in grade based on airports; unfair, the higher the grade, the better the salary is	8
	• The new grade (16) has been introduced since the last two years to recognise the LMs	23
	• The only problem is during bonuses payment; the company is not transparent enough to reward employees' contribution	8
	• Welcome if the company want to review the salary based on the contribution	62
Work design		38
	• Delegates some of works to the employees	46
	• Number of employees are under control	62

#### 4.7.1 Job description.

There was an understanding among LMs on the use of job description as a general document to show their responsibilities. However, eight of the 13 LMs admitted they rarely referred to this document in performing their HRM role. Instead, most of the time LMs relied on their experience to assist with HRM related tasks. LM mentioned:

Yes, we have job description as a guideline, but it just in general. Usually we refer to our experience and friends. (LM 6, Unit 3)

Two main factors contributed to LMs not using job descriptions to guide the HRM role implementation. The first was associated with LMs' perceptions that information about their HRM role was not included in their job description:



I think almost all tasks that related with managing employees were not included in the JD. (LM 11, Unit 2)

According to LMs, the information provided in the job description reflected operational tasks. They only became aware of their HRM role through instructions from the unit heads and observations from their former supervisor.

Second, more than half the LMs noted that the information about their HRM role was general. LMs mentioned that a brief statement about the tasks they should perform did not assist them in understanding *how* the task should be completed. Therefore, it was not surprising to find that LMs struggled to answer the question regarding the job description's assistance in performing their HRM role. This was evident from comments such as:

I think it is quite helpful...but sometimes I found it unclear. (LM 8, Unit 3)

Even though JD is explained in general, but there is one clause (subject to the latest instructions from management). So, you like it or not...there it is... (LM 11, Unit 2)

Overall responses about job descriptions showed that all LMs understood job descriptions were documents about work and tasks, relative to the position. However, 11 of the 13 LMs greatly relied on their experience in performing the HRM role. In addition, LMs mentioned they referred to other documents, such as the SOP and collective agreements (CA) in dealing with employee issues. These documents provided more information to assist them with some HRM processes and guide their role implementation, when compared to information in the job description.

#### **4.7.2 Training.**

The question about training elicited negative responses. LMs expressed that the training offered by the parent company did not assist them in understanding the HRM role expectations. This dissatisfaction was caused by two factors. First, the dissatisfaction was related to the amount of HRM training offered by the company. Only a minority of LMs

suggested the training provided was sufficient. Eleven of the 13 LMs were dissatisfied with the training as no specific training related to HRM was provided. Most training focused more on technical matters, related to their operational tasks. This was summarised by one LM as:

There are no such courses provided by the company related to the management of human resources. We were put in our position to do our job. (LM 12, Unit 2)

This meant that LMs performed their HRM role based on personal experience and reference to other LMs' implementation. Apart from that, understandings about their HRM role expectations were gathered from feedback given by unit heads or other top airport management.

Second, dissatisfaction was caused by the rotation system in nominating employees for training. Through this system, those LMs who had attended the training had to wait until all employees were nominated. While there was need for LMs to update their HRM knowledge continuously, they felt they were left behind as they had to wait for their turn. In the words of two LMs:

I have attended the courses 2 years ago, but until now there are no other courses that I can attend because we have to wait until everybody has attended the courses. So, if there are additional inputs or knowledge in this year courses, I will never know. (LM 5, Unit 3)

I've not been nominated to attend the management courses yet. Usually, they will rotate so I have to wait for my turn. But others may have attended the courses. (LM 4, Unit 1)

LMs who never had training opportunities were more likely to perform their role based on experience and their individual understanding of the HRM expectations based on feedback from unit heads.

Some participants discussed the training that had been offered before the company was privatised. Interestingly, over half of the LMs suggested that training should be updated as it had been very useful:

I used to attend more training courses before (privatisation)...I think those courses are very good in terms of knowledge and skills. I think the new people now don't know much about how to do their job well because they miss such courses. (LM 13, Unit 2)

The content of the previous training was considered beneficial to the HRM role's implementation. LMs expressed this when reflecting on new LMs, who did not know much about doing their job. LMs said that senior LMs performed better because they had been provided with more relevant training. This was identified as contributing to a higher commitment among senior employees compared to new employees.

Although the training provided was insufficient, 11 of the 13 LMs still valued their experience of the HRM role. They suggested that formal training would help them perform better in new environments, particularly when dealing with new employees' attitudes, which differed from those of senior employees. One LM responded:

I think there are a lot of things (new knowledge) we need to learn. The management should offer more courses because it will help us much in this new situation. (LM 7, Unit 3)

LMs understood the new workplace environment provided challenges regarding the HRM role, particularly when dealing with different employee attitudes. According to LMs, this perception came from their own experience working with employees of different backgrounds and ages. As each employee held different expectations of the LM, they each required different skills.

#### 4.7.3 Rewards and benefits.

In discussing rewards and benefits, a majority of LMs were satisfied with what they received from the company. Their satisfaction was often expressed in relation to their Islamic values that emphasised gratitude for the gift received. LMs believed everything they received was a reward for their hard work and sincerity. This was evident in the following statements:

If you want to talk about enough or not, people will never say enough. But for me, Alhamdulillah (praise to God)...I feel grateful of what the company gave to me. I do the best to perform my job and I believe it will be paid. (LM 10, Unit 2)

I am grateful of the salary I've received. I realise that when I've been promoted as a LM, of course it comes with greater responsibility than before. (LM 7, Unit 3)

Other responses about rewards were expressed in relation to gratitude felt for what the company offered and how this related to their qualifications. Previously, the company had required lower qualifications than the current requirement for an employee to hold their position. As the selection processes for joining the company was very competitive, LMs mentioned that the current qualifications set by the company were higher and in line with the increased educational background of applicants. LM responded:

Alhamdulillah (praise to God)...I am grateful of what I've got from the company compare to my qualification. I enter this company only with the secondary school qualification, with the same qualification now, I don't know where I'll end up. (LM 13, Unit 2)

LMs gratefulness was translated through their loyalty to the company. For this reason, they viewed every task given to them as part of their responsibility. LMs suggested they were committed to performing well to repay the debt. However, half of the LMs stated that understandings about the rewards may differ in new employees, who appeared to seek the best

opportunity offered in the job market. This happened because new employees had higher qualifications than older employees.

LMs indicated that the company had taken care of their welfare, and much had been improved. One of the efforts was upgrading LMs' grade from Grade 14 to Grade 16 to recognise their role in the company. LMs believed that this upgrade was awarded to them because of increased responsibility for airport management, including their role managing employees in the unit. Following this upgrade, their salary also increased:

Grade 16 is actually a new grade created for LMs from the Grade 14. So, we are actually the pioneer. If I am not mistaken, this new grade is only been introduced last two years. (LM 11, Unit 2)

LMs believed the new grade meant they had made an important contribution to the company. Moreover, with the new grade, employees showed more respect, as the position was now recognised at the company level.

Other than salary, LMs said that the company had provided employees with bonuses, medical benefits and encouragement for career advancement. Employees who intended to further their studies were entitled to financial assistance for their study fees (provided that they furthered their studies at the university which collaborated with the company) and exam leave. These benefits were viewed as part of the company's encouragement for employees and their career development. Three of the four LMs who furthered their studies, enrolled in management or business administration courses.

LMs were relatively satisfied with what they currently received from the company. However, LMs satisfaction regarding rewards and benefits did not give an understanding of their contribution of the HRM role. Instead, most LMs perceived the company's acknowledgement was to value their overall contribution, including both operational and HRM roles.

#### **4.7.4 Work structure.**

The role of HRM policies and practices was also expressed through the airport's work structure design. LMs' understanding of work structure was related to the delegation of work and the number of employees they supervised.

In discussing work delegation, LMs mentioned the working system implemented at the airport. There was agreement that working on a shift hour basis was appropriate. As LMs were responsible for airport operations at all times, 11 of the 13 LMs agreed their current working hours facilitated this responsibility. However, problems arose when the working systems differed between LMs and airport management. This difference resulted in a communication breakdown, especially as they were intermediaries between management and employees. One LM stated:

The problem of working in shift hour is because every two days the shift changed. When you off from work, usually you don't see your email. So, if any urgent matter required your attention first thing on the next day you start your new shift, you will never know. Sometimes, we have meeting or management want any report, so they will think that you are absent because you are not committed. It will affect our performance. (LM 10, Unit 2)

Top management worked normal working hours; LMs faced some challenges in keeping track of senior management requirements, as LMs worked on a shift hour basis. The challenges were expressed in relation to the information sent by top management during their days off. LMs mentioned their rest days may be on week days, and depended on their shifts. Problems occurred when they did not have access to email on days off, as most of them did not have internet access at home. If management sent any information during LMs' days off, they missed the information. A minority of LMs voiced their concern that this communication breakdown may have affected their HRM role performance; there were cases when LMs only

found out about a meeting with management after the meeting had been held. LMs further added that although they justified their absence to management, this was not accepted because management assumed everyone had email access at all times. In dealing with this situation, LMs cooperated with each other. As the email was sent to all LMs, those who were on duty when information was delivered ensured that their colleagues were informed. One LM explained:

Although during off time we won't get access to our email, but fortunately all my colleagues are very helpful and we help each other. If I am off that day but there is important email which requires my immediate attention, my friend will directly call me. (LM 12, Unit 2)

In terms of the number of employees under their supervision, 11 of the 13 LMs thought the numbers were reasonable and easily controlled. The current number of employees was manageable as LMs had enough time to monitor all employees under their supervision and administer the HR related tasks.

Due to increased workloads, almost half of the LMs delegated some of their tasks to their employees, to ensure that all work was under control:

In this unit, we can appoint the senior employees to cover certain tasks if we've lot of things to do. But we still monitor. If we want to focus on our performance management review, we will ask the senior employee to conduct the fitness training. Since this training is our routine activity, so there will be no problem for them to take over. (LM 3, Unit 1)

Generally, there was strong agreement among LMs that employees were cooperative, which made their HRM tasks more manageable. This was often expressed in relation to the close relationships among employees and unit leasers; thus, employees never refused to perform

tasks delegated to them. Therefore, LMs believed that the airports' work structure implemented assisted them in understanding their HRM role expectations.

The following section presents the findings that relate to LMs' and role evaluators' perceptions of the LMs' HRM role, its definition and enactment.

#### 4.8 The Company's HRM Effectiveness

Role evaluators identified four areas of HRM services that influenced HRM effectiveness: the HR unit, employees, unit operation and value adding. LMs' HRM role contribution to HRM effectiveness was determined by their ability to enact the role and to provide services to these areas. Role evaluators' comments on LMs' current abilities in the HRM service areas are illustrated in Table 10. An explanation of each HRM services areas are given in the next section.

Table 10 Comments on LMs' performance in HR service areas at Airport X

HR services areas	Comments from role evaluators
HR unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Record is updated</li> <li>HR unit referred to some good format developed by LMs</li> <li>HR unit rely heavily on LMs to administer HRM processes at the unit level</li> <li>HR may not able to monitor all employees, this has been done by LMs</li> </ul>
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive impact to employees' attitudes</li> <li>The LM's HRM role is important as they are working 24 hours and able to monitor employees all the times</li> <li>Some information is not delivered to all employees</li> <li>Sometimes received complaints from employees</li> </ul>
Unit operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lots of initiatives from LMs in the operation, the only thing is budget</li> <li>Hard to see their contribution when the operation is smooth or as usual</li> <li>When problem arise, LMs rely on the senior manager rather than their own initiatives</li> <li>Often wait for the senior manager's response on the problem</li> <li>Difficult to see the LM's contribution in day to day activities as LMs did the repetitive tasks</li> </ul>
Value added	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depends on individual, not all LMs have put on initiatives and do more</li> <li>No formal mechanism is developed to measure their contribution</li> <li>Difficult to see their contribution to the company</li> <li>Lack sense of belongingness to the company influence their attitude towards their job and the company</li> </ul>



#### **4.8.1 HR unit.**

Three of the four role evaluators suggested the main focus of LMs' HRM role was to assist HR representatives in managing HR related matters. These role evaluators stated that the HR unit was unable to directly manage HRM processes in all units. Role evaluators believed that LMs played an important role in ensuring the continuity of processes involved in HRM activities, enabling the HR unit to administer HRM functions for the whole airport. Services provided to the HR unit were the only area that received positive feedback from the role evaluators. Role evaluators recognised LMs as a support role to the HR unit's functions.

For role evaluators, LM's HRM role entailed activities such as updating employee record, monitoring employees' performance and administering processes of certain HRM activities at the unit level. As one LM expressed:

LMs play an important role to support HR unit because they are working 24 hours a day. HR unit is operating only during office hours. Their influence is huge because they can monitor employees' performance all the times. (RE2, Unit 2)

The above statement is strongly supported by a HR representative's comment:

Their role is really important. In the HR unit, we don't directly attach with individual employees in all units, but LMs did. They administer everything about their employees including attendance, attitudes and etc. (RE 4, Unit 4)

There was an agreement among role evaluators that the HR function could be affected if LMs were not involved in HRM activities. This was expressed in relation to LMs' roles as intermediaries facilitating HRM processes and delivering information from management. Although LMs did not have authority for decision making, their HRM role was important to ensure the completion of HRM processes, which influenced the effectiveness of the whole HRM system. Three of the four role evaluators believed that the closeness between LMs and employees in the unit contributed to their ability to disseminate information from

management to employees better than the HR unit alone. This was viewed as part of LMs' contribution to support the HR unit's function, because they ensured that employees were kept well informed.

Based on their observations, three of the four role evaluators indicated that LMs played their role well in supporting the HR unit function. For a minority of role evaluator, the performance of LMs was also determined by complaints received from employees. To date, role evaluators stated that only a few complaints were received from employees, and those complaints did not cause any severe problems.

#### **4.8.2 Employees.**

According to role evaluators, LMs could make an important contribution to HRM effectiveness by providing HRM services to employees, being the closest leaders to employees in the unit. As they worked closely with employees, LMs were likely to influence employees' perceptions, both of their jobs and also the company. This was necessary for improvements to people management. In particular, this was true regarding their role as intermediaries between top management and employees, and vice versa. LMs were best placed to disseminate information from management to employees. As LMs worked directly with employees, they were the best people who could provide information about those employees: LMs understood them. Through these functions, role evaluators believed that LMs made a valuable contribution to HRM effectiveness regarding employees.

However, there were mixed responses on LMs' current performance in providing HRM services to employees. Half of the role evaluators indicated a positive effect on employees' attitudes, as they linked LMs' HRM role in this area with their responsibility to monitor employees constantly. One role evaluator responded:

They are flexible...they know how to perform their job and I can see the positive impact to the employees they supervised. (RE 3, Unit 3)

For these role evaluators, LMs had performed their HRM role well and this could be seen from changes in employees' attitudes.

The rest of role evaluators gave more natural responses than others:

It depends. There are LMs that have improved because we can see their own initiatives in dealing with employees. Some are static, nothing much that we can see. If they don't know the process before, they still don't know until now. But I think, there is no LM who shows a bad performance. (RE 4, Unit 4)

This response indicated inconsistencies between LMs' performances, which affected the understanding of their contributions to employees in the airport. This situation also demonstrated that role evaluators expected more uniform performance from LMs, so that their contribution could more clearly achieve HRM effectiveness.

Even though role evaluators noted that complaints from employees were rare, they agreed that LMs needed to improve their knowledge and skills in dealing with employees. This would enhance employees' commitment and attitudes towards their job and the company. They mentioned this in relation to the new challenges facing LMs with the diverse workforce of the airport environment. New employees who joined the airport may bring their own attitudes and a different culture, requiring leaders to prepare themselves in dealing with the new employee expectations.

Overall responses revealed a weak agreement among role evaluators on LMs' performance in providing services to employees.

#### **4.8.3 Unit operation.**

Role evaluators expressed their opinions that LMs could contribute to increase the effectiveness of the unit operation through their HRM role. This could be done by guiding employees' performance to ensure effective unit operation, and increase employee commitment to the job. For role evaluators, employees' contributions were important in

achieving the realisation of the company strategy because they would determine implementation. To achieve this, LMs played an important part, assisting the company at the unit level.

Mixed responses were also revealed for HR services in the unit operation area. Half of the role evaluators suggested many initiatives from LMs to improve the unit's operation, such as:

Lots of initiatives can be seen from LMs, it just that we don't have budget to support the effort. (RE 1, Unit 1)

Other expressed different opinions about LMs' contributions:

We can only see their role if there is problem in the unit. If the operation is smooth...nothing much we can see from their role. Actually, how they perform depend on individual. Their performance differs based on their attitude, communication, feedback on certain issue, how they report to us, their knowledge... (RE 2, Unit 2)

Role evaluators suggested that LMs needed to improve knowledge and skills because of the increased demand for quality services in the airport. These required every employee to provide the best service to meet airport customer expectations. Customers often expected the services provided by all employees to be timely and without mistakes. In this situation, communication was the most important factor that determined LMs' capabilities to improve airport operation. Role evaluators believed that effective communication among LMs would set a good example for employees, especially for those who dealt directly with customers. By setting a good example to employees, LMs could influence employees' capability to provide good customer service, which was needed to increase airport revenue.

A minority of role evaluators also highlighted the importance of communication in terms of activity coordination between units. A smooth communication flow was expected

from LMs with their counterparts, to ensure the whole airport operation was well managed. This increased role evaluators' expectations of LMs' HRM role because some HRM processes required LMs to deal with other units to ensure processes were completed. The effective communication practiced by LMs would determine employee satisfaction of the unit's operational management especially in ensuring employee work needs were fulfilled.

In addition, role evaluators reasoned that LMs needed to have initiative to improve the effectiveness of the unit's operation, without rely solely on the unit head. A minority of role evaluators related LM performance to insufficient training, especially in managing human resources. Role evaluators said that proper training was important for their knowledge, so that LMs were more reliable. Several role evaluators, however, had difficulty explaining how LMs contributed towards the unit operation.

#### **4.8.4 Value adding.**

Role evaluators said the LM's HRM role contribution added value to the company; this was through their positive influence on the company as a whole. This was done by developing initiatives to support the company's goals without increasing operational costs:

If they do something that will give impact to the company but not affect the cost, it is the value added. (RE 4, Unit 4)

LMs' abilities in this area were still limited; comments regarding the lack of knowledge and attitudes of LMs were common. These are encapsulated in the following statements:

It's hard to see their initiatives. In fact, if we announce that we want to conduct KSS for them, they started to question this and that (refuse to come)...actually this is to help them improve...they do their work, but how effective they perform, that is a question mark...(RE 2, Unit 2)

In terms of HR related matters, they need more knowledge...some of them don't really understand their role. But, it's hard to see they come and refer to us. (RE 4, Unit 4)

Most of them are senior people. They lack certain skill like IT (information technology)... Management have prepared like a database that include HR related information that they can refer anytime they want. The only problem is whether you want it or not. (RE 1, Unit 1)

Role evaluators wanted LMs to be more open to gaining knowledge. This was particularly in relation to LMs equipping themselves with the current technology and skills required to meet changing workplace expectations. In doing this, role evaluators expected LMs to be more proactive in gaining further knowledge without relying solely on what the company offered. This required LMs to change their attitudes of being comfortable with what they had. Although role evaluators valued the experience that LMs had, they also believed in the necessity of gaining formal training to enable better performance from LMs. This would ensure that new knowledge was in keeping with the constant changes of the airport environment.

Lacking a sense of belonging (as LMs believed they "worked" for the airport rather than believed themselves as "part of the airport") and government servant mentality were identified as factors that largely influenced attitudes to making changes to the job and company:

We don't see how they are committed to contribute to the company...it's more to their individual benefit...they are still with the old culture (before privatisation)....We need to treat the company as our own...but it's hard to see that. (RE 2, Unit 2)

Role evaluators emphasised LMs' contributions to adding value to the company; LMs had opportunity to initiate changes that could positively affect airport employees. LMs roles in

Airport X were vital to the unit heads, the HR unit and the airport management. Therefore, LMs were expected to act beyond their routine tasks and contribute to improvements in current approaches used in the airport. However, role evaluators admitted that the company did not have proper mechanisms in place to measure how the LMs' HRM role could add value. Indeed, their evaluations were based solely on the unit heads' observations. Role evaluators suggested it was difficult to evaluate accurately and monitor LMs' contributions. There were no guidelines available allowing unit heads to measure LMs' contributions to the company.

#### **4.9 Chapter Summary**

From the analysis of the interviews at Airport X, it has been shown that LMs and their role evaluators agreed on five HRM activities: performance management, rewards management, attitudes and disciplinary management, work arrangement and training. There was misalignment between the intended HRM role of LMs, as perceived by the role evaluators, and the actual implementation of the HRM role. Role evaluators expected LMs to be involved in the following HRM functions: administrative experts, employee champions and change agents. However, LMs did not identify with the change agent role.

In terms of challenges, there was agreement among LMs on their ability to manage desire, capacity and competencies. Only a minority of participants highlighted some weaknesses in support, and HRM policy and procedures. Generally, LMs valued the experience they had from their long tenure, which contributed to their confidence in resolving difficulties performing their HRM role.

The role of HRM policies and practices was mentioned by LMs based on four practices: job description, training, rewards and benefits and work structure. LMs highlighted experience as a key factor that enabled them to deal with weaknesses in the company's HRM policies and practices. First, there was minimal tendency to refer to the job description as a

guideline for the HRM role. Second, there were negative responses to training in relation to insufficient training; specifically, training designed to assist with HR related matters. Third, positive responses were reported in terms of rewards. However, this response did not reflect understanding of the HRM role expectations, but was more likely connected to the overall contribution, including operational tasks. Fourth, in terms of work structure, positive responses were given from LMs, based on the number of employees under their supervision. Moreover, they were comfortable with working on the shift hour basis, and their employees were cooperative.

There were four areas of HR services which contributed to HRM effectiveness: HR unit, employees, unit operation and value adding. Services provided by LMs to the HR unit were the only area which received positive responses in relation to LMs administrative expert role from role evaluators. Two HR services areas—employees and unit operation—received mixed responses in relation to employee champion role from role evaluators. However, the overall feedback on the change agent role to adding value to the organisation showed negative responses because LMs were limited in their ability to facilitate changes in the company.

While interesting findings from Airport X have been reported in this chapter, different findings emerged from interviews with participants in the second airport (Airport Y). These will be presented in the next chapter.



## **Chapter 5: Case Study 2–Airport Y**

The previous chapter reported on the interview findings from Airport X. This chapter presents results from the second case study airport (Airport Y). It highlights the development of the LMs' HRM role at the domestic airport, which has different characteristics from the international airport (Airport X). The chapter commences with the company's background and that of participants involved in the interview. The analysis of interview data is arranged into six themes concerning the understanding of LMs' HRM role development. The chapter ends with the summary of the findings in Airport Y.

### **5.1 Background to Airport Y**

Airport Y is one of the domestic airports located in the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia, with a total of 69 employees. As a small size airport, Airport Y was capable of accepting B737 aircraft and handling up to 800,000 passengers annually. However, the demand for airport services had increased, as evidenced in traffic increasing from 400,997 passengers in 2010 to 407,717 in 2011. In response, a new terminal was built to cater for the demand and to increase the airport's capability to accept larger aircraft and greater passenger numbers. As Airport X and Y were located in the same region (northern), every maintenance, security, fire and rescue services, and finance managers at Airport Y reported to managers at Airport X (case study 1). This was because Airport X acted as a regional centre for the northern area.

As a domestic airport, Airport Y had a smaller operation compared to Airport X and services were limited to local destinations within Malaysia. As a result, there were less units and employees at the domestic airport than at the international airport. This can be seen in the Airport Y organisational chart (see Appendix 7). An airport manager oversaw the five functional units comprised of four main units (operation, engineering, security, and fire and rescue services) and one support unit. The support unit was designed to cover other services

including human resources, finance and commercial services for the whole airport. At this airport, six LMs and five role evaluators were interviewed.

## **5.2 Participant's Demographic Background**

Of the six LMs, two LMs represented each unit. A single role evaluator was used to represent each of the three other units, while HR was represented by the HR executive and the airport manager. As a small airport with a limited number of employees, the airport manager was also responsible for monitoring HRM activities within the units (the HR executive was not an HRM specialist). Further, Airport Y's HR executive was newly appointed (less than a year) and was therefore still learning to manage HRM processes in the airport.

All LMs were male, over 50 years of age, Malay Muslim, possessed secondary school qualifications, and had long tenure with the company. Most LMs had been employed by the company for more than 30 years they had experienced different phases of the company's development, both before and after the company was privatised.

Two out of five role evaluators were female. Role evaluators also differed in terms of age, qualification and tenure. The role evaluators' ages varied, with one role evaluator below 40, while others were over 40. Over half of the role evaluators had a secondary school qualification, while the remaining evaluators had a diploma or university degree. Role evaluators differed in tenure; however, all of them had more than 10 years of experience with the company. In Airport Y, the units could be classified as small or large. Small units were those with less than 12 employees, while the larger units had more than 12. The interviews were based on two large units (Unit 1 and Unit 3) and one small unit (Unit 2).

## **5.3 The HRM Activities of LMs**

Interviews revealed that LMs' responses of HRM activities were consistent with those of the role evaluators. According to LMs and role evaluators, LMs were involved in four HRM activities: PMS, attitude and discipline management, work arrangements and training.

However, their involvement in HRM was limited and differed according to the unit's size. In the large unit, LMs were more involved in HRM activities, as opposed to LMs in small units.

### **5.3.1 Performance management.**

LMs' involvement in performance management activities differed according to unit size. In the small unit, LMs and role evaluators indicated that the performance management activity was managed by the unit head. LMs were not involved in HRM processes and documentation. The following comment confirmed this:

For performance evaluation, tasks such as to complete the evaluation form and discuss about the KPI is done by the head of unit. We just give any inputs about our staff. (LM 18, Unit 2)

This understanding was similar to that of the role evaluator:

I am the one who monitor all employees' performance in my unit. LMs just provide the necessary information for that. (RE 6, Unit 2)

Both LMs and role evaluators agreed that the small number of employees meant the unit head was directly involved in performance management activity. According to the role evaluators, a small number of employees in the unit meant the unit head could cope with performance management processes and documentation without relying on LMs. Role evaluators stated that LMs were only involved if the unit heads required additional employee information, and this was consistent with LM's views. Differences in working hours between the heads of unit and LM where LMs worked shifts and unit heads worked standard hours, meant LMs needed to contribute information about employee performance.

In large units, LMs were involved in performance management processes and documentation. This consisted of managing employee performance evaluation documentation and being involved in meetings to justify employee evaluations. Therefore, employee performance evaluations were made in discussion with unit heads and LMs. A LM responded:

The evaluation on employee performance is made where all LMs sit together and discuss. When we give certain mark to the employee that we supervise, we will ask other's opinions (other LMs in the unit and the head of unit). Our head of unit was together in the meeting. If everybody agrees, then we can proceed with the mark. (LM 16, Unit 3)

In the words of the role evaluator:

In the performance evaluation, LMs are the first evaluator and myself is the second evaluator because LMs are the one who closer with the employees. (RE 5, Unit 1)

Nevertheless, when discussing the decision making process, all role evaluators stated that the final decision in the performance management activity was still arbitrated by the heads of unit, regardless of unit size:

Like for performance management, even though we have a discussion with the LMs on the evaluation for employees, but I will revise it back and see whether the evaluation is suitable or not, then only I will approve. (RE 7, Unit 3)

Both LMs and role evaluators made comments regarding the decision making power of the unit heads in relation to the lower number of employees in Airport Y, as compared to the international airport. LMs and role evaluators agreed that the small number of employees in the units promoted an environment in which 'everybody knows each other'. This enabled the unit heads to monitor employees more effectively. With no authority over the final decision, LMs on this site generally did not link their involvement in performance management activities with other HRM activities, because the performance management processes and documentation were finalised by the unit heads.

### **5.3.2 Work arrangement.**

LMs voiced problems regarding employee shortages, specifically how these problems had influenced actions in their work arrangement activities. The similarity of tasks among

LMs was related to the management of employees' leave. All LMs indicated they were involved in managing employee leave applications by forwarding the leave form to the unit head. Specifically, their role was to determine the appropriate number of employees that ensured effective unit operations. Employees were required to plan for their leave early and the documents were recorded by LMs. The application results were dependent on the needs of the unit operation and airport activity. For instance, when a large number of employees applied for leave at the same time, LMs indicated that approval of leave application was generally based on a 'first come first served' approach. Upon evaluation of the mentioned factors, LMs decided whether the applications were eligible for approval by the heads of unit or not. This understanding was encapsulated in the following comments:

I'll look on the need for employees on that day. If we've plan for certain training we try to avoid any employee to apply for leave because of the limited number of employees at this site. (LM 14, Unit 1)

In terms of leave, I'll support the application, but to get approval is from the heads of unit. (LM 18, Unit 2)

LMs' understandings paralleled the responses from role evaluators:

LMs will make sure the need for employees at the current point of time is sufficient for the unit operation before they can forward any application to us. (RE 7, Unit 3)

For LMs, managing employee leave was important, considering the small number of employees at the airport. While the problem was similar in all units, LMs stated they needed to ensure that all activities in the unit were not negatively affected by their actions. This was particularly true as the heads of unit relied on LMs to assess employee leave applications.

LMs also mentioned that employee leave applications were usually approved.

### **5.3.3 Attitudes and disciplinary management.**

Interviews revealed that LMs' involvement in attitudes and discipline management activities were limited and differed between units. Generally, LMs were limited to providing relevant information on employees' attitudes to the unit heads, but did not have the power to proceed with further action. A LM described this as follows:

We don't have much power. In most of the activities, we just forward the related information to the heads of unit. (LM 18, Unit 2)

LMs in larger units had more involvement in managing employee attitudes and discipline than those in the small units. LMs in the larger units suggested that they often took initiatives to advise an employee when they observed unusual attitudes that contradicted the requirement of the employee's job. However, this initiative was limited to small problems in the unit, such as appearance and absenteeism. For serious problems or repetitive wrongdoings, LMs were charged with the responsibility of reporting those cases to the unit heads. A LM stated:

Usually we give advice and warning to a particular employee if it is their first mistake, but for the serious cases we will directly inform the heads of unit. (LM 14, Unit 1)

Both LMs and role evaluators agreed that LMs could influence employee attitudes because they had a closer relationship with employees than the unit heads, and this was particularly true for LMs in the larger units:

If the management gives advice regarding our employees, we will take notes and discuss with our employees. As a leader, we will communicate the information and try to change the attitude of our employees so that we can achieve our target. (LM 16, Unit 3)

LMs in the small units believed that the unit heads were responsible for managing employee attitudes and discipline. One of the reasons related to respect; employees showed more respect to the unit heads compared to LMs. This was perhaps due to the fact that LMs and their

employees began working with the company at the same time; thus, their employees treated them more as a colleague than as a leader. As a result, LMs in the small units mentioned they had difficulties giving instructions, and felt that their authority was undermined. This was supported by the fact that LMs' pay grades did not differ much from employees. These factors contributed to the perception that the unit heads had more influence on employee attitudes and discipline than LMs. One LM stated:

When we were in the same level, actually it's hard to give order. Unless you were higher than employees, only then they heard what you said. (LM 18, Unit 2)

Other LMs also reported that sometimes employees preferred to consult the heads of unit directly, rather than discussing their problems with them. Indeed, the small number of employees within the airport created a situation where LMs enjoyed a close relationship with their employees.

In contrast, role evaluators viewed the relational proximity of LMs and employees as a positive contributor to the management of employee attitudes and discipline. The fact that LMs worked directly with employees at all times assisted the unit heads in the management of employee attitudes and discipline. LMs could forward important information regarding employee disciplinary action during the absence of the unit head, enabling the further action required to solve problems. In the words of a role evaluator:

LMs also involved in several HRM activities including in taking disciplinary action because they are closer to employees. (RE 5, Unit 1)

According to the role evaluators, managing employee attitudes and discipline was done by the unit heads. Role evaluators further explained that unit heads had various approaches to ensure their employees had the right attitudes and discipline to perform their work. These approaches include sudden work station inspections, record and documentation checks, and LMs' assistance through their HRM role. Moreover, LMs needed to monitor their employees'

attitudes, particularly during the absence of the unit heads. In this case, LMs were responsible for informing the unit heads of serious problems in the unit and for keeping evidence on the event, which could assist unit heads to take necessary action.

Overall, these findings suggested that LMs were limited to providing relevant information to the unit heads, given that the heads were responsible for the documentation of disciplinary action. There was consensus between LMs and the role evaluators regarding who had authority to make final decisions on attitudes and discipline management. In the words of LMs:

If there is any disciplinary action need to be taken, the head of unit is the one who prepare the report and all the documentation. We don't do that, we only act as the source of information. (LM 18, Unit 2)

Like other HRM activities, final decisions in disciplinary action were depend on the head of unit. (LM 14, Unit 2)

Usually we forward any disciplinary issues to the head of unit and we monitor the situation at the unit. We can influence the decision made by our boss but they still have the authority to make the final decision. (LM 15, Unit 1)

This understanding was summarised by a role evaluator:

At their level, they just provide us with input and detail about any problem but decisions are on the head of unit. (RE 7, Unit 2)

The authority to make an ultimate decision remained with the unit heads, suggesting a greater influence of the unit heads in the management of employee attitudes and discipline than LMs in Airport Y.

#### **5.3.4 Training.**

Interviews revealed that LMs were involved in training only within the large units. Responses from both LMs and the role evaluators in the large units were consistent regarding



this activity; four of the six LMs perceived their involvement in training entailed activities such as conducting roll calls and assisting the unit heads in the KSS:

One of the routine activities is conducting the roll call. During this session, we usually communicate the latest instructions from the management. We also involve in the KSS as we can share information with all employees. (LM 17, Unit 3)

Roll call was a common activity for four of the six LMs, in addition to fulfilling the requirements of their unit function. The large units mostly comprised the uniformed units, which were ruled by special laws and regulations, and associated with the local authorities such as Malaysia's Fire and Rescue Department and Royal Malaysia Police. LMs suggested that roll call was a routine activity which needed to be conducted on a daily basis. While this activity was routine in nature, LMs stated that employees in the unit had become accustomed to this activity because it was conducted repetitively. Given the routine of the activity, LMs did not have any difficulty in performing this roll call activity.

For LMs in the small unit, knowledge and understanding of training was based on the yearly training offered by the company. In terms of planning for the training activities, one LM commented:

Usually the planning part is done by the HR unit or from HQ (headquarters). We just follow what has been given. (LM 19, Unit 2)

Role evaluators' understanding about training involvement was similar to that of LMs. Role evaluators also mentioned that planning and input for the training was mostly managed by the unit heads:

I make the plan for training and employee training need. But, LMs did the implementation part. (RE 5, Unit 1)

Sometimes they assist me in KSS. (RE 7, Unit 3)

KSS was implemented in all units; however, assistance in conducting this session was only mentioned by LMs in the large units. LMs believed that this session was useful for disseminating the latest information about the company or introducing new regulations to employees. LMs stated that employees often asked about issues about which they were unsure. LMs and the unit heads gave explanations in line with the company's needs. KSS in the small unit was reported as the sole responsibility of the unit heads, and this understanding was similar between LMs and their role evaluators.

In discussing the type and the frequency of the training, there was agreement among LMs and role evaluators that the training list was produced by headquarters and every airport followed what had been listed. Role evaluators stated that each airport could make suggestions for other training, but further action depended on headquarters. Generally, LMs and role evaluators agreed that the training offered to employees was related with the unit's function, which was in line with technical training. Moreover, they agreed that the unit heads had more responsibility for employee training. This responsibility consisted of the important process of nominating employees to attend training and preparing training effectiveness reports on employee performance.

#### **5.4 The Intended HRM Role of LMs**

Role evaluators were asked questions about the intended HRM role of LMs to explore perceptions of their duties and requirements. From three groups of Corner and Ulrich's (1996) perceived HRM role function, role evaluators' expectations fell into all groups. However, the emphasis differed between groups. Role evaluators gave little emphasis on the administrative expert and employee champion roles, compared to expectations for LM acts to as a change agent. The findings about each role are presented below.

#### **5.4.1 Administrative expert.**

The administrative expert activities, as defined by role evaluators, concentrated on performance management and work arrangement activities such as preparing reports and recording some HRM processes in the unit. More than half of the role evaluators agreed that LMs' involvement as administrative experts was limited, as they were only expected to know the basic HRM activities. This understanding was because most HRM processes were managed by the unit heads. Although LMs' involvement was limited, there was agreement among role evaluators about the need for their role. This was particularly true for LMs in the large units, who were expected to manage the employee performance records, administer employee claims for overtime, and plan the roster for the unit. These tasks were important in assisting the heads of unit to take further action on the related HRM processes.

For role evaluators, LMs were also expected to take immediate action regarding any problems that occurred during HRM processes. According to the role evaluators, this role was important for ensuring the effective management of HRM activities. This was described in the following ways:

They have to know the basic of HRM related matters. Like in the performance management activity, LMs can raise any problem that they have with the employees in the unit to the head of unit so that the head of unit can coach them to resolve the problem. This is important so that employees' work won't be affected. (RE 9, Unit 4)

They have to know what the requirement of their employees' job is and if there is slack in the process, they know how to rectify the situation. (RE 6, Unit 2)

Role evaluators also expressed the need for LMs to ensure the continuity of processes in HRM activities, especially for the unit's operational effectiveness. Moreover, role evaluators suggested that LMs could be a good source of information for the unit heads, by assisting

them in the management of HRM activities. This information was important because the unit heads could consider this before making any actions or decision related with employees.

Another reason for the importance of the LMs' administrative expert role voiced by the role evaluator was associated with the LMs' performance:

They need to know because that is part of their job...and at the end of the day it will affect their bonuses and increment. In fact, before we implement certain thing, we have given them awareness on their responsibility. (RE 9, Unit 4)

In the words of another role evaluator:

We need them because they will involve in the implementation part...because for administration, I run one man show as we don't have enough staff, so I need their assistance. (RE 5, Unit 1)

Role evaluators stated that LMs' HRM role was to assist the unit heads in HR related matters. Although their involvement was limited, role evaluators noted that LMs should not consider this a reason for lack of involvement in HRM activities. While the unit heads had to manage most HRM activities, LM assistance was needed, especially when unit heads were absent from work stations.

When discussing current performance, almost half of the role evaluators suggested that LMs did not perform as expected because their knowledge and skills were limited, especially in computer and English proficiency:

They were supposed to assist in preparing reports and certain documentation, but at the moment there were certain part that they can manage by themselves and other part that we have to involve. They were all senior staff (older in ages), certain thing about computer and technology they don't know. We still have to monitor their work before we can submit anything to the management. LMs should think how to improve and gain more knowledge so that they can perform better. (RE 6, Unit 2)

Only a minority of role evaluators were satisfied with LMs' current performance. These role evaluators often associated this satisfaction with LMs' overall performance, which included their role in operational tasks.

LMs' lack of proficiency in computers and technology was identified as a factor that contributed to their inability to manage some HRM documentation. Role evaluators expected LMs to manage their HRM tasks to ensure efficient HRM processes. This was crucial, considering the limited number of employees in this airport, which demanded that employees took on multiple tasks. Moreover, the assistance in HRM processes may have contributed to the effectiveness of the whole HRM system.

Another role evaluator related LMs' current performance with more responsibilities that were given to them through operational tasks. Due to the small numbers of employees at this domestic airport, LMs were responsible for covering a few operational tasks. This contrasted to LMs at the international airport, where there were larger numbers of employees. This allowed for job specialisation. This was an important contributor to LMs' current performance in fulfilling their HRM role in this airport:

They are supposed to involve in some HR related matters, but since they have many works to be done on the operational tasks, they usually concentrate only on certain tasks based on the need at the certain point of time. (RE 6, Unit 2)

While more responsibility was given to LMs to manage these operational tasks, more than half of the role evaluators believed that the management of HR and operational oriented tasks should be given the same priority as each task was interdependent. Therefore, LMs were expected to perform their HRM role equally to their operational tasks. Moreover, the ability to manage both roles reflected their ability to ensure continuity of HRM activity processes. This was concluded by one role evaluator:

The continuity of HRM tasks would not be completed without action from the unit. If LMs in the unit don't play their role, how can HR people be able to prepare the necessary reports for the whole airport? (RE 5, Unit 1)

This finding indicated that LMs were needed to perform the administrative expert role in the unit as this affected all HRM processes in the airport. In addition, LMs could potentially increase their contribution to the effectiveness of HRM processes if they were able to improve on their weaknesses and equip themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge expected by role evaluators.

#### **5.4.2 Employee champion.**

Role evaluators' perceptions of LMs playing the employee champion role were related to LMs dealings with employee attitudes and discipline. In particular, this meant spending time with employees to discuss potential performance related problems. However, the expectations of LMs as employee champions was low because role evaluators assumed that the relationship between employees and top management in the small airport was close, and that unit heads would know of any problems. One role evaluator responded:

Since there were not many employees in this site, usually employees will directly refer to the heads of unit if they have problems. (RE 8, Unit 4)

Role evaluators expected LMs to improve problematic situations by referring to senior management. This was often expressed in relation to the proximity and direct contact with employees on the shift. The unit heads could only be referred to during office hours. Role evaluators believed that employee problems could be managed effectively if LMs were able to identify the problem as early as possible. This would enable the unit heads to find the right solution for the problem before it got worse. One role evaluator responded:

Relationship between LMs and their employees is important because from that LMs will be able to identify potential problems and thus they can forward that to the HR unit to be resolved. (RE 7, Unit 3)

This was particularly true for problems such as decreased performance, conflict, and employee dissatisfaction with the job, the leader, or the company.

At the same time, role evaluators also expressed the need for LMs to act as an intermediary between top management and employees by explaining work processes to employees. This was summarised in the following comment:

They have to know about some of the SOP so when problems occur, they can explain to employees and assist them to perform well. (RE 6, Unit 2)

Role evaluators agreed that LMs' role as an employee champion depended on the absence of unit heads. When talking about how LMs should perform their role, role evaluators mentioned that when there was no flight requiring attendance, LMs could spend time with employees and hear about their work situations, identifying problems that may influence work performance. In doing this, role evaluators expected LMs to know the SOP so that LMs could respond to problems accordingly (based on the company's policy and regulations). In addition, almost half of the role evaluators believed that LMs' involvement was necessary to ensure that the unit heads were informed about employee problems.

#### **5.4.3 Change agent.**

Interviews revealed expectations of role evaluators for LMs to perform a change agent role at the airport. The importance of LMs as a change agent was due to the need to reshape employee attitudes to become more positive. This was mentioned in relation to the management of employee attitudes and disciplinary activities. As an employee shortage was identified as the main problem in this small airport, LMs were expected to play their role to

foster positive attitudes among employees and motivate them to perform their job flexibly and effectively. This was encapsulated in the following comments:

We are all aware that we don't have enough employees here. With a small number of employees, we need to cover the operation of the whole airport...and sometimes one person has many things to do. But we have to accept that. Even though we have to do more works, but indirectly we can learn many things. If employee can accept that I don't think it will be any problem....LMs were supposed to change employees' attitudes towards that. But now, it is difficult to see that happen...may be it takes time.  
(RE 6, Unit 2)

We have to bear in mind on the company policy, although we understand that different people may have their own perception on certain things. For senior LMs, sometimes they don't even care about the new policy (as the company was privatised) because they think they are almost retired, nothing much to think of. This attitude needs to be change. LMs need to know how to tackle their employees well and change their attitudes towards the new policies. (RE 9, Unit 4)

When talking about the need for LMs to perform the change agent role, interviews revealed different feedback from role evaluators. A majority of the role evaluators clearly indicated that LMs needed to perform the change agent role. Still, others did not see the association between LMs' involvement in HRM activities and their role as change agents. Among the role evaluators who supported the change agent role, emphasis was placed on the need to perform beyond routine tasks and to be reliable in managing employees in their units. This was expressed in the following statement:

In my evaluation, if the person is hardworking, innovative and we just tell them once of how they should perform their job and after that they can do on their own, only then I'll be satisfied with their performance. (RE 9, Unit 4)



Role evaluators also believed that the ability to do more than their routine tasks allowed the unit heads to rely more on LMs in HR related matters and increased the effectiveness of the unit's operation. This was explained by the argument that if LMs were more reliable, faster decisions could be made, especially to improve employee satisfaction. HR related matters were identified by three of the five role evaluators in relation to employee satisfaction at the workplace. Therefore, role evaluators believed that if LMs could perform the change agent role, then the company as a whole would benefit.

Role evaluators highlighted several gaps in the ability for LMs to perform the change agent role. The main factor for LMs' failure to perform this role was directed at LMs' attitudes:

Sometimes, they are not too open with the management to tell the problems, so we need to always approach them and find out the actual situation happen in the unit. (RE 9, Unit 4)

Others responded to the factor of position level:

Before this we often see some communication breakdown as some of the information did not well deliver to employees. The problem is that their grade is almost the same as their employees, so when they give instructions, sometimes people don't really care. Only lately we can see some improvement when their grade has been upgraded. (RE 6, Unit 2)

Based on identified factors, role evaluators suggested that LMs needed more improvement in performing the change agent role. Given the level of LMs' involvement, such changes could potentially be valuable to the company. More importantly, four of the five role evaluators voiced that before LMs could change employee attitudes, LMs themselves must show a positive attitude towards their job and the company, especially in dealing with policy and

HRM changes. For the role evaluators, this was deemed important because it determined the way LMs interacted with their employees.

## **5.5 The Actual HRM Role of LMs**

Interviews revealed that the HRM role was perceived differently by LMs depending on the unit size. LMs in the small units did not have as much involvement in HRM activities as those in large unit and assisted the unit heads to perform certain HRM roles when necessary. Most LMs felt their HRM role fell into two roles of Corner and Ulrich's (1996) perceived HRM role function: administrative expert and employee champion. Only a minority of LMs in the large units identified with the change agent role. Overall, LMs believed that the unit heads had more involvement in HRM activity roles than they did. LMs highlighted that their role was skewed towards operationally oriented tasks. Their understanding was that the unit heads were responsible for HRM aspects. The understandings of each HRM role perceived by LMs are presented below:

### **5.5.1 Administrative expert.**

For LMs, their administrative expert role was associated with work arrangement activities. However, their involvement was limited to managing employee leave, which was agreed upon, regardless of the unit size. In discussing employee leave, four of the six LMs said they were responsible for checking the roster and the unit activity before forwarding employees' leave applications to the unit head for approval. This was mentioned in relation to the employee shortage, which required LMs to ensure a sufficient number of employees for every shift or activity. Further, LMs mentioned that approval for employee leave depended on the unit head, but often when the application had been cleared by LMs, there were no problems:

The approval for employees' leave is on the heads of unit, but employees must go through me first. I'll check on the needs for a particular of time to ensure that there is no activity has been plan on that time. (LM 14, Unit 1)

As a LM, if staffs want to apply for leave, I'll check the roster, if there is enough people at that time only I'll support the application, if not I'll not forward it to the head of unit. Usually the head of unit will not approve the application that is not supported by the LM. (LM 18, Unit 2)

According to LMs in the large units, they also identified as administrative experts in dealing with performance management. This was mentioned in relation to managing employee performance records. LMs stated they updated the employee record for performance evaluation. This record was important as it was referred to during the meeting with unit heads to justify employee performance.

### **5.5.2 Employee champion.**

LMs identified playing the employee champion role in relation to managing employee attitudes and disciplinary activities. The employee champion role meant the LM acted as a medium of communication between top management and employees. Consensus was achieved among LMs on this role: to communicate new regulations or convey the latest information from top management to employees. Four of the six LMs expressed the same understanding of this task:

As a leader in the shift, we'll receive instruction from HQ or management of the airport and then we'll deliver it to the employees. (LM 16, Unit 3)

Apart from receiving the instruction from time to time, we're also an intermediary between top management and employees in the unit. (LM 17, Unit 3)

Regardless of unit size, all LMs saw themselves as intermediaries, delivering information from top management to employees. Although LMs agreed that the HR department used

many ways to deliver information to employees, they believed that their role was still important. By performing their role as an intermediary, LMs were responsible for informing and reminding employees about actions required of them.

As intermediaries, LMs also believed they were responsible for delivering employee problems to senior management. One LM responded:

We understand that we have limited number of employees in the airport but we need to use what we have to ensure the unit operation is running as per required by the company. Employees often need to do overtime and don't have their rest day. We really understand how employees feel. We did inform the management about the problem. (LM 17, Unit 3)

However, LMs commented that the small number of employees in the unit enabled the head to deal directly with employees even when unit heads were not available LMs preferred to let them settle employee problems. LMs said they had limited power of influence over employees, and they felt employees showed more respect to the unit heads.

### **5.5.3 Change agent.**

There was no agreement among LMs on the change agent role because only one of the six LMs perceived this as part of their HRM responsibility. The remaining five LMs believed they did not have enough power to make changes in the unit and to influence employees. This was the case with often expressed in relation to their involvement in most HRM activities, where LMs provided the necessary input to the unit heads for further action. LMs emphasised they were not involved in the decision making processes. Although this airport ran at a loss airport, LMs only performed what had been asked, knowing that all activities were subject to the budgeted costs determined by headquarters.

The change agent role was conceptualised as the management of employee attitudes and discipline, which entailed influencing employee attitudes to support the company's goals, thereby improving employee performance:

As a leader we'll try to change whatever it need to achieve the target....we need to change and it will happen if we have knowledge...we need to guide our employees to achieve the goal and gain revenue for the company....we need that kind of culture here.... (LM 16, Unit 3)

A minority of LMs thought they acted as a role model for employees. LMs worked directly with employees, which enabled them to influence their employees' attitudes by fostering their own attitudes. In their view, this increased employee work performance. LMs discussed how developing commitment towards the job motivated employees to perform their work effectively. To this end, LMs believed it was important for them to lead by example.

However, these views were not the consensus because they were mentioned by less than half of the LMs. The remaining LMs did not have the same understanding, due to lacking the authority to perform this role; thus, they did not think outside their routine duties.

## **5.6 LMs' Challenges to Performing their HRM Role**

The challenges LMs faced in performing the HRM role were identified as desire, capacity, competencies, support and HRM policy and procedures. Interviews in Airport Y revealed two groups of challenges in performing the HRM role: support and the HRM policy and procedures. Interviews also revealed another challenge, which related to the working environment. Overall, LMs valued their experience working within the company from more junior positions, and they explained how this experience helped them transition into the new position. Findings about each of the challenges are presented below.

### **5.6.1 Desire.**

All LMs expressed their willingness to perform the tasks assigned to them by senior management, including HRM tasks. This was evident from their willingness to spend their days off ensuring all tasks were completed as required by the management:

Sometimes we have to sacrifice our time. Sometime during off time, we still have to come to ensure that everything was under control. (LM 16, Unit 3)

There was an agreement amongst LMs that their commitment to HRM responsibilities came from observations of their former unit leaders. From their observations, LMs realised that HRM duties also needed to be managed properly as the HRM and operational tasks were interdependent. Thus, the completion of one task would influence the performance of the other.

### **5.6.2 Capacity.**

In terms of the time allocated to HRM tasks, all LMs agreed that experience was underpinned their ability to perform HRM tasks. Since LMs had worked in the company for a long time, their experience taught them how to organise tasks and allocate enough time for HRM matters. In doing so, they knew the priority of their tasks and managed their time wisely. Although LMs realised that their role was skewed towards operational tasks, they indicated that operational and HRM tasks had been treated fairly as both were interdependent. This was encapsulated in the following statement:

I have no problem with time. We know how to manage time, what task should be completed first and so on. We did that based on our experience. (LM 14, Unit 1)

LMs also mentioned the fact that the domestic airports did not receive as many flights as international airports had enabled them to manage their time accordingly. LMs could use their time to complete the HRM duties when there were no flights requiring their attendance.

### **5.6.3 Competencies.**

When discussing HR knowledge and skills required for the HRM role, all LMs mentioned they had gained a lot of knowledge through their experience of dealing with employee issues in the unit over time. This was often expressed in relation to their long tenure in the company. In addition, LMs stated they gained experience working at other branches of the company, especially in the international airport, which had exposed them to similar challenges. LMs agreed that working at the international airport was more challenging compared to the domestic airports. Thus, LMs believed that their experience had equipped them with useful knowledge and understandings in dealing with employees in the unit. This was expressed through their satisfaction with the HRM duties they had performed. One LM stated:

I think my knowledge and experience to manage employee is enough. I am satisfied with what I have done. (LM 14, Unit 1)

Based on this understanding, LMs believed they had the necessary skills to perform the HRM role, especially realising they never received employee complaints. Although LMs admitted that they often received advice from top management, LMs viewed that message as relating to improvements rather than negative feedback about performance.

### **5.6.4 Support.**

In terms of support, LMs faced challenges because they lacked the support of employees. Five of the six LMs felt they had difficulty performing their HRM role because of employees' attitude. Since most of the employees were senior staff who had long tenure with the company, their attitudes were difficult to change because they were familiar with the old organisational culture, before the company had been privatised. These employees had difficulties accepting new rules or approaches implemented by the company, assuming that

they knew better about what should be done. This was expressed by LMs through the following remark:

Since 80% of the employees in the unit were senior people (employees), so the major challenge for me is to deal with these people. We have to think about the best way to tackle them because they are sensitive and emotional. We understand that they have long been with the company, but policy is policy, we need to obey with that.

Sometimes, it's hard for me to give instruction to them. (LM 17, Unit 3)

In the words of another LM:

The challenges come from the attitude of employees. It's difficult to change the existing mentality. (LM 18, Unit 2)

In some cases, the mentality of senior employees had affected LMs' ability to implement the company's new policy or procedures:

Sometimes the policy cannot be implemented 100% because the mentality among employees differs from one another especially older people. (LM 19, Unit 2)

In facing the difficulties of changing employee attitudes, LMs mentioned they needed to be flexible and could not rely solely on policy. This ensured that their actions would not affect their relationship with employees in the unit. All LMs agreed that the relationship with employees needed wise management, because they needed each other to perform their job. This was particularly true with the employee shortage problem in this airport, where several roles were carried out by the same employees.

In contrast with feedback on the support from employees, there was agreement amongst LMs regarding support from top management, in particular from the heads of unit and the airport manager. LMs said that they received a good support from their unit head and the airport manager in performing their HRM role.



### **5.6.5 HRM policy and procedures.**

Two main issues were in terms of regarding the challenges from the company's HRM policy and procedures: authority of LMs and workforce planning.

In discussing authority, LMs mentioned that their ability to influence employee attitudes was limited because they did not have enough authority, especially in decision making processes. As a consequence, more than half of the LMs perceived difficulties in giving instructions and ensuring that employees obeyed the orders given. LMs commented:

At this moment, our level was almost the same with our employees...that's why it was difficult for us to advise them...I think power is important, not to show off but it is easier to perform our job. (LM 18, Unit 2)

Sometimes people (employees) just take things for granted. They don't really care what we have said compared to if the instruction is given by the head of unit. (LM 17, Unit 3, 51 years old)

We don't have much power, most of the times we just deliver the message to the head of unit. (LM 14, Unit 1)

While their authority was limited, LMs believed that employees showed more respect to the unit heads compared to them. According to LMs, this factor had contributed to a situation where the influence of the unit heads outweighed LMs' influence in managing employee issues.

LMs also expressed their concern about workforce planning. While employee shortages were critical in this airport, this policy had a huge impact on how they managed employees in the unit:

When we plan the roster, we are required to fulfil the minimum strength of eight employees...but then we don't have enough employees. So, employees have no choice

but to do overtime to meet with the requirements. This is not a new problem, but there is still no solution for that. (LM 17, Unit 3)

Since the airport would not increase the number of employees, LMs said they had no choice but to optimise the existing employees to run the unit function and adapt to changes.

Moreover, this situation required them to be flexible in dealing with employees as they had to consider employees' individual circumstances; specifically, fatigue and stress. In cases where employees were asked to do overtime on their next shift, they were given some time to rest before continuing with their new shift. In the meantime, other employees would cover tasks until the particular employee arrived. This usually occurred when units did not have a sufficient number of employees, but employees were nevertheless necessary to meet with company requirements. Often, LMs mentioned they had no choice but to schedule several tasks involving the same employees repetitively, including themselves.

Realising that the domestic airport was considered a 'loss' making airport, LMs noted they were unsure if there would be any solution to the employee shortage. LMs believed the company had tried to reduce the costs but this impacted on employees in terms of fatigue and reduced performance. So while there were increased workloads for employees, and more overtime to meet with the unit's requirement, LMs thought employees had no choice but to adapt and there was little the LM could do but implement the current HRM policies and practices.

#### **5.6.6 Work environment.**

Another challenge on performing their HRM role was related to the infrastructure provided by the company. LMs mentioned the infrastructure used in the domestic airport differed from that at the international airport and was inferior. LMs said that using old equipment slowed down operations, reducing time spent on employee issues:

I think the challenge was on the infrastructure. At the big airport (international), we usually have more sophisticated equipment which makes employee job faster. But here, at the small airport we still use the old equipment and that's why our job was slower. We have suggested this to the management, but it seems like it does not been considered. (LM 19, Unit 2)

LMs believed that if they used the same quality equipment as provided at the international, this would increase the effectiveness of the airport's operation. This could speed up the completion of some operational tasks, and LMs could spend more time managing employee issues. LMs also suggested that new equipment may reduce employee stress in performing their job and reduce the amount of overtime required. Employees would enjoy performing their duties when they could be completed efficiently and without problems. LMs expressed the view that a good working environment was important for employees in the domestic airport and would improve employee motivation and foster positive attitudes towards the job and the company.

To explore the company's approaches to assist LMs in understanding their HRM role, the next section examines LMs' feedback on the messages in HRM policies and practices applied at the airport.

## **5.7 The Role of HRM Policies and Practices**

LMs discussed HRM policies and practices used to deliver information on how their HRM role should be performed. The responses from LMs fell into four aspects: job description, training, rewards and benefits, and work structure. Agreement was identified in responses about job descriptions, while other HRM policies and practices revealed mixed responses.

### **5.7.1 Job description.**

Four of the six LMs expressed their awareness of the job description for their position. However, when talking about how the job description was used to assist in performing their role, they rarely referred to the job description for performing their daily tasks. Only a minority of LMs said they referred to the job description as a way of understanding their HRM role. Instead, there was a strong agreement among LMs that they performed their HRM role based on experience:

Usually we deal with employees based on our experience. Although policy is continuously updated but employees mind were hardly change. (LM 19, Unit 2)

We use experience in dealing with employees' issue. We were all senior people (employees)...we know how to handle people. (LM 18, Unit 2)

We know how to manage our job...what is the priority... based on our past experience. (LM 14, Unit 1)

When discussing references, LMs agreed that their experience was more useful than job descriptions. This was often expressed in relation with the job description's content, and four of the six LMs suggested that job descriptions did not help to implement their role. LMs noted that they learnt how to perform their HRM role based on experience from working with the company for a long time. Moreover, this experience gave them the opportunity to observe how their former leader managed employees, which LMs then used when they became a leader.

### **5.7.2 Training.**

Interviews revealed two contrasting ideas regarding training. Half of the LMs suggested they had enough training to equip them with necessary knowledge and skills to perform their HRM role, while the other half mentioned the training provided by the company, particularly in managing human resources, was insufficient:

I used to go for a leadership training before but it was a long time ago. (LM 14, Unit 1)

We don't have any training for management or leadership. I think I have never attended such courses. (LM 18, Unit 2)

Five of the six LMs insisted that the training they had attended emphasised technical aspects related with the unit function.

In response to the lack of knowledge, five of the six LMs referenced the value of their previous job experience, which enabled them to perform their HRM role effectively. Further, LMs noted that the unit heads had more responsibility in managing the employees in the unit, so LMs could refer to them for potential problems. However, in realising that constant changes happened in the company, such as the introduction of new policies and procedures to increase the productivity of employees, all LMs agreed that more training should be provided to prepare them for the new challenges. Several LMs commented:

From time to time, I think we need more training so that we can improve. At the same time, we can gain more knowledge. (LM 16, Unit 3)

I never attended the courses for administration and employee management. It would be good if the company offer such courses for the shift leader. (LM 18, Unit 2)

While there was insufficient HRM training provided by the company, LMs believed this did not affect their performance in managing employees.

### **5.7.3 Rewards and benefits.**

There were mixed responses regarding the role of rewards and benefits. While half of the LMs expressed their satisfaction with the rewards given by the company, others suggested that the rewards system should be revised in line with the increased responsibilities of LMs in the airport:

For me, in terms of salary the company have to revise it. There were so many differences now...with the increased cost of living and etc... (LM 16, Unit 3)

In terms of financial rewards, I think it's quite unfair if you want to compare with our workloads. Our scope of tasks were huge but yet the salary was not much differed with our employees....and in some cases employees have higher salary than us. (LM 17, Unit 3)

LMS admitted that their positions had been upgraded; however, this did not significantly affect their motivation:

Even though we have higher grade now, but in terms of increment it is just the same with employees...and yet they don't have so much works as we did....so in terms of motivation, it is not really effective. (LM 17, Unit 3)

This was because higher grade did not affect their financial benefits. Instead, LMS mentioned that their employees were able to get a higher salary if they got an excellent performance review across three consecutive years. LMS stated that although employee grades were lower, their salary may be higher, while employees did not have the same workload. This contributed to the LMS' dissatisfaction, especially with increasing costs of living.

LMS dissatisfaction was also caused by a significant disparity between the benefits provided for the executives and non-executives:

As for the differences in benefits between executives and non-executives employees...I think it needs more clarification so that it won't affect employees' satisfaction. At this moment, the gap was very clear...executives were entitled to get services from private hospital but not for non-exec. If we compared with other company, as long as we worked in the same company, all employees get the same benefits regardless of the level. So, we can't avoid the dissatisfaction. (LM 16, Unit 3)

LMS also expressed dissatisfaction with the way the company recognised their contributions:

For me, if they want to value our contribution, it should be done through the performance evaluation. At least once in our services we should get excellent. But unfortunately, it didn't happen here. Like other places, they did like a rotation so that everyone can get excellent, it good to do that so it can motivate employees to contribute to the company. (LM 16, Unit 3)

As LMs were responsible for leading the shift and replacing senior management when absent, they felt they should receive the same benefits as others. However, the benefits they received were similar to employees with no privileges to differentiate their contribution.

#### **5.7.4 Work structure.**

When talking about work structure, LMs understandings were related to the work required, and how that work could be completed. This was explained in relation to the amount of work and assistance they had in performing their HRM role. In terms of workload, almost half LMs perceived they had too much to manage. This was expressed in relation to the employee shortage in the airport, which required them to do more work:

In this site, I need to control all sections including counter, aerobridge, parking and everything. (LM 18, Unit 2)

Our scope of works was too many. (LM 17, Unit 3)

As a result, LMs in this site did not have job specialisation; instead work was delegated to them to cover the whole airport operation. This gave them excessive workloads, which could have been covered by a few people. The excessive workloads mentioned by these LMs related to operational tasks. Their responsibility for huge operational tasks meant they spent more time on these tasks, with limited time for HRM matters.

Other LMs saw the employee shortage as an advantage because the limited numbers of employees in one unit meant that the number of employees to be managed was fewer:

Although we have too many things to do, but we still can control our employees because we don't have many employees in one unit compared to the international airport. (LM 14, Unit 1)

While the employee shortages were highlighted as the main problem affecting workloads, there was agreement amongst LMs that there was a good environment in the airport. The close relationships between LMs and employees, and some leisure infrastructure provided by management, were among the motivational factors highlighted. Four of the six LMs suggested that the concern with employee welfare showed by the unit heads often encouraged LMs to perform well and forget about any workplace problems.

After exploring LMs' challenges in performing the HRM role, the next section is a discussion of how LMs' HRM role performance is perceived by role evaluators. This aims to explore the effect of LMs' HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness at the airport.

## **5.8 The Company's HRM Effectiveness**

In this company, the contribution of the LMs' HRM role to HRM effectiveness was measured through their services in four services areas: the HR unit, employees, the unit operation and value adding. Role evaluators at this site saw the HRM role of LMs falling into two main HR service areas: HR unit and employees. The other services areas received negative responses from role evaluators. Generally, all role evaluators agreed that it was difficult to define the contribution of LMs in this airport, because most of the HRM activities in the small airports were managed by the unit heads. Role evaluators explained that the smaller number of employees in one unit enabled the unit heads to monitor their employees without relying on LMs. This has also influenced by the distribution of work in the unit, where LMs were responsible for managing operationally oriented tasks, while the administrative tasks (including managing employees) were the unit heads' responsibility. LMs were available at all times, which was important in the absence of top management. However,



role evaluators believed that in terms of HRM, LMs simply assisted the unit heads. Nevertheless, three of the four role evaluators did not deny the LMs' contribution, because HRM processes might not be completed without LMs' assistance. In fact, LMs' HRM role contribution would be clearer if LMs were able to perform their HRM role better. Explanation about the results of each services area is presented in the following section.

### **5.8.1 HR unit.**

Three of the four role evaluators valued the contribution of LMs in managing employees in the unit, although their overall involvement in HR related matters was limited. As LMs played an important role as intermediaries between top management and employees, this responsibility enabled LMs to support the HR unit in ensuring that information from headquarters was disseminated to all employees. This was particularly true as the HR executive in this airport was newly appointed and did not specialise in HRM. For this reason, almost half of the role evaluators believed that LMs were involved in providing assistance to the HR department, especially on matters relating to employees in the unit.

The LMs' services to HR were also identified in relation with their ability to monitor employees in the unit during the absence of unit heads or top management. According to the role evaluators, LMs' abilities to provide all information related to employee attitudes and performance was necessary to guide the unit heads' actions. Half of the role evaluators believed that LMs' assistance enabled unit heads to provide records and documentation requested by the HR department on time. As a result, the HR department could do their part to ensure all the requirements of HRM activities were fulfilled. Additionally, a minority of role evaluators noted that some of the HRM processes required the HR department to deal directly with LMs, for instance in processing employee claims for overtime. This was due to the availability of LMs in all shifts, which enabled them to give confirmation of information provided by employees.

It was important to note that four of the five role evaluators believed that in the small airport, the unit heads were more influential than LMs regarding HRM, which ultimately limited the effectiveness of the LMs' role.

### **5.8.2 Employees.**

According to the role evaluators, although all employees in the small airport were close to each other, LMs were still required to monitor employee attitudes in performing their job, especially in the absence of unit heads. However, there was no agreement among role evaluators on how LMs influenced employee attitudes and commitment to the company, because the level of involvement differed according to the unit size. Almost half of the role evaluators agreed that LMs influenced employee attitudes; however, a majority of LMs did not agree with this claim. Role evaluators believed that the unit heads played a bigger part. Overall, responses from role evaluators revealed that the changes in employee attitudes were also influenced by other factors, including the unit heads.

### **5.8.3 Unit operation.**

Five of the six LMs that the unit heads contributed more to the management of the unit's operation. In fact, LMs believed it was the responsibility of unit heads to ensure that operations were running as required. Role evaluators mentioned that the failure of LMs to maximise their contribution to the unit operation through the HRM role was mainly due to the workload that had been given to them. This gave LMs a wider scope of work, and they were only able to concentrate on one HRM duty at one time. As a result, the unit heads had to ensure all the HRM related matters, important for the unit's operation, were managed effectively. Only one role evaluator responded that LMs had contributed to the unit operation because the unit heads needed them to assist with the workload due to employee shortages. However, when asked whether the unit heads could rely solely on LMs' HRM role, this role evaluator stated they still needed to monitor LMs to ensure that all duties were performed

accordingly. Overall, there was a strong agreement among role evaluators that in the small airport, the contribution of LMs through their HRM role was not really clear to the unit operation. In most situations, the supervision of the unit heads was still needed.

#### **5.8.4 Value adding.**

More than half of the role evaluators did not see any value in LMs' HRM role. These role evaluators viewed that LMs only performed what was asked of them and nothing more. The remaining role evaluators highlighted the need for LMs to contribute more towards adding value to the company. The airport concentrated on business and airport operations and so all employees needed to provide the best service to customers and to boost demand for, and satisfaction with, airport services. Even this airport was a loss making airport and relied on the international airport to support its operation, LMs could do more to add value.

While LMs understood the airport was a "loss making airport" efforts to make improvement to the company's revenue were limited. They believed nothing much could be done when no flights were landing in the airport. But, role evaluators thought LMs could change their employees' attitudes and encourage employees to create business opportunities around the airport and attract more people to come to the airport. Role evaluators also expected more initiative from LMs because they could lead their employees by example. Role evaluators further explained there was no need for more authority to perform this task; because in the small airport, news was easily disseminated. This also suggested that good attitudes illustrated by one employee could potentially influence another employee, regardless of authority. Nevertheless, role evaluators expressed that this attitude was difficult to see among LMs in this airport, and that all LMs had the same attitude as their employees.

### **5.9 Chapter Summary**

The analysis of interviews at Airport Y shows that LMs' understandings of HRM activities were consistent with those of the role evaluators. LMs and role evaluators agreed on

four HRM activities: performance management, attitudes and discipline management, work arrangement and training. Different responses were found on the LMs' involvement in these activities due to unit size. LMs in the large units were more involved in HRM activities, compared to LMs in the small units.

The intended HRM role of LMs fell into the three roles: administrative expert, employee champion and change agent. From the perspective of LMs, interviews revealed differences in the actual HRM role. While all LMs indicated that their HRM role fell into the administrative expert and employee champion roles, there was no agreement on the change agent role. In general, LMs did not consider being a change agent role as part of their HRM role because they were limited to providing necessary information about employees to the unit heads. More importantly, LMs did not perceive themselves as change agents because they were not involved in the decision making process.

Three challenges affected the performance of LMs' HRM role: employees' support, and HRM policy and procedures and infrastructure. Unchanging employee attitudes were identified as the main factor contributing to the lack of support, which hindered the performance of HRM duties. In terms of policy and procedures, the lack of authority in their HRM role caused difficulties for LMs in managing employees. The second issue of the company's policy and procedures was related to the employee shortage, which had caused an increased workload among employees. In acknowledging this situation, LMs had to be more flexible in managing employees because often the same employee was involved in different tasks. Interviews also revealed another challenge related with the old infrastructure that slowed down the daily operations. In turn, this affected the time allocated to HRM matters.

Responses on HRM policies and practices covered four categories: job description, rewards and benefits, training and work design. There was agreement amongst LMs on job description, while the other three categories received mixed responses. First, LMs responded

that they rarely referred to job descriptions. Second, there were mixed responses in terms of rewards and benefits. While half of the LMs were satisfied with the rewards provided, others perceived that their workload was too much, compared to the recognition they received. Third, mixed responses were also revealed regarding LMs experiences towards training. The lack of training, specifically in managing human resources, was considered a key factor contributing to dissatisfaction within the unit. Fourth, there were contrasting ideas among LMs on the number of employees under their supervision. Half of the LMs believed that the small number of employees was an advantage because they were easier to manage, while other perceived this as a difficulty because more work had to be done by each employee.

The analysis also found that role evaluators' perceptions of the LMs' HRM role contribution fell into two HR service areas: HR unit and employees. However, there was no agreement among role evaluators on both areas. Generally, all role evaluators agreed that LMs' contributions to HRM activities in the small airports were unclear because the unit heads had more influence. These factors, contributed to the difficulty measuring changes to HRM effectiveness through the LMs' HRM role.

Overall, there were some differences of how the LMs' HRM role was defined and enacted at Airport Y, when compared to Airport X. The key difference was in the HRM activities of LMs, where more activities were expected from LMs in Airport X as they were involved in rewards management. The definition of the LMs' HRM role was captured within the same functions: administrative expert, employee champion and change agent. However, LMs in Airport X were expected to have greater involvement in HRM processes and documentation compared to LMs in Airport Y. Similarly, findings on the enactment of LMs' HRM role showed that LMs in Airport X did more than those in Airport Y. Importantly, the understanding of the LMs' HRM role in Airport X was clearer than Airport Y, which affected the role evaluators' perceptions of LMs' contributions to HRM effectiveness.

Following the same case study procedures, the next chapter shows findings from the last case study, Airport Z.

## **Chapter 6: Case Study 3–Airport Z**

As discussed previously, this study employed multiple case studies involving three Malaysian airports. The previous chapters reported findings from two case studies: Airport X and Airport Y.

This chapter presents the interview results at Airport Z. The same case study process was used as in the other two cases. The chapter covers the background information about the case study organisation, the participants involved and six themes that frame the research questions. This chapter ends with the summary of the findings for Airport Z.

### **6.1 Background to Airport Z**

Airport Z is a category C domestic airports and is located at the centre of Peninsular Malaysia. Starting as a small airport with only 81 employees, Airport Z had the capacity to handle some 500,000 passengers annually. But in 2008, the airport terminal was extended and it transitioned into an international airport. This development increased the airport's capacity to accept larger aircraft and receive more passengers. The new terminal now receives larger 747 aircraft and handles about 2 million passengers every year. The main factor contributing to the increased number of passengers was the airport being an attractive starting point for the pilgrimage to the Holy Land Mecca via Jeddah and Medina. Muslim passengers on the west coast of the Malaysian Peninsular particularly use this route as they do not need to travel through Kuala Lumpur.

At this airport, interviews were conducted with four LMs and four role evaluators. LMs who participated in the interviews represented three main units: operations, fire and rescue services, and security. Meanwhile, role evaluators were represented by superiors from the same units, as well as one support unit. The Airport Z organisational chart is illustrated in Appendix 8.

## **6.2 Participants' Demographic Backgrounds**

Of the four LMs, Unit 2 was represented by two LMs and one (LM) for Unit 1 and Unit 3. A single role evaluator was used from the security, fire and rescue services, operations and HR units. The number of participants involved depended on their availability during the interview sessions. For instance, although Unit 1 was the largest unit, the location of the unit was separate from the main building (where the interviews were held) and required LMs to be at their work stations. It was difficult to access all LMs because they were working and had responsibilities. LMs were fully responsible for monitoring work stations as the unit's head office was located in the main building.

The LMs were predominantly male (three males and one female) and over 50 years of age. All LMs shared the same characteristics in terms of race, religion, education and tenure. LMs were Malay Muslims with secondary school qualifications and all had long tenure with the organisation.

The role evaluator's characteristics differed predominantly in terms of education, age and tenure. Two role evaluators had gained diplomas, while two others had secondary school qualifications. In terms of age, two role evaluators were over 50 years of age, while one represented the 30 to 39 age group and one the 40 to 49 age group. All role evaluators had more than ten years of tenure. Role evaluators were similar to LMs in terms of gender, religion and ethnicity.

## **6.3 The HRM Activities of LMs**

Interviews with LMs and their role evaluators revealed four key HRM activities in which LMs engaged: work arrangement, attitude and disciplinary management, performance management and training. Differences in responses were identified on the basis of the unit's size. As mentioned previously in Chapter 5, the small units employed less than 12 employees, while larger units had more than 12 employees. In this airport, there were two large units



(Unit 1 and 3) and one small unit (Unit 2) that participated in the study. Consensus was achieved between LMs and role evaluators that LMs in large units had more involvement in the HRM activities compared to LMs in the small unit. The general understanding was that with fewer employees to manage the unit heads were able to monitor their employees without much reliance on LMs. The results of individual HRM activities are presented below, based on the frequency of the activity being mentioned by participants.

### **6.3.1 Work arrangement.**

Regarding LMs' HRM roles, work arrangement was the most mentioned HRM activity by both parties, and there was a strong agreement between both groups about which activities comprised work arrangement. This was expressed by LMs and the role evaluators in relation to managing employee leave. For this activity, the responses were similar between units, regardless of size.

LMs perceived their involvement in the work arrangement activity to include management of employee leave applications. Moreover, LMs expressed that management of employee leave was based on the planned monthly roster. While half of the LMs mentioned that the airport faced problems with the employee shortage, others said that employee leave applications were contingent on the roster. That meant, at the request time, if there were a sufficient number of employees, or employees who were willing to replace another employee, then the application would be forwarded to the unit head for approval. In most cases, employee applications were approved by the unit head when supported by the LM. Most importantly, the number of employees had to be in line with the requirements set by the parent company:

We have a minimum of nine employees a day. Therefore, we have to plan...how many people on leave...how many people on standby and etc. Usually, if employee plans to apply for leave next month, we'll plan earlier so that it won't affect the roster except

for medical leave or emergency leave. When everything was cleared, then we forward the application to the head of unit. (LM 21, Unit 3)

The roster was identified as an important tool for assisting LMs with work arrangements. Apart from being a reference to manage employee leave applications, the roster was used to check on employee attendance and to make necessary adjustments. During one of the interview sessions, a LM received a phone call from one of his employees regarding the number of employees rostered in that unit. The LM asked this employee why insufficient employees had been scheduled on the roster and after being satisfied with the explanation, recorded the information in the log book. Although the number of employees available was different to the schedule, no further action was taken. According to the LM, the current number of employees still complied with the minimum needed to operate the unit; the LM indicated that no work function would be affected.

Role evaluators expressed the same understanding regarding work arrangement. They expected LMs to manage employee leave applications to ensure that the unit's operation would not be affected. Similarly, role evaluators voiced that approval for employee leave was the responsibility of the unit heads. Although role evaluators said that the unit heads had the right to reject any employee leave application, often role evaluators observed that the unit heads would approve the application if it had been supported by the LMs.

### **6.3.2 Attitudes and disciplinary management.**

Both LMs and role evaluators shared similar understandings of LMs' involvement in managing employee attitudes and discipline. This involvement included monitoring employees' daily work and ensuring their performance was consistent with the parent company's requirements:

I have to make sure employees completed their work accordingly. I'll monitor them every day and make record of it so that I can refer if the heads of unit want any information. (LM 20, Unit 1)

To ensure this consistency and to solve employee work related problems, all LMs mentioned they had to understand the employee's job. This was explained in the following comments:

We'll make sure employees understand their job....so we need to inform them what to do and how they should do their job. We are also responsible to inform employees about their current tasks which are not included in their job list. (LM 22, Unit 2)

If we notice any unusual thing, we'll call them and discuss. Then, we'll see what we can do so that the problem will stop there. (LM 20, Unit 1)

With regard to knowledge of employee situations, such as wrongdoings, LMs reported to the unit heads. If an employee was having a serious health problem that caused them to be absent several times, LMs suggested that they were responsible for letting the unit heads know immediately. This was because the problem would require further action, which related to company policy and regulations and would involve other parties, such as the HR unit. Three of the four LMs said that often they tried to solve small problems themselves by talking with the respective employees, and by giving advice or to counselling them. LMs endeavoured to solve most employee problems before they became worse. Nevertheless, no LM mentioned that any disciplinary action had taken since their appointment.

According to role evaluators, LMs should inform the heads of unit about employee work behaviour and performance. A role evaluator responded:

If there is disciplinary issue among employees, they reported to us and we will take necessary actions. (RE 10, Unit 1)

One issue raised by role evaluators was the inability of LMs to give instructions to employees. The close relationship between LMs and employees was identified as a key factor that

contributed to this problem. LMs were not willing to ask employees to do what they were supposed to do. They were concerned this may affect their relationship. As a result, role evaluators noticed that employees were too comfortable with their way of performing, even if they weren't achieving their job requirements. Role evaluators believed this situation could be prevented if LMs were able to advise their employees accordingly and to lodge complaints about employees' work. This is encapsulated in the following statement:

The relationship between LMs and employees are too close and there is no gap.

Sometimes LMs do employees' work because they afraid to ask their employees. At the end of the day it affects LMs work because they don't have enough time to do their own job. They don't even have time to monitor the attendance. (RE 12, Unit 3)

Regarding monitoring employee work and performance, three of the four role evaluators mentioned that the unit heads did not rely solely on LMs' input. Role evaluators monitored employee attitudes by relying on records and evidence from LMs to assist with decision making and action. Although the unit heads were only available during office hours, they often called their LMs to update them on airport events during their absences. This occurred particularly if an important event was scheduled at the airport or if there were special guests involved in an event. Role evaluators said this ensured the effectiveness of the airport's operations and customer satisfaction.

In discussing the inability to promote good attitudes among employees, three of the four role evaluators suggested that LMs were aware of their weaknesses. LMs were expected to know the basic requirements of their employees' jobs and to guide them accordingly. Although LMs had a close relationship with employees, LMs need to differentiate between what was right and wrong so that employees could respect LMs' instructions. Only a minority of role evaluators expressed their satisfaction with LMs' current abilities to perform this task. However, this satisfaction did not reflect the overall ability of all LMs. Role evaluators

believed that all LMs could improve their abilities in performing this task if they were more willing to change their own attitudes towards employees.

For role evaluators, the only problem that hindered LMs' ability to change was their own attitude. Half of the role evaluators believed that as LMs were senior employees and were nearly retired, they were comfortable with their working style and thus hesitant to shift from their comfort zone. This related to their inability to adapt to the new culture brought about by the company's transition from government owned to a private company. Instead, most LMs remained in the old culture and still behaved as if the company was a government agency. Role evaluators noted that it was important for LMs to realise that there had been a significant change in the company's operations. These changes, in turn, resulted in more challenges and expectations of employees, including LMs.

Based on the role evaluators' responses, the LMs inability to promote good attitudes among the employees was not considered a problem if the unit and airport operations were still under control. Instead, role evaluators believed that the unit heads played a more important role in managing employee attitudes and discipline, which outweighed LMs' influence. This was due to the level of respect among employees: unit heads were more respected compared to LMs. LMs were not able to promote positive attitudes among employees, but this task was being handled by the unit heads.

### **6.3.3 Performance management.**

LMs' perception of their role in performance management activities matched those of the role evaluators. According to LMs, their role included activities such as involvement in monitoring and updating employee performance records, discussing employee performance evaluations, managing the performance evaluation documentation and providing necessary information to unit heads to assist the process:

For performance evaluation, the marks given to the employees are through the discussion with the heads of unit. (LM 20, Unit 1)

If the heads of unit need any information about certain employees, they will ask that from us. (LM 22, Unit 2)

For role evaluators, LMs were responsible for providing employee performance information and being involved in the performance evaluation meeting.

All activities including performance evaluation is done by the LMs. We just involve at the final stage to give confirmation on their evaluation. But we don't rely totally on their evaluation....I'll check the record by myself and sometimes I just go to the work station to see how employees do their work. (RE 10, Unit 1)

According to role evaluators, although LMs were responsible for managing the performance evaluation documentation, the evaluations made of employees' performance was made in discussions held with the unit heads. The input for this documentation was dependent on the outcome from the meeting, and was not solely based on LMs' judgements.

Another role evaluator stated that LMs were also responsible for conducting feedback sessions with employees. These sessions were conducted after the unit heads had finalised all employee assessments. LMs were responsible for meeting with the individual employee to convey the results of the performance evaluation:

They have to see each and all employee and tell the results. If the employee agrees then LMs will need to ask the employee to sign the form, if not then that employee will come and see me. (RE 12, Unit 3)

There was a similar understanding between both parties, in that LMs' involvement in performance management differed based on the unit size. LMs in the large units were more involved in the performance evaluation processes than in the small units. Moreover, LMs and role evaluators noted that LMs in the small units did not manage the performance evaluation

documentation, nor participate in the performance review sessions. These included tasks to monitor and update employee performance records, involvement in the sessions to discuss employee KPIs before performance evaluations were held and to give performance evaluation feedback after the evaluations. These have been described by LMs and role evaluators in the small unit through the following statements:

In this unit, performance management is handled by the heads of unit, not us. (LM 22, Unit 2)

The heads of unit did all the process to evaluate employee performance. (LM 23, Unit 2)

Even though LMs supervise employees in the unit but I did the performance evaluation processes and all documentations involved, I've my own way to monitor employee performance. (RE 11, Unit 2)

In terms of decision making for performance management, both parties agreed that, regardless of size, this was the responsibility of the head of unit. This was encapsulated in the following comments:

Final decision is on the heads of unit. (LM 20, Unit 1)

Although I have a meeting with LMs during the performance evaluation, but the decision is still on me. (RE 10, Unit 1)

#### **6.3.4 Training.**

There was little consensus about LM's involvement in training. Role evaluators did not agree on LMs' involvement in training as it depended on the unit size. LMs in the large units had more training tasks compared to LMs in the small unit. This included involvement in planning the training schedule, which was forwarded to the unit heads for approval:

I am the one who prepare the training schedule and I pass it to the head of unit for approval. (LM 20, Unit 1)

Based on the training schedule, LMs in the large units were also involved in the implementation process. Their involvement in conducting specific training included roll call and fitness training. This was particularly expressed in relation to the unit functions which required certain units to perform that specific training. LMs further noted that these training sessions were routine activities and part of their daily tasks. Role evaluators expressed the same understanding regarding LMs' involvement in implementation, once the training schedule had been approved.

LMs involved in all activity including conducting training in the unit. (RE 10, Unit 1)

LMs in the small unit did not mention any involvement in training which accorded with the role evaluators' assessment. The training offered to employees in the small unit was based on the training list provided and decided by company. Based on this training list, employees were nominated to attend training by HR unit at the airport.

#### **6.4 The Intended HRM Role of LMs**

Based on Corner and Ulrich's (1996) HRM typology, role evaluators understood LMs' HRM role as serving three functions: administrative expert, employee champion and change agent. Interviews revealed the differences of the expectations of LMs' HRM role amongst role evaluators, and the differences depending on the unit size. LMs in the large units were expected by the role evaluators to fulfil more HRM duties compared to LM in the small unit where the HRM functions were mostly managed by the unit head. In the small units the unit head was able to monitor all employees as there were few of them.



#### **6.4.1 Administrative expert.**

Role evaluators perceived the administrative expert role to be performed mostly by LMs in the large units. LMs were involved in activities, including preparation of rosters and training schedules for the unit:

In terms of administrations tasks, they have to make sure there were sufficient employees in every shift; they have to plan....make sure employees were prepared to achieve their job need, conduct training class, manage employee leave and others. (RE 10, Unit 1)

Nevertheless, role evaluators agreed that all documentation related to this preparation had to be approved by the unit heads before the activity could be delivered:

LMs need to manage the monthly roster, then bring it to me for approval. (RE 12, Unit 3)

Out of four role evaluators, three of them stated that often what had been prepared by LMs would be accepted and approved because the unit heads had confidence in LMs' abilities knowing that LMs were familiar with the preparation work. However, in some cases, the unit head needed to complete the task on behalf of the LMs especially if the cases needed to be prepared in English. Not all LMs had proficient knowledge of English as one role evaluator commented:

Most LMs in my unit were senior employees, they have long been with the company but they don't have enough qualification. They can implement the operational tasks, but for documentation especially preparing document in English....they still have problem to do that. So, I can't let them handle tasks that I am supposed to delegate. (RE 12, Unit 3)

Regarding the preparation of training schedules, three of the four role evaluators indicated the involvement of LMs in the large units that were classified as a uniformed body.

These units were required to perform certain activities, which were routine in nature. These activities were also important for the unit's functions. For instance, routine fitness training was a compulsory activity for Unit 1, because physical strength is an important requirement for employees in this unit (Unit 1 was responsible for emergencies within the airport, especially in relation to aircraft). Another activity was to conduct roll call. The nature of these activities contributed to the perception of LMs' training role. Half of the role evaluators further explained that LMs were involved in preparing the training schedules, and how that enabled them to monitor and record employee attendance, which was used for the performance evaluation process.

Half of the role evaluators also viewed performance evaluation feedback sessions as the LMs' responsibility. In these sessions, LMs delivered the employee performance evaluation results to all employees in the unit. This session was important and needed to be managed appropriately, to ensure that employees were satisfied and understood the justifications for their result. Therefore, role evaluators expected LMs to answer any question to the employees' satisfaction:

LMs have to see employees and deliver feedback from performance evaluation. For those employees who did not agree with the given marks after the meeting with their LM, these employees have to see me for further explanation. (RE 12, Unit 3)

LMs in the small units were not expected to do most of the tasks performed in the larger units. This included preparing training schedules and conducting performance evaluation feedback sessions. Role evaluators suggested that the heads of the small units were responsible for most of the checklist and documentation involved in HRM processes. The head of unit responded:

I manage my employees directly. I approved every task they performed, even for work checklist I monitor by myself. (RE 11, Unit 2)

Managing employee leave was the only activity common to all units, regardless of size. All LMs were expected to assist in the processes of employee leave applications by checking the roster to ensure employee numbers were sufficient, before forwarding applications to unit head for approval. Three of the four role evaluators said that the leave applications supported by LMs were often approved by the unit head. A minority of role evaluators also mentioned that LMs could change the roster to ensure there were sufficient numbers of employees in the unit to enable leave approval.

There was agreement amongst role evaluators that the unit heads did not rely solely on LMs to perform their administrative expert role. This related to the lack of skills and attitudes among LMs, and is described in the following comment:

In managing employees in the unit, I think they need improvements especially in terms of attitudes. The new generation may good in technology but lack of commitment as the senior people had. Senior people were very committed with their work because of their experience and credibility but lack in qualification. (RE 10, Unit 1)

Role evaluators suggested that LMs performance of the administrative expert role could be improved if LMs were willing to learn more of the skills needed to administer the HRM processes, and did not only rely on their current skills. This was particularly true as most LMs were senior employees who had limited ability, especially in using technology such as computer applications. Role evaluators believed that ability in computer technology was common in any workplace nowadays. They indicated the importance of this ability to LMs with the increased expectations of the new airport environment.

#### **6.4.2 Employee champion.**

There was no agreement amongst role evaluators on the LMs' employee champion role. A minority of role evaluators expected LMs to have a close relationship with employees

to identify employee problems for upper management. This was considered important for maintaining employee commitment, which also allowed employees to realise the company cared about their problems:

We need LMs to monitor employee problem so that employees always show their support the company. (RE 12, Unit 3)

According to role evaluators, the employee champion role required LMs to be close to employees. In discussing this point, a minority of role evaluators stated that senior LMs were in a better position to build good relationships with employees and were able to offer assistance to them:

Employee show more respect to the senior LMs because senior people have more experience and know when something is not right. Employees usually don't take for granted anything from the senior people. (RE 10, Unit 1)

Three of the four role evaluators did not expect LMs to perform the employee champion role. Although half of the role evaluators agreed that LMs had a close relationship with employees in the unit, problems occurred when LMs were unable to manage the relationship accordingly, to meet with the expectations of role evaluators. Sometime, LMs were reluctant to provide advice to employees, although they were aware of weaknesses in the employee's daily work. This happened because LMs did not want the relationship with employees to be affected:

I found that the relationship among LMs and employees were too close. When this situation happens, employees don't have much respect to the leader. (RE 12, Unit 3)

Role evaluators noticed the huge effect on employee performance when LMs were not respected. In particular, this was evident with the difficulty in giving instructions to employees. Some LMs were reported to perform employee tasks because they were reluctant to give orders to their employees. These situations made employees feel comfortable with their performance, even if they did not meet the job requirements.

Further, the inability of LMs to provide instructions to employees resulted in dissatisfaction with employees' performance evaluations. Employees assumed they had performed their job well because they had not received complaints from their LMs. However, their evaluation might not reflect their assumption because the unit head evaluated employee performance. The unit heads monitored employee performance based on the standards and could detect weaknesses in employee performance as they conducted inspections. As a result, some employees were dissatisfied with the performance evaluation because they had not been informed by their LM earlier.

In other cases, problems occurred when the time allocated to perform HRM activities was affected because LMs had spent their time completing their employees' jobs. Indeed, the tendency for LMs to perform their employees' jobs was the reason for their high workload perception.

While LMs' lack of ability in managing relationships contributed to the problem of performing the employee champion role, three of the four role evaluators believed that the unit heads were better performing the employee champion role. The following statements made this evident:

I think we can only rely on LMs to handle employees about 40%, mostly we refer to the heads of unit. (RE 13, Unit 4)

To manage employees, we need to follow the policy (current policy). But to change the old understanding among LMs is very difficult. They still did not meet with my expectations. (RE 12, Unit 3)

#### **6.4.3 Change agent.**

Interviews revealed the role evaluators needed for LMs to perform the change agent role. Role evaluators expected LMs to change their attitudes in line with the company's transformation. They believed LMs to set a good example for employees in the unit.

Moreover in the company transformation from government agency to a private organisation, the mentality of employees had also changed and role evaluators needed LMs to change also.

Role evaluators agreed that, amongst all HRM roles, the change agent role required the most improvement from LMs. This was mentioned in relation to the need for changing attitudes. Management expectations had changed with the company's ownership change. But role evaluators thought the attitudes of LMs had not changed and this affected the way the HRM role was performed. Role evaluators expressed this in relation to LMs' attitudes which reflected the old working style and this hindered their ability to perform non-routine tasks. This was particularly evident in cases where LMs did one job activity when they could multi-task to be more effective. This was encapsulated in the following statements:

If they think they have a lot of pressure to do their job, I guess it was the old mentality....when you have transformed to the private company, you should not compare with what you have done before. The mentality need to be change. (RE 11, Unit 2)

Sometimes I can see the weaknesses of how the job is done by employees, but LMs can hardly see that although they do the monitoring part....if they sit on one work station at the beginning of their shift, they usually be there until the end of their shift. It is so difficult to change the mentality. They were supposed to do multitasking. (RE 12, Unit 3)

Role evaluators also observed the difficulties in changing attitudes towards supporting the company:

At first, most of them keep complaining about this and that..... only recently we can see some improvement towards supporting the company. (RE 12, Unit 3)

This was observed through the conflict between newer and older employees; both groups were unwilling to accept each other's strengths, despite the potential to improve work

performance. Role evaluators defined newer employees as those who joined the company after privatisation, while older employees were those who had been with the company when it was a government owned. There was a consensus amongst role evaluators about the different attitudes of these groups. This is succinctly summarised in the following statement:

The new people and senior people have different mentality. Senior people thought they know everything. The new people proud of their academic qualification and most of them have experience working in Airport M (an international airport). This new people bring the new culture...but senior people do not like it. But then, when we ask senior people about the requirements of their tasks, they can't answer that...because they lack of knowledge. (RE 12, Unit 3)

As a result, role evaluators observed different styles of employee management in the units. Newer LMs were focused more on documenting or referencing work processes, while older LMs were more flexible as they drew on their experience to get the job done. There was a difference in the way these different LMs influenced and managed their employees. Consequently, some employees gave priority to achieving their personal over the company's strategic goals. This happened because LMs feedback to employees was inconsistent and employees were not provided with the best advice to guide their understanding of the company's goals. This contributed to the tendency for employees to interpret policy based on their own understandings and motivations. Role evaluators felt this situation should be avoided because it created resistance to change in the company.

In dealing with this conflict, these role evaluators voiced the need for both groups to complement each other, instead of complaining about one another. Role evaluators believed that if LMs managed the situation properly, they would provide a good example to employees and the airport operation would be smoother. This ability of LMs to act as role models was highly emphasised by role evaluators when considering the constant changes made by the

management to improve airport operations. The remaining role evaluators did not view the differences in LMs' mentality as a serious problem, because in all situations, regulation was still regulation. Essentially, all employees could perform tasks in their own way as long as it agreed with company regulations. In particular, LMs were responsible for using the company's policy and regulations to guide their performance, although they were familiar with the tasks allocated to them.

## **6.5 The Actual HRM Role of LMs**

LMs perceptions of their HRM role fell into two categories of Corner and Ulrich's (1996) HRM typology: administrative expert and employee champion. Only a minority of LMs were concerned about performing the change agent role. However, interviews revealed differences in perceptions of the HRM roles on the basis of the unit size. LMs in the large units were more involved in performing HRM roles compared to the smaller units.

### **6.5.1 Administrative expert.**

Three common HRM activities around the administrative expert role are discussed here. First, all LMs expressed their administrative expert role in relation to managing employee attitudes and discipline. This included monitoring employee's daily work and ensuring they did their jobs to company standards. In performing this task, LMs said that they needed to make records of employee attendance and performance for later use in the performance evaluation process:

I did employee work evaluation, every day I will monitor their work, I keep record of that because it will be useful for employee performance evaluation later. (LM 20, Unit 1)

Second, half of the LMs discussed their administrative role in relation to the performance management mentioned by LMs in the large units. They described their responsibilities in relation to conducting performance evaluation feedback with employees. According to these



LMs, this activity was conducted after the performance evaluation had been finalised by the unit head. The performance evaluation feedback was an important part of the performance management process for LMs, and they were charged with explaining the assessments given to employees. In this process, LMs also said they referred to records and evidence of employee work if there were unsatisfactory cases:

After we have evaluated their performance, I'll call them individually and explain what they get. (LM 21, Unit 3)

The third activity was training. Half of the LMs mentioned their involvement in managing training schedules. This task was performed only by LMs in the large units. The type of training mentioned by LMs related to their unit's function, which differed between units. Training included roll call and fitness training sessions. LMs mentioned that they were responsible for planning the training schedule, which would be conducted after the schedule had been approved by the unit heads:

I prepare the training schedule and send it to our head of unit for approval. (LM 20, Unit 1)

Interviews revealed different levels of involvement among LMs in performing the administrative expert role. LMs in the small units were not involved in the administrative expert role because most of the related tasks were managed by their unit head. This is described in the following response:

We don't have the same employees under our supervision because it based on shifts. Each shift may involve different people. So, we just monitor employees in our shift...leave application, performance evaluation and others were all done by the heads of unit because heads of unit monitor all employees. (LM 22, Unit 2)

Indeed, checking on the number of employees was the only task related to their administrative expert role. This task required LMs to communicate with employees at all work stations and

to update information regarding the number of employees available. According to LMs, this task ensured that every work station was occupied with enough employees to ensure smooth and efficient airport operation. LMs recorded the information in a log book, which was referred to for subsequent issues. Due to its function, the small unit in this airport was not required to conduct any specific training. Therefore, LMs in the small unit were not involved in the training schedule or in conducting the training sessions.

#### **6.5.2 Employee champion.**

Only half of LMs expressed their HRM role in relation to the employee champion role. This role was described by LMs to entail activities such as building employee commitment and trust:

When I see that some of the employees did not perform their work accordingly, I'll ask them to follow me to the work station and do the work together with me. I show them the way they were supposed to do their job and when they become familiar, I leave them to finish the work. The next day, I'll check again. I just want to make sure that all employees are responsible with their jobs. (LM 20, Unit 1)

By guiding employees, LMs believed they could build commitment to their job. This commitment from employees would determine the success of implementation; in turn, this contributed to the effectiveness of the unit operation.

Moreover, LMs were also responsible for conducting the performance evaluation feedback sessions. LMs were responsible for the security of the employees' performance evaluation and did not reveal the results except to the individual employee. As a result, employees trusted them to share work or personal problems that affected their work. According to LMs, this situation assisted them in delivering employee problems to the unit heads, ultimately reaching resolutions.

Other LMs stated they were not responsible for building employee commitment and trust, due to their limited involvement within HRM activities. This understanding was true for the small units. These LMs believed they were more responsible for operationally oriented tasks, while the unit heads were responsible for employee issues.

Half of the LMs mentioned the problem of employee shortages that affected work arrangements in the unit. This caused employees to have greater workloads as each unit had to use the limited number of employees for the unit to function. In this situation, LMs expressed their role as listening to employees when they wanted to voice dissatisfaction, particularly due with work stress and fatigue. However, conveying problems to senior management had become irrelevant since the problem was not new to this airport. Senior management had been informed about the problem before. For LMs, they would always be a place for employees to voice their dissatisfaction, because the employee shortage could be an ongoing problem. It might never be solved by airport management or the parent company.

### **6.5.3 Change agent.**

All LMs agreed they were not involved in the change agent role. They indicated that a lack of authority in performing HRM activities had been identified as the main factor contributing to this perception. This has hindered them from doing more than instructed because their actions were ruled by the need to report to their unit heads.

## **6.6 LMs' Challenges to Performing their HRM Role**

Factors that influenced LMs in performing their HRM role were identified based on five categories: desire, capacity, competencies, support, and policy and procedures. At this site, there were two contrasting opinions amongst LMs regarding challenges in performing the role. While half of the LMs were confident that there were no challenges regarding management of HR related matters, others pointed out issues that hindered their ability to

perform the HRM role. The issues raised were closely related to the company's HRM policy and procedures. Other categories received positive responses from most LMs.

#### **6.6.1 Desire.**

LMs expressed their pride in being employed by the company, realising that many people were interested in joining. LMs were grateful for being employed by the company, as they were aware of the difficulty to get accepted. This was identified as a factor that contributed to their loyalty. For LMs, every task given to them, particularly in managing employees, had been taken as a responsibility and they were committed to perform the job to the best of their ability.

#### **6.6.2 Capacity.**

In response to work management, LMs mentioned that time management was important. Despite acknowledging that their workload had increased, LMs highlighted the value of experience that assisted them in their jobs. Three of the four LMs, the ability to balance the workload between operational tasks and managing human resources was attributed to the experience they had gained working with the company. This was often expressed in relation to training conducted by their previous manager on some HRM tasks, before they were appointed as LMs themselves. This experience and guidance subsequently shaped how they performed their role and informed them of how tasks should be completed.

#### **6.6.3 Competencies.**

The value of experience was also evident when discussing the knowledge and skills required for effective performance of the HRM role. While three of the four LMs agreed that the company had provided their employees with training, the specific training for managing human resources was insufficient. However, they did not view this as a factor that hindered performance of their HRM role. Instead, they believed that their experience had provided them with sufficient skills and knowledge. Most of the experience mentioned by LMs was

gained from being an employee previously and from observations from their former managers.

#### **6.6.4 Support.**

Interviews revealed three sources of support, which included support from colleagues, the unit head and their employees. The most mentioned form of support was support from their colleagues. LMs mentioned that although the increased workloads had caused increased stress, the understanding and cooperation from colleagues assisted them in the management of workload and stress. This was expressed in relation to the willingness of their colleagues to assist each other according to their differing expertise. As a result, LMs were able to complement each other.

Half of the LMs emphasised the importance of support from their unit head and how this had assisted them. Apart from the trust given in the capability to manage employees, these LMs also noted that the line of continuous feedback they received from their unit head was valuable for improving their HRM role performance. The close relationship between these LMs and their unit head was identified as a factor that contributed to performance. These LMs described their head of unit as very responsive and kept in touch on a regular basis, despite not being physically at the airport.

For a minority of LMs, the support received from employees helped them perform their HRM role. This was expressed in relation to employees' willingness to undertake their delegated tasks. This assistance allowed LMs to focus on more important tasks. However, three of the four LMs did not associate the support they received from employees with their ability to perform HRM roles.

LMs stated they did not deal much with the HR unit, as most of the information from senior management to employees was delivered through the unit head. Moreover, LMs mentioned they rarely referred directly to the HR unit when experiencing problems with

employee management. In most cases, they preferred to go through their head of unit, who was able to give them solutions.

#### **6.6.5 HRM policy and procedures.**

Interviews revealed mixed responses regarding HRM policy and procedures in performing HRM roles. Differences were identified between perceptions of LMs in large and small units. LMs in large units perceived the current HRM policy and procedures as a hindrance in performing the HRM role. However, LMs in the small unit were unsure of how to judge the use of the policy in performing their tasks, considering their limited involvement in HRM activities.

While LMs were aware that they were responsible for performing all allocated work, problems arose when they had no power to manage employee issues. This was particularly true in relation to managing employee attitudes and discipline. Half of the LMs mentioned they were not able to correct employees, even when employees had not performed as required. LMs were unsure about the policy because they felt their actions were inconsistent and needed to be contextually based. They observed this on the basis of feedback from management. Although LMs refused to discuss this issue further, it was likely to be related to the problem of favouritism. This was evident, as they mentioned that implementation was based on individuals and their relationship with the powerful people in the airport. For LMs, this situation affected their performance because it could cause dissatisfaction among certain employees. In fact, LMs had to bear the consequences if employees' performance affected the unit function or the airport's operation.

The HR audit process also affected the implementation of the LMs' HRM role. Although it was understood that the audit process was good, in the sense that it revealed areas requiring improvement in work and employee management, half of the LMs suggested that the audit sessions were held too often. During the audit process, they were often faced with an

abundance of work that needed to be managed at the same time. This limited the time for managing HR related matters, as more focus was needed to prepare for the audit. Moreover, a minority of LMs mentioned they often received complaints from their colleagues and employees during the audit sessions because they were required to be involved in the audit process while performing their routine jobs.

## **6.7 The Role of HRM Policies and Practices**

Four HRM policies and practices were identified to inform understanding of their HRM role. These included job description, training, rewards and benefits, and work structure. Of the HRM policies and practices, job description and training received negative responses, while the other policies and practices received mixed responses.

### **6.7.1 Job description.**

LMs understood the job description as a document that explained the job scope and required tasks to all employees. Three of the four LMs stated they rarely referred to the job description for managing HR related matters. This was mentioned in relation to the content of the job description, which was general and did not assist HRM role performance. In dealing with employees, LMs mentioned that they preferred to perform tasks based on experience, rather than on the written document. This was encapsulated in the following statement:

Job description...yes it is helpful. But usually we were not referring to that because we are all senior employees, we were familiar with all those tasks, we know what to do because that was our routine tasks. (LM 21, Unit 3)

For LMs, the best resource for managing employees was the experience from working under their own previous leader. LMs believed that previous experience was valuable because it helped them deal with employee issues that were not covered in the job description. LMs further explained that the advantage of having those experiences allowed them to understand the consequences of their actions. Moreover, the prior experience of being an employee

provided insight into decision outcomes. Based on these experiences, LMs assumed that their employees felt the same when regarding their actions as a leader.

Half of the LMs raised the issue that newer employees differed in attitude compared to older employees. Although LMs could apply the same approaches they learnt from their former manager, their task was more challenging when dealing with newer employees. Newer employees had different understandings which influenced their attitudes and perceptions regarding the way LMs performed their HRM role. Although LMs could expect the preferred way to manage older employees, they could not apply the same methods to newer employees, as they viewed the method differently.

LMs stated that managing employees required more knowledge than that given in the written document. Moreover, they asserted they could be flexible in managing employee issues because some of the issues were unique. Experience was invaluable to performing the HRM role while maintaining and increasing employee commitment to the company.

### **6.7.2 Training.**

LMs feedback about training was negative as they believed a lack of training affected their HRM role. Two issues contributed to their dissatisfaction towards training. First, there was insufficient training designed to improve their knowledge and skills with HR related matters. Out of four LMs, three of them expressed that, although the company offered training every year, specific HRM training was not available. The training provided by the company focused on the unit function, which they described as technical.

Second, most LMs stated that some of the training they thought useful in managing employees had not been listed after the company became privatised. This was noted in the following statements:

We have training but now the number of training has reduced. As a leader, that training was important so that we can manage our employees better. (LM 20, Unit 1)



I think we have the leadership training once. But that was a long time ago. (LM 21, Unit 3)

LMS praised the usefulness of the previous training as they were more likely to apply what had been learnt at their workplace. In addition, they also wished the same training could be offered again so that newer LMs could gain the same knowledge and skills as older LMs. They believed this effort would be useful to ensure the consistency of HRM implementation in the airport. A minority of LMs felt that the current training offered by the company was less relevant because the theory was different from the actual implementation of their HRM tasks.

### **6.7.3 Rewards and benefits.**

Interviews revealed mixed responses from LMs regarding rewards and benefits. LMs did not express their understanding of the messages conveyed by the design of rewards and benefits in relation to their HRM role. Instead, they were likely to discuss rewards in general based on their views as an employee of the company. Most LMs were satisfied with what they received from the company. Much improvement had been made in the ways the company rewarded their employees. LMs explained they saw changes in the way the company appreciated their employees and believed this was part of the company's effort to increase employee satisfaction. LMs further explained that this effort was important for improving employee work performance, but did not particularly discuss the importance of the effort with regards to their HRM role performance.

LMS only expressed that their satisfaction of the company's rewards had influenced their loyalty towards the company. As LMs responded:

In terms of acknowledgement, Alhamdulillah (praise to God). The company rewards their employees accordingly. Those who have employed for 25 years, the company offer them with gold or watch. For me, this shows how our company appreciate

employees. That's why most of the senior employees have a good loyalty with the company. But new employees may think differently. (LM 20, Unit 1)

As previously mentioned, there was a gap in the attitudes of older staff and newer employee. Older LMs noted they were unsure whether or not newer employees had the same understandings about rewards and benefits. This was evident in the differences in understanding shown by both groups when it came to attitudes about HRM approaches. While older employees felt grateful for the current salary and expressed their loyalty to the company, newer employees were eager to find better opportunities that promised more salary and benefits.

Other LMs also discussed the influence of age on employees' perception of rewards. The older LMs agreed that as most of them were nearly retired, there was nothing more they would ask from the company because they had spent most of their life with the company.

LMs responded:

Alhamdulillah (praise to God, ) every year there must be an increment. I feel really grateful of what the company give to me. (LM 20, Unit 1)

Alhamdulillah (praise to God), with this salary I can support my family and saving money for my life after I retired. I can even help my daughter with her education fees even though she was married. (LM 21, Unit 3)

Only a minority of LMs voiced dissatisfaction with rewards and benefits. This was expressed in relation with their increased workloads, compared to rewards received. LMs agreed that their salaries were good, but when it came to the workload, LMs suggested that it was not worthwhile because they had to sacrifice their time and energy. The following comment summarised this attitude:

Actually, our job is challenging, but we have no choice, we have to do it no matter what.... Yes, we used to get certificate for the best worker, but that's all, only the

certificate. For me it is not worth compare to too much work to be done. (LM 22, Unit 2)

#### **6.7.4 Work structure.**

Work delegation was the main element identified concerning work structure. In discussing the work delegation within units, half of LMs expressed their satisfaction with the distribution of work, which enabled them to concentrate on their expertise, while managing employees. As a result, LMs believed they could ensure timely completion of work and quality work performance. This gave them more time to monitor their employees in the unit, as one LM responded:

Our head of unit has delegated specific task for each LM, so we were nominated to attend training related with our scope of tasks. For me, it helps me a lot because I am doing tasks that I was good at. Like me, I am not good with the office work and administration, so I would not be given the management tasks but more on the field work. (LM 22, Unit 2)

Other LMs commented on excessive workloads with operational duties, which had affected their focus on HRM. This problem was associated with the workforce planning policy. When discussing this issue, LMs in this airport often made comparisons about the work delegation in the international airport, which were more specialised as compared to the domestic airports. At this site, as the number of employees was limited, employees had to perform multiple roles compared to employees in the international airport, who were more specialised. For LMs, employee shortages caused them to widen their scope of responsibility in operationally oriented tasks, as one LM responded:

Our scope of work includes cleaning inspection at the terminal, landscape and grass cutting....we also need to check on the safety at the airside, monitor if any problem happens in the terminal, monitor contracts employees that provide their services at the

airport, check on the attendance, quality of work, cleanliness and etc .....We were doing our job on one man show but everything we have to monitor...at the airside, terminal and everything. That's too much work to be done....This differed from international airport, they've got many employees and one employee is responsible for one section. (LM 22, Unit 2)

Due to this situation, a minority of LMs mentioned the difficulty meeting with senior management's expectations while dealing with heavy workloads.

Fatigue was another problem caused by the work structure in the domestic airport. LMs highlighted this issue because the heavy workload on operational tasks had affected their HRM role performance. According to half of LMs, meeting with senior management's expectations often required them to sacrifice their rest day to complete HRM work on time. This was described as follows:

Sometimes, we still need to continue our work at home, prepare the report and everything. It is difficult to take leave because lots of works to be done...yes, in one part we know many things, but on the other part, it is really tiring...even during our rest day we have to come if there was a meeting... (LM 22, Unit 2)

These LMs suggested that the stress to perform the HRM role may be reduced if there were a sufficient number of employees to manage the work scope and to make jobs more efficient.

In discussing the employee shortage, most LMs agreed that top management was aware of the problem, but to date no action had been taken to solve it. This was perhaps due to the fact that domestic airports did not gain as much revenue as the international airports. Therefore, top management at this domestic airport needed to find ways to manage operational costs. One option was to reduce the number of employees. Although LMs realised this, half of the LMs voiced the need for the company to review the workforce plan so that it would not affect employee performance.

## **6.8 The Company's HRM Effectiveness**

In response to HRM effectiveness, role evaluators identified four areas of HR services: services to HR unit, employees, unit operation and value added. Overall feedback on all HR services led to negative responses. None of the role evaluators related the HRM role of LMs as adding value to the company as a whole.

### **6.8.1 HR unit.**

According to role evaluators, LMs were not able to support the HR unit in managing HR related matters. Most role evaluators agreed that most HRM activities in the unit were the responsibility of unit heads. Although LMs in the large units were partly involved in all HRM activities, the unit head's role was needed to complete or finalise any HRM processes performed by LMs. The HR executive viewed the heads of unit as the intermediary between top management and employees. In this case, the HR executive stated that most of the information from headquarters or airport managers was delivered to employees through the unit head. Likewise, employee issues in the unit were sent to senior management through the unit head. Even in the absence of the unit head, the HR unit could not rely solely on information from the LMs. They were concerned that LMs had a limited ability to manage employee issues. Instead, the HR executive would get confirmation from the unit head before the information was accepted. This line of communication contributed to the belief that LMs merely supported the HR unit. Most role evaluators described this as a factor that caused the unit head to only accept LMs input in general because in most cases, LM actions needed close supervision from the unit head.

### **6.8.2 Employees.**

Despite a close relationship between LMs and their employees, LMs were unable to manage their relationship. This was identified as a key factor that contributed to their lack of influence on HRM effectiveness. Role evaluators described this as a weakness, as managing

the relationship with employees was vital for influencing employee attitudes. The following statement described this:

In terms of managing their employees, LMs need to improve especially in terms of attitude. We can see changes in employee attitudes but it fluctuate, sometimes its increase and vice versa...this is not consistent. (RE 10, Unit 1)

As LMs worked directly with employees in the unit, their relationship had to be managed properly so that employees were aware of the power dissonance between leaders and subordinates. Role evaluators viewed this gap as important because it determined the level of respect shown by employees for work instructions. In close relationships, employees took instructions less seriously. As a result, employees were not doing what they were supposed to do, and this affected their work performance. Moreover, role evaluators mentioned that employees felt as if they were doing their job well if there were no complaints or advice from LMs. In reality, LMs were not willing to tell employees about their weaknesses, for fear that their relationship might be damaged.

Three of the four role evaluators also mentioned the need for LMs to improve their attitudes, given their influence on employee perceptions. While role evaluators believed that complaints from employees were usual for any organisation, LMs attitudes could help enforce employee perceptions in support of the company. Role evaluators believed that LMs should always be on the company's side, to help employees realise the long term benefits provided by the company. This was because some of the new programmes or policies introduced by the company might not take effect in the short term. The benefit was more likely a long term one. Therefore, LMs needed to ensure employees understood the benefits so that they could accept the changes made when implementing new programmes and policies easily and without resistance. This was important with new rules or policies that employees were expected to meet with the new expectations. This required employees to move from their comfort zones,

and learn new things, to meet with the new expectations. According to role evaluators, LMs played a key role in influencing employees' understandings of changes made. LMs should act as an example for employees. Moreover, LMs should be able to explain the changing process to employees.

Unfortunately, role evaluators agreed that the influence of the LMs' HRM role could not be seen. In this airport, most role evaluators believed that the influence of the unit heads outweighed the LMs because LMs rarely accepted the changes made by management. Instead, most LMs focused on personal outcomes rather than the company's long term benefit. This was viewed as a bad example to employees as it encouraged resistance to change and resulted in little performance improvement from employees. Instead, the unit heads needed to take charge and guide employee attitudes accordingly to support the company's mission.

### **6.8.3 Unit operation.**

In the operational area, LMs were expected to minimise employee problems that could potentially affect the unit function and performance. Due to a significant concern with reducing operational costs at this domestic airport, role evaluators expected LMs to guide employees to prevent mistakes that could increase costs. Role evaluators emphasised the need for each unit to perform well and to ensure the satisfaction of all customers in the airport. When talking about customers, role evaluators noted that the quality of services was important not only to the flight passengers, but also to the airline companies, contractors and the public. As there was a wide scope of services, role evaluators suggested that LMs should support the unit operation by ensuring complete control of the airport. This could be accomplished by guiding employees to perform as required, and through accommodating the needs of all customers. However, three of the four role evaluators indicated that LMs' contributions were limited due to their lack of HRM knowledge and skills. This knowledge

and skills deficit contributed to a weak implementation as operational and HRM tasks were interdependent.

#### **6.8.4 Value adding.**

Overall, no contributions in value adding were identified through the LMs' HRM role. All role evaluators agreed that in the domestic airport, the unit heads had more influence on HRM related matters. However, based on role evaluators' perceptions, LMs could contribute to the company without authority. This was mentioned in relation to attitudes and motivation. If LMs could set a good example for employees and were more open to accept changes, this potentially helped support the company. This was due to the fact that LMs were still the leaders on their shift, and due to that, they were supposed to influence employee attitudes so that employees were willing to change and supported the company's mission. This could be done by motivating employees to avoid mistakes in their work processes so operational costs were not increased. This effort could be beneficial, especially for the domestic airports, as effective management of operational costs was vital for increasing revenue.

### **6.9 Chapter Summary**

Airport Z was a domestic airport located at the centre of the Malaysian Peninsular. This airport differed from other domestic airports in its connectivity to the Holy Land Mecca via Jeddah and Medina. This routing increased demand for services in the airport, especially from Muslim passengers living on the western coast of the Malaysian Peninsular. LMs and role evaluators in Airport Z shared similar characteristics as most of them were male and Malay Muslims. However, there were differences in the role evaluators' characteristics such as age, educational background and tenure.

Role evaluators and LMs revealed four activities that were central to LMs' HRM: work arrangement, attitudes and discipline management, performance management and training. There was a strong agreement between both groups on the activities which



constituted LMs' HRM role. However, the reliance on LMs' involvement in those activities was limited, due to a gap in their HRM knowledge and abilities. Differences in levels of involvement were also present according to the unit's size. LMs in the large units were more involved in the HRM activities compared to those in the smaller units.

According to role evaluators, LMs' HRM role included three functions: administrative expert, employee champion and change agent. However, LMs only considered the administrative expert and employee champion role as their HRM role. LMs claimed that they only contributed to providing information for the unit head, to ensure the continuity of HRM activities. Their proximity with employees allowed for a close relationship, which supported their employee champion role.

In terms of challenges, half of LMs were confident in their ability to manage the challenges. Other LMs highlighted the company's policy and procedures as the main challenge that hindered their ability to perform their HRM role effectively. The limited number of employees and the huge workloads, especially during the audit processes, were identified as factors that contributed to LMs' dissatisfaction with the company's HRM policy and procedures.

The role of HRM policies and practices were described in relation to the following elements: job description, training, rewards and work structure. Job description and training were elements in the policy that received negative responses from LMs. This was due to the job description content that was provided in general, and the lack of specialised training in HRM currently offered by the company, compared to previous training. The other elements contained mixed responses from LMs; however, there were more positive responses perceived than negative.

Regarding HRM effectiveness, role evaluators viewed that the contribution of LMs was limited to three areas of HR services: HR unit, employees and the unit operation. This

limited contribution was attributed to a lack of skills and knowledge, in addition to the fact that the unit heads' influence outweighed that of LMs. From their observations, role evaluators agreed that LMs were involved in these three areas of HR services, and suggested that more improvement was needed from LMs to maximise their contribution. Role evaluators perceived that the LMs' HRM role did not add value to the HRM process, and asserted that LMs could do more to support the company's mission.

In the next chapter all case studies results are considered through a cross case analysis. All findings are interpreted and compared by referring to the initial research framework introduced in Chapter 1, in conjunction with the literature. Through examining the similarities and differences, a clear picture of the LMs' evolving HRM role is gained and contributes to the resolution of the research questions.

## **Chapter 7: Cross Case Analysis and Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to explore the development of LMs HRM role by focusing on how the role is defined and enacted. In addition, an attempt is also made to investigate the influence of LMs' HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness. Data for this study was gathered mainly through interviews with staff at three Malaysian airports. Analysis of related publications such as company documents and websites were conducted to provide general information about company background and to compare findings from the interviews.

In this chapter is a discussion of the results from the case studies and an interpretation of the findings in terms of the role theory concepts. A cross case analysis is conducted to compare results across the cases. This is done to identify similarities or differences in themes related to the role theory concepts. Four role theory concepts are covered: role expectations; role taking; role conflict; and role consensus. The interview results are studied to identify the causal link between the real understandings of the respondents with the role theory concepts. The link between the real situation and theoretical concepts is important so that an explanation of how the LMs' HRM role is defined and enacted in the Malaysian environment can be made. This discussion aims to bring together these concepts to deliver understanding of the development of the HRM role of LMs and the influence of their performance on HRM effectiveness. Insights to be captured, using both structure and agency, will provide a better understanding of the development of the HRM role of LMs in the Malaysian organisation. In terms of structure, airport category/size, the company's strategic priorities and the unit's functions are discussed as these affect how the company's HRM activities are managed. Agency is addressed by the employees' experience, cultural values and religiosity. The interactions of these elements provide a full understanding of how the LMs' HRM role is defined and enacted. These results are analysed in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The chapter concludes with a summary.

The chapter commences with a brief discussion of the research framework that guides the research questions.

## **7.1 The Research Framework**

Figure 1 (as shown in chapter 1 and repeated here) represents the exploration of the role theory concepts relevant to the development of the LMs' HRM role in achieving HRM effectiveness. The related role theory concepts involved in the research framework are role expectations, role taking, role conflict and role consensus. Each of these concepts is considered by asking different interview questions. First, role expectations are captured by asking the role evaluators (senior managers and HR representatives) about the intended HRM role of LMs. Second, role taking is explored by considering the role holder's (LMs) perceptions of their experience in performing the HRM role. Third, role conflict is represented by questions about challenges LMs faced in performing their HRM role. Fourth, the company's HRM policies and practices are used to examine the concept of role consensus, which aims to investigate how the HRM policies and practices have been used to send messages about role expectations to LMs. The understanding of these role theory concepts is used to explain the effect of LMs' HRM role performance to HRM effectiveness.

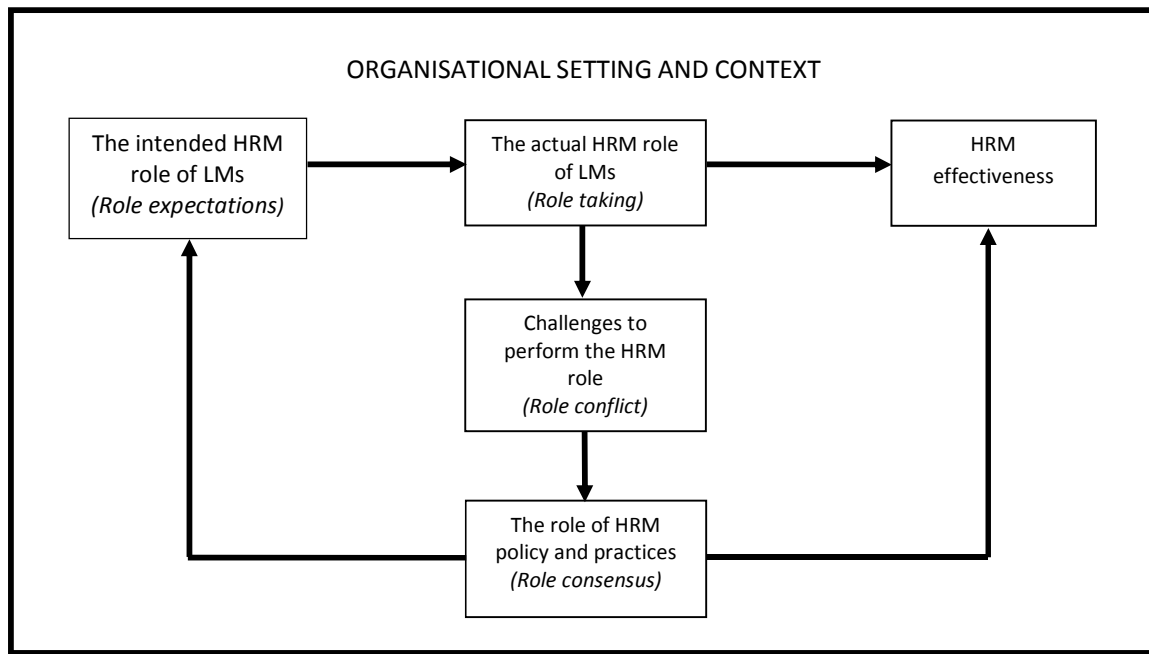


Figure 1. Preliminary research framework.

## 7.2 RQ1: How is the LM's HRM Role Defined?

In this study, the LMs' HRM role was embedded in two main facets, namely the understanding of LMs' HRM activities and the intended HRM role of LMs.

### 7.2.1 LMs' HRM activities.

HRM activities are the activities that ensure organisations use employees' capabilities and contributions to accomplish organisational goals (Boxall & Purcell, 2011). The importance of gathering perceptions about HRM activities lies in getting a clear picture of LMs' involvement in these activities, so that their HRM role can be described.

Between airports, role evaluators agreed that LMs should be involved in many HRM activities. Although the number of HRM activities to be performed by LMs differed, this study was consistent with earlier studies, where LMs were expected to be involved in more than one HRM activity (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Renwick, 2003). As shown in Table 11, the number of HRM activities was similar between Airport Y and Z, but differed at

Airport X. More activities were expected by role evaluators to be performed by LMs in Airport X than Airport Y and Z.

Table 11

Comparison Between LMs' HRM Activities

HRM activities of LMs	Airport X	Airport Y	Airport Z
Performance management	Yes	Yes (Differed based on the unit size)	Yes (Differed based on the unit size)
Rewards management	Yes	No	No
Attitudes and disciplinary management	Yes	Yes	Yes
Work arrangement	Yes	Yes (Differed based on the unit size)	Yes (Differed based on the unit size)
Training	Yes (Differed based on the unit requirement)	Yes (Differed based on the unit requirement)	Yes (Differed based on the unit requirement)

In terms of the HRM activity, the only exception that differed between airports was rewards management. Four HRM activities were the same: performance management, attitudes and disciplinary management, work arrangement and training. Performance management was the most mentioned activity by participants in the study. This was in line with the study by Cunningham and Hyman (1995), who identified performance appraisal as the most common HRM activity associated with the HRM role of LMs. LMs were also reported to be involved in attitudes and disciplinary management consistent with the literature, which provided evidence of the increased involvement of LMs in this activity (IRS, 2001 as quoted in Renwick, 2003). Although there has been no discussion in the literature about LMs' involvement in work arrangement activity, participants in this study highlighted this activity as part of their HRM role at the airport. This included administering employee leave and managing work rosters, which was crucial to ensuring that each unit could operate as required. The last HRM activity revealed by the participants was training.

Although four HRM activities were common to all airports, this similarity did not reflect the role evaluators' consensus of the coverage and depth of involvement of LMs in each of the HRM activities. Differences in activities perceived by role evaluators between airports are summarised in Table 12. More coverage was expected from LMs in Airport X as compared to Airports Y and Z. Significant differences between Airport X and the other airports were identified in two HRM activities: performance management and work arrangement. At Airport X, LMs performed most processes and undertook the documentation associated with the activity, whereas those at other airports were only partly involved in the process and not with documentation. The activities performed by LMs in Airport X were mostly undertaken by the unit heads at Airports Y and Z. The coverage of HRM activities also differed between units in Airport Y and Z, as LMs in the smaller units had less involvement than LMs in the larger units.

Table 12 Differences of LMs' Coverage of HRM Activities

HRM activities	Performance management	Attitudes and disciplinary management	Work arrangement	Training
Airports				
Airport X	Updated merit and demerit forms Conducted performance review sessions Completed the performance appraisal form and forward to the head of unit	Monitored employee attendance Monitored employee discipline and appearance Advised employee on minor wrongdoings Provided evidence for serious discipline cases Involved in investigation if necessary	Managed employee leave Planned and prepared monthly roster Prepared the monthly report Monitored manning levels Ensured sufficient employees for each shift Informed head of unit about related information relevant to employees work	Conducted knowledge sharing sessions (KSS) Conducted physical training as required by the unit function Proposed any training needed to improve employee work performance in the unit
Airport Y and Z	<i>Large units</i> Involved in meetings to discuss employee performance Provided input about employee performance if necessary	Monitored employee work performance Advised employee for minor disciplinary problem Informed head of unit about serious disciplinary problem LMs involvement is considered as part of the approaches to monitor employee discipline	Monitored employee leave Scheduled the work roster and forwarded to heads of unit for approval	Assisted head of unit in the KSS if necessary Conducted physical training required by the unit function
	<i>Small unit</i> -      None	Provided information to heads of unit if necessary	Checked the work roster	None

Due to differences in their coverage of HRM activities, LMs in Airport X had greater influence on HRM activities compared to LMs in Airports Y and Z. This was measured through their involvement in HRM processes and associated documentation. The more they participated in HRM processes and completed documentation, the more influence they had over HRM activities. A summary of these differences between LMs at the airports can be seen in Table 13.



Table 13

## Differences in Depth of Involvement in HRM Activities

HRM activities of LMs	Airport category		
	Airport X	Airport Y and Z	
		Large units	Small units
Performance management	High	Low	No
Rewards management	High	No	No
Attitudes and disciplinary management	High	Low	No
Work arrangement	High	Low	No
Training	High	Low	No

Other similarities found between airports regarded the final decision on HRM activities. Regardless of the LMs' influence in HRM activities, there was agreement that the final decision on these activities was owned by the unit heads. This parallels Cully et al.'s (1999) study where they found that although LMs had increasingly been involved in the HRM matters, this development did not reflect any increased authority for LMs to make the final decision on those activities (Renwick, 2000).

### 7.2.2 The intended HRM role of LMs.

As noted by researchers, the intention to devolve the HRM role to LMs was based on several goals (Budhwar, 2000; Larsen & Brewster, 2003). This included: increasing local accountability, while allowing HR specialists to focus more on their strategic role; providing better employee relations as LMs worked directly with employees at the workplace; having a better understanding of the HRM issues, as LMs were assumed to have closer relationships with employees compared to the HR specialists; and to reduce operational costs (Budhwar, 2000). These goals were encapsulated in Ulrich's typology, which identified the value of the HRM function in adding to the organisation (Yusoff, et al, 2010). While HRM activities were designed to use employees' capabilities to achieve organisational goals, the understanding of

these activities was used to explain activities involved in each HRM role and the importance of those activities in reflecting the contribution of the LMs' HRM role to the airports.

In 1996, Conner and Ulrich undertook a study about the change needed in the HR function to create value for a company. They suggested four key roles to be fulfilled by HR people: administrative expert, employee champion, change agent, strategic partner. They described the administrative expert role as including tasks associated with the traditional HR role and entailing activities to facilitate the processes of HRM activities. The employee champion role was described as managing day-to-day activities by considering employee needs and problems. As organisations had to deal with constant changes, the change agent role was important to foster new behaviours to help organisations deal with changes, while enhancing competitiveness. The strategic partner role concentrated on ensuring that HR strategies were in line with business needs. In their work, Conner and Ulrich (1996) reported that the change agent and strategic partner roles were not separate roles but were related to each other. They concluded that for the HR practitioner to have success in delivering their strategic partner role, they must be able to manage change. Therefore, three HR roles were used in this study to investigate the intended HRM role of LMs: administrative expert, employee champion and change agent. The assumption was made that the strategic partner was the domain of the HR specialists' role. Items adopted from Conner and Ulrich (1996) to measure the intended HRM role of LMs are presented in Table 14.

Table 14

Items of the HRM Role Adapted from Conner and Ulrich (1996)

HRM role	Description
Administrative expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor administrative processes</li> <li>• Improve operating efficiency</li> <li>• Spend time on operational issue</li> <li>• Increase productivity</li> <li>• Develop processes document and related transaction</li> <li>• Ensure the HR processes are efficiently administered</li> </ul>
Employee champion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer assistance to employees</li> <li>• Meet employee family and personal needs</li> <li>• Spend time on listening and responding</li> <li>• Maintaining employee morale</li> <li>• Building employee morale</li> </ul>
Change agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help generate employee commitment</li> <li>• Help accomplish the company goals</li> <li>• Reshape behaviours towards future needs</li> <li>• Spends time on supporting new behaviours</li> <li>• Help anticipate future needs</li> <li>• Participate in the company renewal</li> <li>• Change or transformation activities</li> </ul>

In analysing the intended HRM role of LMs, it was revealed that differences in role evaluators' perceptions existed between airports, as shown in Table 15. Although the entire HRM role (administrative expert, employee champion and change agent role) was considered by role evaluators in all airports, their views on the level of LMs' involvement differed. As can be seen in Table 15, the expectations of LMs in Airport X were higher than LMs in Airports Y and Z in all HRM roles. Moreover, the level of LMs' involvement within units in Airport Y and Z also differed based on the unit size. The involvement of LMs in the larger unit was more likely than LMs in the smaller unit.

Table 15

## Case Studies Comparison of Intended HRM Roles of LMs

Perceived HRM role function	Airport X	Airport Y	Airport Z
Administrative expert	Yes (high involvement)	Yes (low involvement) Differs based on the unit size	Yes (low involvement) Differs based on the unit size
Employee champion	Yes (high involvement)	Yes (moderate involvement)	Yes (moderate involvement)
Change agent	Yes (high involvement)	Yes (high involvement)	Yes (high involvement)

The only similarity across all airports was the change agent role: role evaluators heavily emphasised the change agent role to be played by LMs as compared to the other HRM roles. The explanation for these outcomes is discussed below.

#### ***7.2.2.1 Administrative expert.***

The administrative expert role was viewed by role evaluators to consist of documenting the procedures and processes involved in the HRM activities, especially those activities that related to work arrangements and performance management system (PMS). In terms of work arrangements, the administrative expert role entailed activities such as managing rosters, preparing monthly reports, monitor staffing and administering employee leave applications. For PMS, LMs were expected to conduct performance review sessions and complete the forms included in the performance evaluation process.

Role evaluators at all airports indicated the need for LMs to perform the administrative expert role. However, the level of LMs' involvement differed between airports. Role evaluators at Airports Y and Z shared the same understanding of the administrative expert role of LMs. Differences were identified at Airport X. First, the level of involvement that was measured through LMs' participation in the HRM activities: the higher involvement of the

LMs' administrative expert role was expected from role evaluators in Airport X when compared to the other airports. The high involvement of LMs in Airport X was described by their participation in most processes involved in the work arrangement and performance management activities. LMs' involvement was not limited to implementation, but included planning some HRM activities. In the work arrangement activity, role evaluators required LMs to prepare the staffing and work roster to be used by employees in the unit. This necessitated LMs to study the unit's work and tailor it to the number of employees needed to undertake that work. From there, LMs were expected to allocate the right amount of employees for every shift, to ensure the unit functioned smoothly. This planning of LMs in Airport X was perceived as important by role evaluators. Staffing and work rosters were important documents for monitoring employee attitudes and discipline at work. The low involvement of LMs at Airports Y and Z was evidenced by the role evaluators through their limited participation in both work arrangement and performance management activities. Generally, LMs in both airports were only expected to be involved in implementation, while planning activities were managed by the unit head. Even in performing the activities, LMs often followed what had been decided and relied heavily on their unit head when problems arose. Apart from that, LMs at Airports Y and Z also had limited involvement in HRM documentation, because most documents were completed by their unit head. Role evaluators suggested that LMs could do more in performing the administrative expert tasks, but their lack of computer and English proficiency limited their contribution to these tasks. This differed from the situation of LMs at Airport X, who reliably managed the documentation of HRM activities.

Second, differences in LMs' involvement between airports can be explained by the dependency of the unit heads on the LMs. The dependency of the unit heads on the LMs at Airport X was higher than at Airports Y and Z. LMs at Airport X were trusted to perform the

administrative expert role with minimal supervision from their unit head. Meanwhile, LMs at Airports Y and Z performed HRM activities together with unit heads; the heads closely monitored the LMs' work. For instance, in the performance evaluation processes, LMs at these airports held the meeting with other LMs, and the unit heads, to discuss employee performance before decisions could be made. In this process, the heads of unit prepared all the documentation and finalised the result. In contrast, LMs at Airport X were expected to manage all the processes and complete the performance evaluation form for the employees they supervised. The unit head's role was to give approval based on what had been prepared by the LMs. This suggested that the responsibility of LMs at Airport X was greater compared to LMs at Airports Y and Z. Thus, LMs at Airport X were held responsible for their decisions and this differed from the situation at Airports Y and Z where the responsibility for the decision was made by the head of unit.

#### ***7.2.2.2 Employee champion.***

Tasks associated with the employee champion role were described by role evaluators to consist of activity in managing relationships with employees to guide them so they could perform. In addition this role meant the LM acted as an intermediary in delivering new policy or regulations introduced by top management to employees. Role evaluators at all three airports expressed the need for the employee champion role to be performed by LMs. However, greater involvement was expected from LMs at Airport X compared to LMs at the other airports. This was expressed in relation to LMs' influence in performance management processes, which differed between airports. As LMs at Airport X were involved in most processes in employee performance evaluation and dealt directly with employees to conduct the performance review sessions, it was suggested that LMs spent more time with employees to monitor their work and performance. This opportunity allowed LMs to identify the best way to communicate new policies or changes introduced by senior management.

In the interviews, it was discovered that the expectation of the employee champion role was shaped by the working hour system implemented in the company. In all airports, LMs and employees were working on shifts while the unit heads and other top management worked normal office hours. These patterns gave more opportunity to LMs to work directly with employees and spend time understanding employee problems that could affect performance. Role evaluators also believed that this situation made the relationship between LMs and employees closer compared to the unit heads because LMs were often available whenever employees needed them.

This study revealed that LMs' influence differed between airports. LMs at Airports Y and Z appeared to have less influence compared to those at Airport X. At Airports Y and Z, the unit heads had greater influence over employee attitudes. This was due to their involvement in most HRM processes; this reflected their influence in HRM decision making. Some role evaluators thought this contributed to LMs being reluctant to take their own initiative when dealing with employee problems because they preferred to rely on the head of unit. At Airport X, LMs had more influence because they were given full responsibility for monitoring their employees without assistance from the heads of unit.

#### ***7.2.2.3 Change agent.***

Emphasis on the change agent role was given by role evaluators at all airports. Role evaluators viewed the change agent role as an important HRM role to be performed by LMs compared to other HRM roles. The importance of performing this role was mentioned in relation to most HRM activities. Activities entailing the change agent role included initiatives to cut the cost of unit operations by reducing overtime, increasing efficiency, searching for opportunities that could increase the non-aeronautical revenue (revenue generated from commercial activities like the operation of duty free shops, hotels, parking facilities and

leasing commercial space) at the airport and putting more effort into contributing to the effectiveness of the unit and airport without relying on others.

Interestingly, the focus on performing as a change agent differed between airports. At Airport X there was a concern about cost saving efforts, while both at Airports Y and Z there was a need to change employee attitudes in line with expectations of top management. According to role evaluators at Airport X, LMs were expected to assist in cost saving initiatives due to their influence over members of the work unit. Directly working with employees gave LMs the opportunity to identify ways to increase efficiency in the unit. This situation differed to the expectations for LMs at Airports Y and Z, as the unit heads had more influence over managing the work unit. As a result, LMs were expected to lead the attitude changing effort and increase employee commitment towards the airport.

From role evaluators' understandings, performing the change agent role did not require LMs to have more authority, as it depended on their individual efforts. Role evaluators believed that limited involvement in HRM activities should not hinder LMs at Airports Y and Z from involvement in the change process and contributing to company goals. Performing the change agent role could be done if all employees, especially LMs, had a strong sense of belonging at the airport and were willing to contribute for the benefit of the unit and the airport.

### **7.2.3 Discussion of how the LM's HRM role is defined.**

The airport category, size and location differed, but a number of similarities were identified regarding the role evaluators' perceptions of the LMs' HRM role. This was particularly true for Airports Y and Z, while differences were found at Airport X.

The concept of role expectation was used to interpret the findings of the role evaluators' perceptions about LMs' HRM role. Role expectations have been defined as the demands and assessment of specific behaviours for a role that are formally written down



(Biddle, 1986). The assumption has been that the role evaluators' perception would influence the design of the company's HRM policies and practices, to assist LMs in meeting the requirements of their HRM role. In understanding the allocation of work roles in the organisation, role theory highlighted the importance of role evaluators' expectations because it was assumed that the role holder enacted their role based on what was expected and required by others in the role set (Katz & Kahn, 1978). While early developments of role theory noted that expectations were the crucial aspect that affected the performance of the role (Biddle, 1986), this study confirmed that this remains the same in the modern organisation. This was particularly true in discussing how the LMs' HRM role was defined through involvement in HRM activities, and the intended HRM role in the Malaysian airport sector amidst constant environmental changes.

Differences in the number of HRM activities between airports can be explained by a number of factors. First, the airport size and category made a difference. The literature reveals that organisational size is a factor that influences role expectations (Truss, et al., 2002). Researchers suggest that more expectations are reported in larger organisations compared to smaller organisations. This explains why LMs in Airport X were expected to be more involved in HRM activities compared to LMs in Airports Y and Z. As the international airport, Airport X was larger in size with more employees to be managed than the domestic airports (Airport Y and Z). In addition, Airport X had longer operating hours and was capable of accepting more, and larger, aircrafts per day.

A ratio of LM to employees varied between airports and units. In average, one LM at Airport X supervised around 14 employees. Airports Y and Z had a ratio of 1:9 for LMs to employees at the large units, with 1:2 for the smaller units. This reflected a greater influence of LMs at Airports X than those at the other airports. They were involved in more HRM activities and specifically reward management. As LMs at Airport X were responsible for

managing employee performance evaluation forms; this led them to being involved in rewards management. They were responsible for completing the performance evaluation form and made recommendations to the unit heads about rewards. LMs had to continuously monitor employee performance to assist their judgement and make the right evaluation for each and every employee under their supervision. This differed for LMs at Airports Y and Z because the final documentation was completed mainly by the unit heads, who were held accountable for decisions on employee rewards.

In general, role evaluators perceived that LMs' involvement in HRM activities for Airports Y and Z was difficult to define because their involvement was often overshadowed by the unit heads' influence. This is consistent with Regner (2003), who suggested that situations in the organisational peripheries required LMs to be more flexible and explorative, depending on the situation. The situation at the organisational peripheries was regarded as more complex and unstable compared to the organisational centre. Regner's (2003) findings effectively explain situations in these airports. For instance, as an international airport, LMs' involvement at Airport X was defined clearly by the role evaluators. Perhaps this occurred as more employees were employed at the Airport X, which allowed the allocation of work to be made based on different functions and specialisations. Marginson et al. (1993) suggested that to reduce employees doing cross-functional tasks, a clear definition of LMs' HRM role is needed (Renwick, 2000).

As domestic airports, Airports Y and Z were faced with complex situations where they needed to deal with limited number of employees while maintaining standard quality services. This shaped the allocation of work among employees in the units, including the LMs' HRM role. The limited number of employees made the allocation of LMs' role dependent on the airport's needs and situation. While the size of the units differed between one another, it appeared that more expectations were required from LMs at the large unit than smaller unit.

The smaller unit had less than 12 employees, while the larger unit had more than 12 employees. In the larger unit size meant more employees required management compared to the smaller size, indicating a need for more LM involvement in HRM activities. LMs in the smaller units were responsible for more operational tasks because the limited number of employees required them to oversee several operational areas and provide information about employees to the unit heads only when necessary.

Interestingly, it was found that the increased expectations for LMs to be involved in HRM activities did not depend on the power structure at the airport. Although LMs were held accountable for the outcomes of the decisions about employee work and performance in the unit, they actually had to bear the consequences of others' decisions and not their own. This was particularly true for LMs at Airport X, as they had a high involvement in most HRM processes, while the ultimate decisions depended on the unit heads. Document analysis of LMs' job descriptions confirms this finding, as LMs were only responsible for making decisions on operationally oriented tasks.

To understand the role evaluators' expectations of the intended LMs' HRM role, LMs were expected to play their role in all HRM functions: administrative expert, employee champion and change agent. Of all, the change agent role was given the highest emphasis by role evaluators in all airports. The administrative expert role was viewed by role evaluators as a day-to-day, repetitive and rarely changed HRM activity, consistent with Conner and Ulrich's (1996) findings. Further, role evaluators perceived these activities to be important to ensure the continuity of HRM processes in the unit so it could be integrated with the needs of the HR department. This has been noted by previous researchers, who believed that the purpose of performing the administrative expert role was to ensure the efficiency of HRM processes, so that operations ran as planned (Yusoff, 2012).

The need for LMs to perform the employee champion role was in keeping with the argument by McConville (2006), who suggested the need for LMs to work closely with employees as representatives of senior management. These activities were related to managing employee attitudes and discipline, as the employee champion role was associated with people-based activity rather than HRM processes (Yusoff, 2012). Moreover, this finding corroborates the study by Floyd and Lane (2000), who reported that LMs were well placed to promote new ideas to the employees they managed. In fact, although LMs in the domestic airports were perceived to have limited involvement in HRM activities, role evaluators still expected them to assist in delivering a new policy or regulation to their employees.

This study produced results which corroborate the findings of much previous work in the devolution of the HRM role to LMs. This suggests the increased emphasis for LMs to perform ‘the interventionist HRM roles’, including the change agent role (Caldwell, 2003; Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Hope-Hailey, et al., 2005). Differences in the focus of performing the change agent role were expected because this role had long been characterised as the most varied role, reflecting the differences in its enactment (Conner & Ulrich, 1996). In this study, these foci are influenced by the airport category and size. While Airport X (international airport) provides most of the company’s revenue, the operation at Airports Y and Z (domestic airports) were more likely to be subsidised by that revenue. Airports Y and Z could not gain revenue from aeronautical sources due to the limited number of aircraft using the airport services per day. Therefore, the focus was on attitudes and changing efforts to increase employee commitment to supporting the airport by generating non-aeronautical revenue. However, all airports required contributions from LMs to achieve strategic priorities and improve the effectiveness of airport operations. This finding is consistent with an earlier study that described the change agent role as a strategically oriented task expected from the LMs (Yusoff, 2012).

The shift in the company's strategic priorities could explain the expectation of the role evaluators regarding LMs' HRM roles in this study. In this study, changes happened as the company transformed from a public institution to a private company. Due to this transformation, more effort was tailored to improve the effectiveness of its operations and increase satisfaction among stakeholders, especially employees. The company's HRM policy and practices were continuously improved to achieve the company's mission. The introduction of the new performance evaluation approach from Human Performance Management (HPM) to Performance Management System (PMS) had recently been made to increase employee satisfaction with the company performance evaluation system. This required LMs to understand a new process and perform each process accordingly, to increase employee satisfaction. This involved the application of KPIs in reviewing employee performance, which had not existed under the previous performance evaluation system. The expectations of LMs had increased, as they needed to be flexible and gain the necessary knowledge to apply the new system and to convey understanding to employees about how the new system would work. Therefore, emphasis was given by role evaluators to LMs to perform the change agent role. This finding was consistent with Truss (2001), who suggested that the HR function was expected to be flexible and able to react with current needs and reduce uncertainty to effectively deal with drastic changes in the environment. Indeed, this was particularly true for LMs, who were responsible for performing the HRM function so this contribution was recognised by other members in the organisation (Sheppeck & Militello, 2000).

Changes in the airport environment could also be seen through the new LMs grade in the airport structure. This change marked the increased expectation of senior management, where LMs were expected to be more reliable in performing their role in managing employees in the unit, relying less on the unit heads. The increased expectation of the LMs' change agent

role from the restructuring was expected, as earlier researchers had noted the effect of organisational restructuring on an increased demand of LMs' HRM role (Budhwar, 2000). In fact, this change caused HR priorities to shift from activities to outcomes (Ulrich, et al., 2008). This was evident, as most role evaluators highlighted the need for LMs to perform beyond their routine tasks and contribute to the airport's operations as a whole. According to the role evaluators, the real contribution of LMs was in their effect on others and not only themselves. This required LMs to make changes, especially to the employees they managed, to support the new demands from the changing airport environment.

Workplace diversity could be another factor affecting the expectations of the LMs' HRM role. This confirms the suggestion made about the refinement of the role in organisations, to include the dynamic nature of the workplace, such as age differences (Wickham & Parker, 2007). In this study, differences in expectations were identified between newer and older unit heads. Most older unit heads were over 50 years of age and had experienced the governance changes in the organisation, whereas newer unit heads were younger and had only been with the organisation in its incorporated state. Newer unit heads indicated higher expectations of the LMs' HRM role than the older unit heads, especially in terms of supporting the organisation with the changes.

### **7.3 RQ 2: How was the LMs' HRM Role Enacted?**

LMs' experience in enacting their HRM role was investigated by comparing their understandings to those of the role evaluators. This was captured through the understanding of HRM activities they were involved in, the HRM role they played and challenges in performing their HRM role. Apart from that, the role of HRM policies and practices in sending messages about HRM role expectations was also examined to obtain LMs' understandings of their HRM role.

### **7.3.1 LMs' HRM activities.**

LMs at all airports shared similar understandings of their HRM activities with their role evaluators. Greater involvement of LMs in HRM activities was reported at Airport X as compared to Airports Y and Z. This is seen through the number of activities in which LMs were involved, and their involvement in HRM processes and documentation. At Airport X, five HRM activities were identified by LMs: performance management, reward management, attitudes and discipline management, work arrangement and training. Reward management was the only HRM activity that differed between Airport X and the other airports. More participation in each HRM activity was perceived by LMs at Airport X, while LMs at other airports viewed their involvement as limited; they assisted their unit heads to perform HRM activities.

### **7.3.2 The actual HRM role of LMs.**

LMs' perceptions about their HRM role were interpreted based on Conner and Ulrich's (1996) HRM role typology, similar to the measurement used to examine the perceptions of role evaluators of the intended HRM role of LMs.

Generally, LMs at all airports perceived that their HRM role related to two HRM functions: administrative expert and employee champion. However, different emphases were given by LMs between airports, as shown in Table 16. Greater emphasis was given by LMs at Airport X compared to others at Airports Y and Z. Further, the perceptions of these roles also differed among LMs in Airports Y and Z on the basis of the unit size. While LMs in the larger units perceived they were responsible for performing the HRM role, LMs in the smaller units believed that they were not involved in the HRM role. Instead, the HRM issues for their unit were the responsibility of their unit head. As stated previously, a small unit was defined as one with less than 12 employees, while a larger unit had more than 12 employees.

Table 16

## Case Studies Comparison of the Actual HRM Role of LMs

Perceived HRM role function	Case study airports		
	Airport X	Airport Y	Airport Z
Administrative expert	Yes (high involvement)	Yes (low involvement) Only large unit	Yes (low involvement) Only large unit
Employee champion	Yes (high involvement)	Yes (low involvement) Only large unit	Yes (low involvement) Only large unit
Change agent	No	No	No

The only similarity of perceptions among LMs in all airports was found in the change agent role: LMs perceived their limited involvement in the decision making process hindered them performing beyond their routine tasks. Thus, they had no influence on the change process. Analysis of the results for each HRM role perceived by LMs is presented below.

#### ***7.3.2.1 Administrative expert.***

LMs had different perceptions of their administrative expert role at the different airports. LMs at Airport X said their administrative expert role to be high, whereas LMs at Airports Y and Z thought they had low involvement in performing this role. LMs at Airport X believed their high involvement in the administrative expert role was evidenced by their participation in most HRM processes and documentation. This was reflected through their involvement in all LMs' HRM activities: performance management, reward management, attitudes and discipline management, work arrangement and training. Although the final decision on HRM issues remained with the unit heads, LMs at Airport X suggested that they participated in each of the HRM processes before they were finalised by heads.

Low involvement in the administrative expert role was described by LMs at Airports Y and Z in relation to the low number of employees in their units. Few employees in the units was the main factor contributing to the understanding that unit head could manage employee issues. However, different understandings were reported between LMs of the larger and



smaller units at Airports Y and Z. LMs in the large units still believed that they had their part to play in the administrative expert role. This was described in terms of assisting their unit head in some HRM processes to ensure continuity of HRM activities in the airport. However, LMs in the smaller units had no involvement in the administrative expert role.

#### ***7.3.2.2 Employee champion.***

Similar results were reported in terms of the LMs' perceptions of their employee champion role, expressed through their awareness to act as an intermediary between top management and employees. However, more understanding of what the activity entailed was shown by LMs at Airport X compared to those at the other airports. LMs at Airport X described the need to build a good relationship with employees to ensure employees felt comfortable in discussing workplace problems. In addition, employees at Airport X had more respect for their LMs compared to employees in the other airports. The grade level between LMs and employees at Airports Y and Z was very different, and so LMs at these airports expressed difficulty in giving instructions and influencing employee attitudes. This caused difficulties for LMs in performing their role as an intermediary between top management and employees. They believed that their employee champion role was not efficient because the unit heads were in a better position to disseminate information from senior management to employees. In contrast, LMs at Airport X emphasised the employee champion role because they mentioned that employees were afraid of them due to their higher grade in the airport structure. This allowed them to convey information without relying on their unit head.

Although LMs' participation in the employee champion role differed between airports, this study revealed that LMs at all airports agreed they needed support from the unit heads and HR representatives to perform the employee champion role. LMs were not expert at answering regulatory questions, so assistance from the unit heads and HR representatives was needed for LMs to deliver the right information to employees.

### ***7.3.2.3 Change agent.***

More similarities were found in regards to LMs' perceptions about the change agent role. LMs at all airports did not perceive themselves as change agents as they had no authority in the decision making process. LMs assumed that being involved in the change process required authority enabling them to do tasks beyond the routine. Regardless of their involvement in HRM activities, LMs at all airports pointed out that the final decision on HRM issues remained with the unit heads or top management. LMs believed that they had done well in performing their HRM role when they fulfilled the usual tasks assigned to them. There was a very low awareness of their participation in the change process, either for their individual development or for others (unit and airport), which suggested that LMs were not able to perform more unless they were told what they should do.

Similar results were found regarding LMs' awareness of the importance of the change agent role in airport management. Although they noticed improvements made by the parent company over time, particularly in staff management, LMs did not mention their involvement in these changes as being more than they had been asked to do. Instead, LMs were comfortable to wait for instructions from management. In discussing tasks that were beyond their knowledge and ability to perform, differences were reported among LMs between airports. In most cases, LMs at Airport X showed more interest in asking for assistance from the unit head and respected new knowledge that helped improve their ability in performing HRM tasks. In contrast, LMs at Airports Y and Z preferred to complete their tasks based on their experience and individual understandings, indicating no improvement was made in the ways they performed their HRM tasks, other than what they had already done.

LM actions towards their HRM role were potentially explained by the challenges they faced, which influenced their understanding of senior management's expectations. Therefore,

the next section explores factors that assisted or hindered LMs' ability to perform their HRM role.

### **7.3.3 LMs' challenges to performing their HRM role.**

LMs' challenges are measured on five factors: desire, capability, competencies, support and HRM policy and procedures. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to provide responses based on factors that influenced their HRM role implementation. Although LMs mentioned no challenges to perform their HRM role, most of them highlighted two factors to be improved for better performance: support and HRM policy and procedures. Work environment was identified by LMs at Airports X and Y as another factor that influenced their HRM role implementation. The overall explanations of all challenges are described below.

#### ***7.3.3.1 Desire.***

Similar results were reported among LMs between airports in response to the question about desire, as they regarded HRM tasks as part of their responsibility as a LM. This was expressed through their willingness to perform the HRM role and never viewing the role as a burden. More importantly, LMs were not reluctant to accept the HRM role as part of their responsibility because they had observed the same tasks being done by their former LMs. As LMs had assisted their former leaders to perform some HRM duties, they expressed no difficulty in accepting the same duties. Therefore, when they were held responsible as a LM for the unit, they knew exactly what should be done. Similarly, LMs at all airports expressed their willingness to accept any new task assigned by top management without objection.

#### ***7.3.3.2 Capacity.***

LMs at all airports showed the same understanding that undertaking the HRM role did not reduce their responsibilities for the operational tasks. LMs understood they were responsible for two different tasks at one time: operational and HRM tasks. Although LMs at

all airports expressed their ability to manage time to complete their tasks, the priorities of operational and HRM tasks differed. LMs at Airport X gave the same priority to operational and HRM tasks. Different results were reported among LMs at Airports Y and Z, because LMs from the small units of both airports stated their main priority was operational tasks.

#### ***7.3.3.3 Competencies.***

Similar results were found on competencies as LMs at all airports perceived they had insufficient HRM training to help them perform their HRM role. However, LMs did not view the lack of training as the main factor that influenced their competence in performing the HRM role. Instead, there was a strong agreement among LMs that they had gained knowledge and skills to perform the HRM role through prior experience working in the airport. This was mentioned in relation to their observation and participation in HRM duties prior to being appointed as a LM. Despite a lack of formal training in HRM, LMs suggested that their prior experience had given them enough knowledge to manage employees in the unit. LMs perceived that some training only provided them with theoretical knowledge, but was rarely used in practice. As most employee issues needed to be handled based on the situation, LMs believed that experience was more valuable because no one solution was best for all situations.

#### ***7.3.3.4 Support.***

Differences were found between airports in terms of support received by LMs. Although LMs agreed that they received support from all parties, such as HR specialists, superiors and employees, support from these parties also required improvement. LMs in Airport X had more to say about support than those at Airports Y and Z. The kind of support needed by LMs at Airport X was in terms of feedback and employee attitudes. Slow, inconsistent feedback and difficulty in understanding expectations were identified by LMs at Airport X as weaknesses of management support, especially from HR specialists. LMs agreed

that employee attitudes also caused difficulty in performing the HRM role. As they worked between top management and employees, the attitudes of senior employees who were comfortable with the old policies often hindered LMs in performing their duties. LMs at Airport Z had less issues with support compared to the other airports.

#### ***7.3.3.5 HRM policy and procedures.***

Findings of the study indicate that the HRM policy and procedures implemented in the airport were unclear in assisting LMs to perform their HRM role. This was mainly attributed to inconsistent implementation and feedback regarding HRM policy and procedures among top management. However, the perceptions of HRM policy and procedures differed between airports. LMs at Airport X were most concerned about the weaknesses in implementation of HRM policy and procedures, and they perceived that this hindered them in performing their HRM role effectively.

#### ***7.3.3.6 Work environment.***

Work environment was only mentioned by LMs at Airports X and Y. However, a different emphasis was given by LMs at each airport. LMs at Airport X related the problem of work environment to insufficient infrastructure and equipment for new policy implementation. In contrast, LMs at Airport Y highlighted the lack of standardised equipment used between airports in relation to work processes and time spent in completing their duties.

Considering some challenges faced by LMs in performing their HRM role, the next section reports LMs' understandings of the role of HRM policies and practices to deliver clear messages about their HRM role expectations.

#### **7.3.4 The role of HRM policies and practices.**

As mentioned in Chapter 2 (literature review), HRM policies and practices were considered a primary means of communicating role information to role holders, so they could achieve the role behaviour expected by role evaluators (Jackson & Schuler, 1995). The role of

HRM policies and practices was explored in this study to investigate its effectiveness in communicating the message about HRM role expectations to LMs. Four HRM policies and practices were mentioned by LMs: job description, training, rewards and benefits and work structure. Two HRM policies and practices were perceived negatively by LMs in all airports as a medium to transmit information about their HRM role: job descriptions and training. The remaining policies received mixed responses from LMs between airports. Details on the results of each HRM policy and practices are discussed below.

#### ***7.3.4.1 Job description.***

There was agreement amongst LMs across the airports on the existence of a job description as a document that provided information about the LM role. This was in line with the definition of a job description as ‘a written profile of a job’ (Aminuddin, 2008, p. 40). Interestingly, findings indicate similar attitudes among LMs towards job descriptions, as they rarely referred to this document to guide them in performing the HRM role. This was due to the fact that information in the job description was general. No HRM role information was included in the document. Therefore, LMs suggested they used previous experience to assist them in performing the HRM role, rather than referring to their job description.

#### ***7.3.4.2 Training.***

Insufficient HRM training was provided by the company to assist LMs with their HRM role. Although LMs agreed that the parent company offered training for employees every year; the training was limited and focused more on technical matters than HRM. It was interesting to note the agreement among LMs at all airports about the rotation system used for training. The rotation system caused delays for them to receive new information and knowledge to improve their HR skills. It also caused inconsistencies HRM implementation among LMs, because the knowledge they received depended on training they had attended. However, more emphasis on this issue was given by LMs at Airport X compared to those in

the other airports. LMs at Airport X realised the need for HR training when new employees joined the company. LMs described newer employees as being younger with different attitudes to older employees. Thus, there were challenges in managing employees from different backgrounds, which required LMs to have more knowledge and skills to perform their HRM role.

Another interesting finding was that LMs expressed their satisfaction with the previous training offered by the parent company compared to the current training. This was mentioned in relation to the company transforming from a government agency to a private company. LMs believed that the training offered by the company before privatisation was more frequent and useful. Much knowledge they gained from the previous training was still applicable in performing their current duties. In contrast, some of the training currently offered was perceived as too theoretical and hardly used in practice.

#### ***7.3.4.3 Rewards and benefits.***

Most LMs at each airport were satisfied with the rewards and benefits they received from the company. This satisfaction did not reflect their understanding of the increased expectations of senior management regarding their HRM role. For instance, LMs who had been upgraded on the reward structure suggested this showed their importance to the airport's operation. LMs viewed the new grade indicated more responsibility in general, but not specifically in relation to their HRM role. Due to that, LMs said they tried their best to respond to any new task allocated to them, including HRM tasks. Based on the researcher's observations, LMs responses were more about operational tasks compared to HRM.

More complaints about rewards were expressed by LMs at Airports Y and Z than by LMs at Airport X. Dissatisfaction among LMs at Airports Y and Z related to the excessive workloads given to them. Although they agreed on the new grades and increased rewards given by the company were positive, they perceived that the reward was not worth the greater

workload. These LMs sacrificed their rest time to ensure all jobs were completed on time. This problem was mentioned in relation to the work delegation, which differed between international and domestic airports.

#### ***7.3.4.4 Work structure.***

Different work structures between airports shaped LMs' perceptions about challenges to perform their HRM role. The size and airport operation affected the delegation of work to employees within airports. As discussed in the challenges section, the cost reduction policy affected workforce planning. LMs at Airports Y and Z perceived that their efforts to perform the HRM role were distracted because their actions depended on current needs. As a result, one employee was required to perform more tasks than similar employees at Airport X, who had more specialised jobs. LMs at Airports Y and Z perceived the work structure currently implemented by the parent company caused them greater workloads, especially in terms of operational duties. There was limited involvement of LMs at both airports in the HRM role as most of their time was spent completing operational duties.

Work structure also affected the kind of support received by LMs to perform their HRM role. Although all airports had HR representatives in their organisational structure, the background of HR representatives in each airport differed. The HR representative at Airport X was employed on a higher grade with specialisation in HRM and had studied to a higher educational level. In contrast, HR representatives at Airports Y and Z were lower in grade and appointed based on availability in the airport. This meant not all of them had HRM backgrounds and they usually had lower educational levels. Consequently, these HR representatives were unable to provide detailed guidance for LMs, especially on policy related matters and complex decisions. Often, these HR representatives needed to refer to other parties, such as HR specialists at the parent company or senior airport management, indicating



a delayed response time for LMs' queries. This explains the inconsistent support received by LMs between airports, which likely influenced their ability to perform the HRM role.

### **7.3.5 Discussion of how the LM's HRM role is enacted.**

Three role theory concepts were applied to understand the LMs' HRM role implementation: role taking, role conflict and role consensus. First, LMs' views of their HRM activities and HRM role were examined through the assumptions of role taking. Second, challenges in performing the LMs' HRM role were revealed through the understanding of role conflict. Further, the clarity of the HRM policy and practices in sending message of the LMs' HRM role expectation was interpreted through the understanding of role consensus.

#### ***7.3.5.1 Role taking.***

The role taking concept describes that employees are obliged to take an assigned role when they join the organisation (Biddle, 1986). In line with this, each position in the organisation is designed for certain purposes and thus, employees who hold the position are responsible for performing any task allocated to them by the employer (Jackson & Schuler, 1995).

LMs were supposed to perform the HRM role if they were assigned to the role. However, this only happened when the LM understood their work role requirement as a LM in the airport (Rousseau, 1989). This study showed that LMs' understandings of their HRM role covered only two functions: administrative expert and employee champion. Each role was perceived by LMs differently at each airport. This study revealed that these differences were related to organisational, interpersonal and personal factors influencing role taking, as noted by Katz and Kahn (1978).

Differences in LMs' perceptions were attributed to organisational factors. In this study, the influence of organisational factors can be seen through HRM policies and practices used to determine the work allocation among employees. This differed depending on the

airport category. This policy was formed according to the cost reduction effort by the parent company. The effect of the cost reduction effort was severe for employees at Airports Y and Z because the parent company was trying to minimise the number of employees in domestic airports to cover operational costs. Consequently, these airports ran operations using limited numbers of employees. As an international airport, Airport X had more employees and clearer work specialisations; as it was capable of generating more revenue. More employees in the units indicated a higher involvement of LMs in HR at Airport X. They needed to be administrative experts as they were responsible for managing processes and documentation for HRM activities. In contrast, LMs at Airports Y and Z had fewer employees in their units and so the unit head was able to administer all HRM processes and documentation. LMs here focused on operational tasks. Unlike Hunter and Renwick (2009), who found that the absence of an HR department in small organisations increased responsibility for HRM roles to LMs, this was not the case in these airports. These differences suggested that the organisation's HRM policies and practices strongly affected the allocation of HRM roles to LMs.

The influence of organisational factors can also be seen in the organisational structure of the airports. LMs at Airport X had higher grades than LMs at Airports Y and Z. The grade used for LMs at Airport X was similar to the unit heads at the other airports. The lower grade of LMs at Airports Y and Z meant they had fewer LMs to manage HRM processes. As a study by Watson et al. (2007) found, the management level of LMs affected their understanding about the depth of their involvement in HRM activities. They found that strategic LMs perceived more involvement in HRM activities as compared to first LMs. In this study, LMs at Airport X who had a higher grade than LMs at Airports Y and Z reported more involvement in HRM activities.

Organisational factors also influenced LMs' interpersonal factors. The organisational structure of the airports affected the level of respect employees had for their LM.

Accordingly, employees at Airport X showed different levels of respect for their LMs to those at the other airports. This was captured through employees' responses on LMs' instructions and advice, contributing to the difference in LMs' perceptions about the employee champion role. The effect of the interpersonal factor on LMs' perceptions of their employee champion role is not surprising; it has been reported that this role requires LMs to deal with people (employees) more than processes (Yusoff, 2012). As LMs need to deal with employees as representatives of senior management, the relationship between LMs and employees was important for performing this role. As such, LMs at Airport X had more confidence in performing this role. They had more respect from their employees due to the higher grade they had in the organisational structure. Perhaps this indicates that LMs' understanding of their HRM role was influenced by the authority they had in the organisation.

The importance of authority was evident in LMs' understandings of the change agent role. This explained LMs inability to be involved in the change process because they were not involved in making decisions for HRM activities. As a result, LMs did not perceive the change agent role as part of their HRM role. Similar findings were cited by Renwick (2000) in Cully et al. (1999), who found that most LMs involved in HRM duties did not have the authority to make decisions. The differences between this and other studies, such as Cunningham and Hyman's (1995) and Harris et al.'s (2002), show that LMs in this study welcomed the authority to make HRM decisions. Others have reported LMs reluctant to accept authority for fear of being blamed. This difference may be due to different cultural values between Western and Malaysian contexts. As Malaysia is considered a high power distance society (Rowley & Abdul-Rahman, 2007), this may influence the way authority is viewed. In Malaysian society, authority could offer individuals power to do something and to have "a say" in the unit or organisation. In fact, the level of respect from members in the social group, e.g. organisation, is also influenced by how much authority that one has in the

group. Therefore, having authority in decision making is viewed by LMs in this study as crucial because this could give them freedom to act in performing their HRM role.

In this study, LMs were more likely to follow instructions than to explore what was best for the unit and the company. A minority of LMs at each airport were aware of the need to perform the change agent role. Personal factors also influenced LMs' understandings of their HRM role. This finding supports an earlier study that identified individual characteristics as a contributing influence on how employees behaved in relation to their role in the organisation (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Although most LMs had similar backgrounds, their individual characteristics differed and influenced their actions at work. A minority of LMs were eager to gain more knowledge and improve their performance. As they realised that the training offered by the parent company was limited, they sought alternatives such as taking their annual leave to attend related HRM courses at their own expense. These LMs showed more initiative in managing their unit compared to those who just felt satisfied with the training provided by the company. In particular, this could be related to LMs' openness to experience. Those who had a high level of openness valued the experience they gained from training more than those with low levels of openness (McCall, 2004).

Based on the above findings, this study does not support previous research that reported organisational factors were less relevant in the modern organisation (Heimer & Matsueda, 1994; Thornthwaite, 2004). Instead, this study has shown that organisational factors are still important and even strongly influence the understanding of LMs on their HRM role taking. As a member of the organisation, LMs attitudes are influenced by policies and routines they are comfortable with. For a new LM, they were likely to inherit the same values, as they often referred to the senior LMs in performing their role. LMs in this study were used to the parent company operating as a government agency. This probably explains their understanding of change. A possible explanation for this might be the organisational

culture. This can be seen in the work routines and the political behaviour among LMs, who preferred to follow instructions and did not perform beyond their routine tasks unless they were told to do so. Despite awareness of changes in the parent company and their airports, this study's findings suggest that LMs felt they had no control over what happened at the airport.

#### ***7.3.5.2 Role conflict.***

Role conflict is defined as a situation where an employee has competing expectations as they need to perform multiple roles at one time (Parker & Wickham, 2005). This explains the LMs' situation in the case studies as they were given the HRM role to perform on top of their operational tasks (Nehles, et al., 2006).

Nehles et al. (2006) found a positive response among LMs towards accepting the HRM role, although this contradicts earlier studies, which reported that LMs were reluctant to accept the HRM role as part of their job (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Harris, et al., 2002; Hope-Hailey, et al., 2005; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). However, the devolution of the HRM role to LMs may be accepted over time and the results of this study add to this perception. More importantly, this is evidence of the devolution of the HRM role to LMs in Malaysian organisations and indicates a transformation from personnel management to HRM in Malaysia. Others have also reported that organisations in Malaysia are beginning to adopt HRM practices, even though HRM development has been described as slow and cautious (Hashim, 2010; Yusoff, Abdullah, & Ramayah, 2010). The LMs in the airports did not view their HRM role as a new responsibility to be performed when they were appointed as a LM. Instead, they were aware of their responsibility for performing the HRM role through their observations of their former LMs. With their long tenure this suggested that the devolution of HRM to LMs was not new in the Malaysian airport sector.

Findings of the current study also add a new perspective for understanding LMs' attitudes towards the HRM role. Although some researchers have suggested that LMs would give greater consideration to the HRM role through personal or institutional incentives (Harris, et al., 2002; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003), this study did not find these factors necessarily persuaded LMs to accept the HRM role. Similar findings by Nehles et al. (2006) also suggested that institutional and personal incentives were not the main factors influencing LMs to understand their HRM role. For example, LMs in these airports did not agree that their understandings of HRM responsibilities were based on job descriptions or performance evaluation indicators. Instead, there was strong agreement among LMs that they were willing to accept the HRM role because they had observed the HRM role of their former LMs.

Apart from personal and institutional incentives, the findings of this study suggest that the effect of organisational culture positively influenced the desire of LMs to accept the HRM role. This finding accords with the contention that excellent companies are marked by strong cultures shared amongst members, influencing their commitment and loyalty (Ogbor, 2001). At the airports, this was interpreted through the parent company's shared values. In particular, 'teamwork' was successfully communicated to employees. Moreover, organisational culture affected the political behaviour of LMs, who were willing to accept any tasks allocated by their leader, showing their commitment to obeying orders.

Religion was another possible explanation for LMs' willingness to accept orders; most LMs were Muslims. Islamic values could influence actions at the workplace. Budhwar and Fadzil (2000) have reviewed some basic Islamic values that influence the way people react in everyday life, including at work. These values include responsibility, self-discipline, patience, sincerity and trustworthiness. Some of these values could be reflected in LMs' actions towards their HRM role. In fact for Muslims, being responsible at work is one way of worshipping God (Rees & Johari, 2010). For instance, the value of responsibility is shared

among all Muslim LMs when they responded about the increased workloads at the airport. LMs always be prepared to perform what has been asked by their superior although sometimes they have to sacrifice their own satisfaction. This may not happen if one does not has a strong believe on how they perform their work will be rewarded one day in many ways. Muslims people believe on this value although the reward that they expected may not come in short period of time or in any way that can be seen by others, i.e. increased salary or bonuses. The reward from God may come in the form of serenity that is needed by all people to live a happy life. This is consistent with LMs' feedback of how thankful they are with the reward and the opportunity they had working with the airport company. Although the financial reward may require some improvement, but they are fortunate to have the opportunity working at their hometown which allow them to always be with their family and loved one.

LMs between airports expressed different kind of support needed to perform their HRM role. This is consistent with Nehles et al. (2006). LMs at Airport X perceived their involvement in HRM activities to be greater than LMs at Airports Y and Z. This might explain the reason why LMs at Airport X demanded more support to perform their HRM role. The results corroborate the findings of much previous work regarding the importance of support for LMs for their HRM role (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Renwick, 2003; Watson, et al., 2007). Slow and inconsistent feedback from HR specialists was not surprising, as prior studies have reported frustration among LMs not receiving sufficient and consistent support from key members in the organisation, including HR specialists (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). In addition, findings support previous research showing conflict between LMs and employees, as their position required them to enact the HRM role and to ensure employees' understanding of organisational changes (Floyd & Lane, 2000).

LMs believed the execution of HRM policy and procedures failed to assist them in performing their HRM role. This related specifically to the difficulty of the organisation in creating an alignment between HRM strategies and the view of the organisational members about HRM policy and procedures developed in the organisation (Gratton, et al., 1999, p. 27). Most LMs commented on the same problems regarding the execution of HRM policy and procedures at the airports. The execution of HRM policy was based on individual understandings and this resulted in inconsistent feedback given to LMs by their superiors or the HR unit, which caused variation in the implementation of the HRM role between LMs.

### ***7.3.5.3 Role consensus.***

The concept of role consensus was used to investigate the effectiveness of the company's HRM policies and practices in sending messages to LMs about HRM role expectations. In fact, the main objective of HRM policy and practice was to use employees' contributions to achieve organisational performance.

Like previous studies that have suggested LMs need guidelines and procedures to guide them in performing their role effectively (Hall & Torrington, 1998), so did this study. LMs in the airports perceived that their job description was not a reliable guide, as this document did not provide the information they needed to perform their HRM role. LMs preferred to use their own experience and individual understandings in performing HRM tasks. The problem was that individual understandings differed, and thus influenced how the HRM role was performed. This was evident as LMs mentioned comparisons were made by their employees in regards to the performance evaluation process, which they believed to be unfair because it was not standardised between LMs.

The dissatisfaction amongst LMs about insufficient HRM training paralleled the findings from the study by Cunningham and Hyman (1995). Although LMs were confident with the informal training they gained through experience, they were aware of the need for



formal training to meet future challenges of managing their employees. Previous researchers have highlighted the importance of investment in skill development programmes to undertake HRM roles (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Cunningham & Hyman, 1995). Differences in training programmes offered by the company, as it transformed from a government agency to a private company, meant LMs were dissatisfied with their current training. The transformation caused changes to investment in employee development as strategic priorities shifted. As a result, the training that was previously offered to LMs was no longer available.

The lack of HRM training was consistent with the findings reported by Harris et al. (2002). Although LMs agreed on the importance of formal training to improve their competencies in performing the HRM role, they believed experience enabled them to perform the role. Other studies have suggested that training is more important than experience. Nehles et al. (2006) found that competencies were identified as a hindrance for LMs with lower educational levels to perform their HRM role; however, there were no significant differences in this study between the perceptions about competencies by LMs who had a tertiary or a secondary education. Thus, the findings of this study show that educational level did not influence the perception of the challenges to the HRM role's performance.

The HR processes associated with the HRM policies and practices failed to provide a clear understanding to LMs of the importance of their HRM role to airport operation. This failure was due to the misalignment between individual performance and business strategy. Gratton et al. (1999) highlighted that organisational improvements needed to occur if they were concerned about individual contributions to the organisation. In fact, the process of transformation needed to be built around the new corporate mission (Holbeche, 2009). Misalignment was evident, as no clear indications were given about how LMs' performance was to be evaluated, showing their contribution as the expectations of role evaluators changed. As a result, LMs continued with routine tasks and assumed they had performed well.

The findings show the effect of workforce planning on the airport work structure. This is similar to the contentions of earlier researchers about the influence of company policy on ‘what’ and ‘how’ employees perform work (Delaney & Huselid, 1996). Like others who found that work structure was crucial for LMs to contribute to the HRM role—because suitable work structures can provide opportunity for LMs to perform well (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982; Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Delaney & Huselid, 1996)—this study found a suitable work structure was necessary for LMs as they needed assistance to guide their understanding in performing the HRM role, given their diverse backgrounds and functional areas.

#### **7.4 RQ 3: What is the Effect of LMs’ HRM Role Performance on HRM Effectiveness?**

In this study, items were adapted from Wright et al. (2001) about HR services to guide the investigation about the effect of the LMs’ HRM role on HRM effectiveness. HR services were the focus because the HRM function is considered a service function in organisations (Schneider, 1994). Wright et al. (2001) suggested 15 items were included in HR services:

1. Maintaining an equitable compensation system that controlled costs while ensuring that top performers were retained
2. Maintaining performance based incentives to motivate individuals to focus on achieving strategic goals
3. Providing labour relations and preventive labour support to business partners and front-line managers
4. Providing training and development programmes to enable front-line managers to maximise their performance potential
5. Providing performance management programmes to develop and motivate business partners and front-line managers

6. Communicating and marketing key business and human resource initiatives to business partners and front-line managers
7. Maintaining effective staffing systems and succession plans to ensure a steady supply of managerial talent
8. Controlling benefit costs, particularly health care and sick leave
9. Developing HR initiatives that contributed to achieving current and future business goals
10. Tracking important measures and trends to identify potential problem areas
11. Developing HR initiatives to respond to potential problem areas
12. Developing initiatives that help build employee commitment
13. Maintaining employee/user friendly benefits administration programmes
14. Maintaining programmes and providing support to business partners and front-line managers to ensure compliance with legal regulations
15. Developing initiatives to exploit the value of a diverse workforce

Wright et al. (2001, p. 122)

The discussion with senior managers and HR representatives resulted in some modifications to ensure the terms were familiar to employees and suitable to conditions within the company. Items were also modified to suit the focus of HR services provided by LMs' HRM role, instead of the airports' broader HR functions. Five items were also added based on senior managers' and HR representatives' experiences in evaluating the HRM role of LMs. All items were classified into four groups of the HR services areas expected from the LMs' HRM role: HR unit, employees, unit operation and value adding to the company. HRM service areas and the activity each entailed are summarised in Table 17.

Findings in relation to HRM effectiveness showed that role evaluators at each airport emphasised value adding. This may be due to the transformation process that had occurred in

the parent company, which resulted in significant changes to airport management and administration, including new expectations of the HRM function. The finding was consistent with arguments about the changing demands of the HRM function due to constant changes in the organisational environment (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Ulrich, et al., 2012). These new expectations required HR people, including LMs, to be equipped with the right skills to perform the HRM role and contribute to HRM effectiveness (Lynch, 2007).

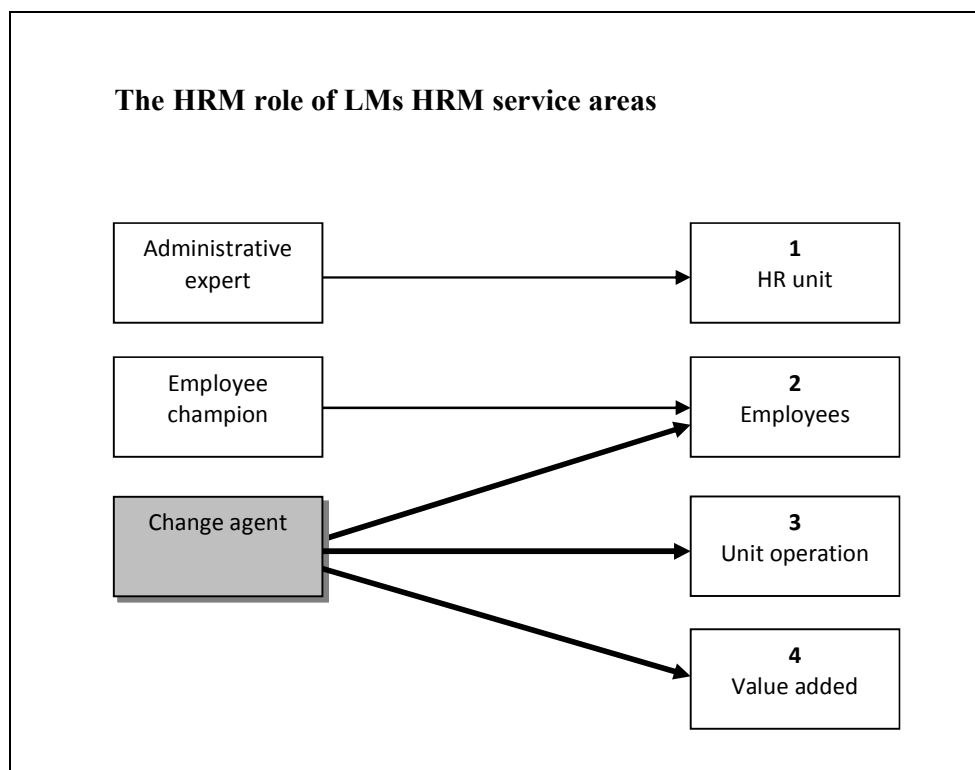
Table 17

## Areas of HRM effectiveness

Areas	HR services	Modification
HR unit	Providing training and development programs to maximise employees' performance potential	From item 4
	Administer the HRM processes at the unit level	Added item
	Providing relevant information about employees to ensure the HRM processes are effectively manage	Added item
Employee	Maintaining an equitable compensation system to increase employees' satisfaction	From item 1
	Maintaining performance based incentive to motivate employees to support organisational goals	From item 2
	Identify potential problems areas that may affect employees' performance	From item 10
	Communicating the HRM initiatives to employees and guide the right attitudes to support the initiative	Added item
Unit operation	Maintaining effective staffing systems to ensure a steady supply of employees at each unit	From item 7
	Controlling the operational cost by utilising the existence employees supply	From item 8
Value adding	Developing initiatives to help build employees' commitment	From item 12
	Developing initiatives to reduce the operational cost	Added item
	Developing initiatives to improve the effectiveness of the unit operation to increase the contribution to the company	Added item
	Developing HR initiatives that contribute to achieve current and future organisational goals	From item 9
	Developing HR initiative to respond to potential problem areas	From item 11

#### 7.4.1 Relationship between HRM role and HRM service areas.

It was found that role evaluators at each airport emphasised the change agent role in comparison to other HRM roles. This paralleled their interpretation of HRM effectiveness, which covered four HR services areas: HR unit, employees, unit operation and value adding. The interpretation of tasks to be performed by LMs for each services area showed that the change agent role was needed in most areas, except in providing services to the HR unit. This finding corroborated three elements noted by other researchers who have discussed the changing demands of the HRM role: efficiency, flexibility and service provider roles (Sheehan & Cooper, 2011).



*Figure 4.* Relationship between the HRM role of LMs and HR service areas.

Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between HRM roles and HRM services areas. Results of this study indicated that the administrative expert role was required for achieving HRM effectiveness for the HR unit area. This was due to limitations of the HR representative

to oversee HRM processes in all units; assistance from LMs was needed to ensure the completion of the HRM activities. LMs were expected to provide this service, as the administrative expert involved in operationally focused tasks and were routine in nature.

Providing services to employees required LMs to perform the employee champion and change agent roles. The employee champion role focused more on people than processes and required LMs to encourage employee satisfaction with their job and the company. The employee champion role also needed LMs to identify employee problems and advise top management. For the change agent role, the flexibility and efficiency of LMs was necessary for setting a good example for employees to support the company mission. This was considered important by role evaluators, who considered continuous changes made by the company to improve the airport's operation. The LMs' role as a change agent was important in this area to facilitate employees through the change process and avoid resistance to change.

Role evaluators described the services provided to the unit's operation through the change agent role as achievable by using employees' capabilities. In dealing with the increased expectations of shareholders, role evaluators believed that controlling operational costs was important for increasing the effectiveness of the unit's operation. Therefore, LMs had to be flexible and identify ways that could help to reduce unit costs, especially by guiding employee work performances in line with company standards. This was expected from LMs, as their work directly dealt with employees at the operational level, providing them with good knowledge about what was best for their unit's operation. Instead of performing their routine jobs, role evaluators expected LMs to do more and make improvements to the unit's operations.

As each unit contributed to the effectiveness of the whole airport's operations, the contribution of LMs through their change agent role was crucial in adding value to the company. As the company moved to providing better quality service, role evaluators expected

LMs to be actively involved in the change processes by developing more initiatives to build employee commitment, support organisational goals and increase the effectiveness of their unit's operation. These expectations meant that LMs needed to be flexible in accepting new responsibilities and fulfilling the requirements needed to perform these duties. According to the role evaluators, these new expectations often required LMs to move away from their comfort zones (old culture) and adapt to a new culture, where they could accommodate the company's current situation and needs.

Although the relationship between the HRM role of LMs and HRM service areas has been explored, HRM effectiveness can only be measured through LMs' current performance, as discussed in the following section.

#### **7.4.2 The LMs' HRM role performance (intended vs. actual).**

Evidence suggested that LMs' HRM role performance was measured by their ability to meet the HRM role expectations of the role evaluators and that the value of HRM functions should be determined by their contributions rather than activity (Buyens & Vos, 2001). Although the involvement of LMs differed between airports, their contributions were necessary for achieving HRM effectiveness. This was evident in the emphasis role evaluators gave to LMs performing the change agent role.

A gap was found between LMs intended and actual HRM role performances. In fact, the same has been noted by other research on LMs' involvement in HRM activities (Nehles, et al., 2006). Further, the gap between LMs' performances differed between case studies. As shown in Figure 5, the performance of LMs at Airport X was better than at the other airports. LMs at Airport X excelled in their administrative expert role as they met the expectations of their role evaluators. Role evaluators at Airport X expressed their satisfaction with LMs' employee champion role as LMs were reliable intermediaries between top management and employees. However, some improvement was needed in the employee champion role because

performance of LMs was inconsistent. Unfortunately, a gap could be seen in the change agent role of LMs, suggesting that LM's involvement in the change process was limited. This was evident as LMs concentrated on their routine tasks and showed little initiative in making improvements to support the company.

The performance of LMs' HRM role between Airports Y and Z was very similar. The only difference between the two airports related to their administrative expert role, where LMs at Airport Y performed better than those at Airport Z. The gap in other HRM roles was similar at both airports. Role evaluators at both airports were dissatisfied with LMs' employee champion role due to their inability to manage the relationship with employees and their reliance on unit heads to perform the role. More LM commitment was expected from role evaluators for them to perform the employee champion role, regardless of their involvement in HRM activities. This perception arose as the employee champion role was focused on employees rather than processes, suggesting that authority was not the main requirement for performing the role.

It was clear from the study that the change agent role was the main problem at each airport as role evaluators emphasised this role should be performed by LMs. However, the inconsistency between the perceived HRM role by LMs and their role evaluators implied that LMs' ability to deal with change was limited. This was potentially due to the LMs' HRM role requirement not being revised when the organisation transitioned to becoming a private enterprise. Given that the process of how LMs learnt and adapted to their HRM role requirements could affect the role's enactment, the issue of role development processes should be emphasised. This result has been confirmed in a previous study by Lynch (2007), who argued that more attention should be placed on the 'processes' of developing the role instead of the outcomes. As the importance of process was evident, the findings revealed that LMs did not realise they were required to perform more than what they had, especially in



terms of acting as a 'change agent'. This concurred with LMs' responses about the weaknesses of some HRM policies and practices in sending a clear message about their HRM role expectations. This was particularly true in terms of insufficient HRM training reported in the previous section. Further, as the transformation process occurred in the company, it resulted in changes to the expectations of role evaluators in the effort to deliver value to new shareholders. This situation had made it difficult to clearly define the role because the role varied over time, depending on the situation (Farndale, et al., 2011). This caused potential misalignment between HRM strategy and organisational outcomes and influenced the development of HRM policies and practices at the airport.

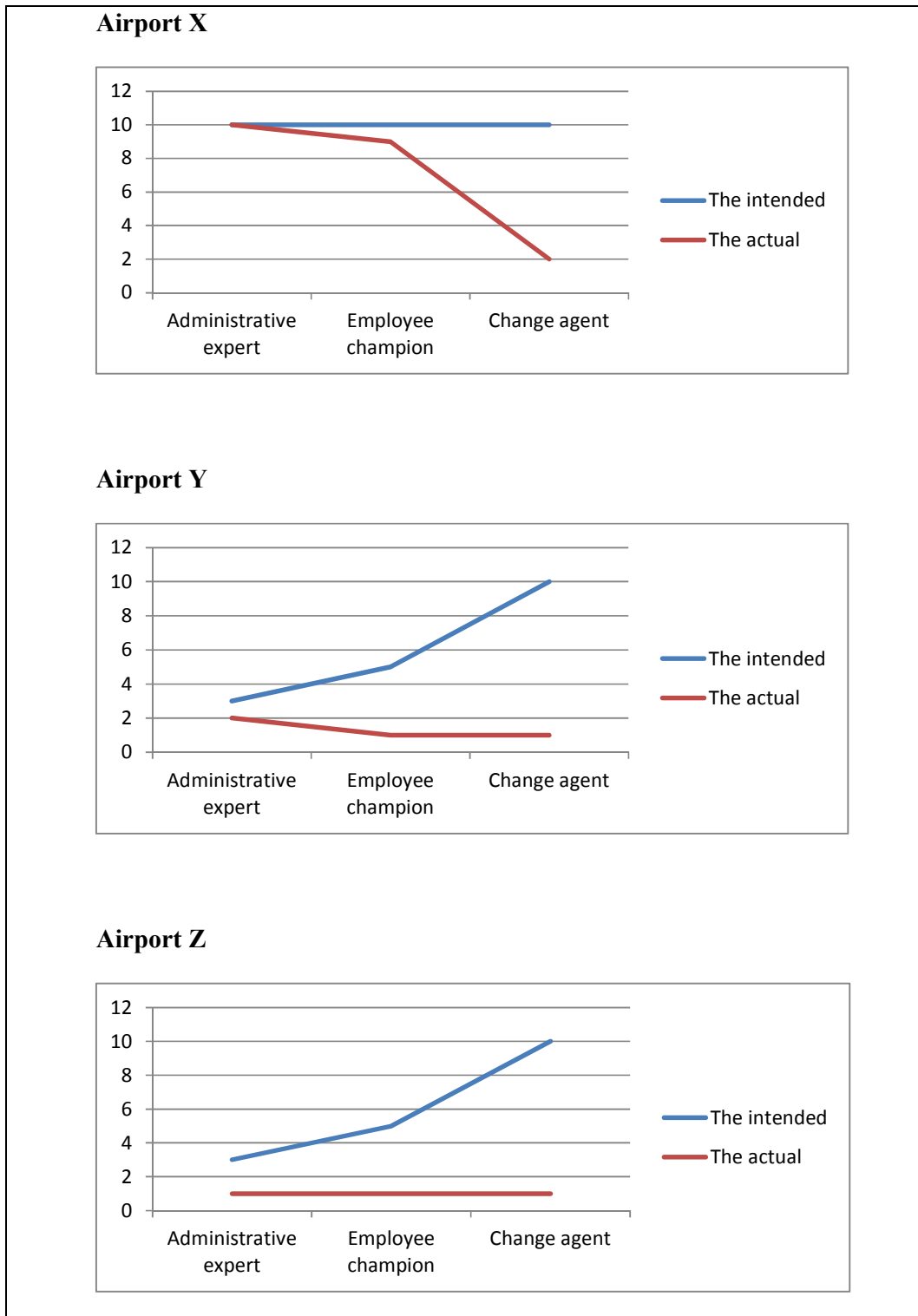


Figure 5. The gap between the intended and actual HRM role of LMs in all airports.

An interesting issue uncovered from the findings was that role evaluators made differing assessments of LMs' performance, although they agreed the same HRM activities should be performed. Such differences were a reflection of the ambiguity synonymous with the lack of understanding of the LMs' HRM role definition. This had been noted by other researchers to occur from an unclear definition of the LMs' HRM role (Currie & Procter, 2001). These differences can be seen from the role evaluators' perceptions of LMs' HRM role performance, which differed from one another. Even at the same airport, the perceptions of role evaluators differed based on individual understandings. Some were more lenient in evaluating the LMs performance than others. More importantly, this potentially created problems at the airport because inconsistent feedback from role evaluators caused LMs to be uncertain of the expectations about their role. This affected their performance evaluation because LMs referred to this to judge their own performance. This finding appeared to confirm earlier research on the LM's HRM role being structured by the role expectations (Mantere, 2008).

#### **7.4.3 Discussion of the effect of LMs' HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness.**

Researchers noted that HRM effectiveness depended on two main factors: the quality of HRM practices and the enactment of HRM by HR people (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Huselid, et al., 1997; Kane, et al., 1999; Wright, et al., 2001). These factors suggested the importance of the LMs' HRM role performance in achieving HRM effectiveness as they increasingly became responsible to manage HRM in the organisation.

The LMs' HRM role could influence HRM effectiveness if LMs were able to meet their HRM role expectations. This meant that LMs' actual implementation needed to be in line with the intended HRM role perceived by the role evaluators. However, the gap between the intended and actual HRM role of LMs reported in this study suggested that LMs' current

performance was unable to influence HRM effectiveness in the case study airports. This was particularly true in relation to the importance of the change agent role of LMs. Role evaluators perceived the influence of this in the HRM service areas for HRM effectiveness. The emphasis on the change agent role reported in this study corroborated the study by Yusoff et al. (2010) that showed the HRM role in Malaysia was moving towards being strategically oriented instead of focused on operational tasks. This reflected the tendency of the senior management and organisational members to value the change agent role of LMs.

The emphasis on the change agent role by role evaluators was due to its contribution to delivering value to most service areas in achieving HRM effectiveness. This finding concurred with the increased expectations of the HR function to deliver value to the organisation (Ulrich, et al., 2012). However, LMs did not perceive the change agent role as important, mainly due to the lack of their authority in the decision making process. Similar findings have been reported in Dany et al. (2008), who noted positive implications of the LMs' HRM role could only be achieved if HRM decision making was made by HR specialists in discussion with LMs. LMs also related their limitations in performing the change agent role to insufficient HRM training and unclear indicators of their HRM role performance in the way they were rewarded. These findings potentially indicated a weakening of the integration between the increased expectations of LMs' HRM role and the HRM policies and practices designed by the parent company to deliver the right message about role expectations. Integration was important as researchers have suggested the effect of the LMs' HRM role on HRM effectiveness can only be measured with the appropriate support for them to perform their role (Perry & Kulik, 2008).

## **7.5 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, four role theory concepts were explored to answer the three research question posed for this study. Role expectations were explored to understand the perception of

role evaluators in defining the HRM role of LMs. Role evaluators' expectations of the HRM role of LMs fell into all HRM roles' functions: administrative expert, employee champion and change agent.

Three role theory concepts were examined to answer the second research question: role taking, role conflict and role consensus. Responses were gathered from LMs to understand how LMs enacted their HRM role in the organisation. LMs' understanding of their HRM role was found in two HRM roles, namely administrative expert and employee champion. Findings about role conflict show that LMs needed improvements in terms of support and HRM policy and procedures. Role consensus was explored through the effectiveness of HRM policies and practices in delivering messages to the LMs about HRM role expectations. LMs were not satisfied with the effectiveness of some HRM policies and practices in assisting them to perform their HRM role. This was evident with the negative responses about job description and training. Although most LMs were satisfied with the rewards they received, the study found that their rewards were not paralleled with the indicators for their HRM role performance.

A comparison was made between the intended and actual HRM role of LMs to answer the third research question. This study showed a gap between the intended and actual HRM role of LMs and suggested that LMs' HRM role performance did not influence HRM effectiveness in the case study airports.

In the following chapter, the main findings are highlighted in terms of their theoretical and practical contributions. In addition, the limitations and recommendations for future research are addressed.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research questions are answered from the findings of the study. The contributions of the study in theoretical and practical ways are outlined. This chapter ends with the limitations of the study and suggestions for future inquiry.

### **8.1 Research Questions**

As observed in Chapter 2 (literature review), one of the main issues in the devolution of HRM activities to LMs has been the unclear definition of LMs' HRM role to distinguish it from that of HR specialists (Currie & Procter, 2001). While most studies exploring LMs' HRM role have focused their attention on HR specialists' view, the complexity of the relationship between LMs and HR specialists contributed to difficulties in determining the exact HRM role of LMs (Larsen & Brewster, 2003). This showed the necessity of obtaining the perspectives of other organisational members who are closely related with the role (Harris, et al., 2002). Further, studies exploring the LMs' HRM role have been conducted based on one single HRM activity, or several activities, decided upon earlier by the researcher. This was more likely to cover a broader context of HRM activities rather than an in depth coverage of LMs' involvement in all activities implemented in the organisation (Valverde, et al., 2006).

While researchers suggested a need to compare views from LMs and their role evaluators to gain an in-depth understanding of the HRM role of LMs (Maxwell & Farquharson, 2008), the scarcity of research exploring LMs' perspectives has been reported in the HRM literature (Nehles, et al., 2006). The clarity of work role requirements depended on the interaction between LMs and their role evaluators; this reflected the importance of capturing LMs' perspectives as role holders. Some studies were limited, as their use of quantitative research methods meant they were unable to provide detailed information on LMs' experience in undertaking their HRM role (Khilji & Wang, 2006).

Another issue of LMs involvement in HRM was measurement of their contribution to organisational achievement. More focus was given to financial measures rather than HRM effectiveness. Realising that organisations needed to deal with the uncertainty of environmental changes, HRM effectiveness was the main priority in understanding the changing demands of the HR function current environments, particularly through LM's contributions (Ulrich, et al., 2012).

Based on the gaps identified in the HRM literature, the purpose of this study was to provide insights into understandings of the LMs' HRM role in the organisation. To achieve this, the perceptions of LMs, their senior managers and HR specialists were gathered to obtain the expectations of the HRM role from the perspectives of both role evaluators and role holders. Subsequently, this study also examined the effect of LMs' HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness.

Data were gathered from three Malaysian airports through interviews with LMs, senior managers and HR representatives at each airport. In addition, analysis of websites and some documentation, such as job descriptions and airport charts, was conducted to obtain general information about the airports and to compare findings from the interviews. The following section presents the answers to the research questions.

#### **RQ1 How is the HRM role of LMs defined?**

The findings of this study show that role evaluators defined the LMs' HRM role as including the administrative expert, employee champion and change agent roles. Of all the roles, change agent was highlighted as the most important to HRM, based on the airports current environments. This finding supported a large proportion of studies that found change agents, as 'the interventionist HRM role', increasingly devolved to LMs (Caldwell, 2003; Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Hall & Torrington, 1998; Hope-Hailey, et al., 2005).

In this study, the explanation of each role was made in relation to LMs' HRM activities. While most studies, such as Larsen and Brewster (2003) and Currie and Procter (2001), discussed their findings based on one single HRM activity (or several activities that were decided earlier by the researcher), this study provided understandings of LMs' HRM activities from participants' own definitions. This study reported five HRM activities of LMs perceived by role evaluators: performance management, reward management, attitudes and disciplinary management, work arrangement and training. This study captured one HRM activity that was rarely used by HR scholars, namely work arrangement. The identification of LMs' HRM activities provided a good explanation of the exact HRM role of LMs, by providing depth and broad coverage regarding LMs' involvement in each activity. In fact, this specification was lacking in the HRM literature and contributed to unclear definitions of LMs' HRM roles.

In defining the HRM role of LMs, this study showed the depth and coverage of LMs' HRM role differed between cases. The differences were based on several contextual factors, such as the airport category and size, the unit functions and the company's strategic priorities. Airport category and size and the unit function were more likely to influence the perceptions of the administrative expert and employee champion roles. This was not surprising, as both roles are considered operationally oriented tasks, suggesting similar underlying causes in determining LMs' involvement in HRM activities (Yusoff, 2012). Further, this finding supported earlier research by Truss (2001), who linked organisational size to influences on role expectations. The company's strategic priorities determined the focus of the change agent role between cases. This was in line with the understanding of the change agent role as being involved in strategically oriented tasks (Yusoff, 2012). This study provided additional evidence to support Cunningham and Hyman (1995), who demonstrated the success of the HR vision was ensured by placing LMs' HRM role at the forefront of change processes. This



explained the great emphasis given to the change agent role as the one that achieved the company's current needs. Further, the focus on performing as a change agent differed between airports: at Airport X the focus was on cost effectiveness, while Airports Y and Z were focused on changing attitudes among LMs. This was consistent with the contention that HRM priorities were driven by the business strategy approach (Maxwell & Farquharson, 2008). In this study, while Airport X (international airport) generated most revenue from its operations, the involvement of LMs in the change process was tailored to encouraging more cost effective initiatives. Employee commitment effort was enhanced at Airports Y and Z through the initiatives to change LMs' attitudes, in line with the requirement to use a limited number of employees in the domestic airports and necessity of LMs for setting a good example for employees.

While little empirical evidence was available to explore the development of the LMs' HRM role, this study provided insights into how the LMs' HRM role is defined in detail. Rather than relying upon a common approach that focused on HR specialists' views, this study enhanced the understanding of LMs' HRM role by using multiple informants, including senior managers in the airports. Harris et al. (2002) employed multiple informants in their research and their discussion was based on several HRM areas that were decided earlier by the researchers. Further, their study paid more attention to the outcome of the devolution on the changing role of LMs and HR specialists, rather than specifying the HRM role of LMs. This was similar to the study by Larsen and Brewster (2003), which failed to provide the exact role of LMs, although they agreed on the increased HRM role assigned to LMs. In Malaysia, much discussion on strategic HRM has been made regarding its effects on HR specialists and HR department functions (Othman, 2009; Yusoff, Abdullah, & Ramayah, 2010). Little attention has been paid to the HRM role of LMs. Therefore, this study will serve

as a basis for future studies in defining the HRM role of LMs by understanding the role expectation in more specific detail.

Once the expectations of the role evaluators were outlined, further investigation on LMs' experience in undertaking their HRM role was conducted to examine the clarity of work role requirements set by the role evaluators.

### **RQ2 How is the HRM role of LMs enacted?**

LMs perceived their HRM role to involve two HRM functions: administrative expert and employee champion. LMs were unaware of the need to perform as change agents, although this role was given the most emphasis by role evaluators. This study revealed that LMs perceived no real challenges hindering them from performing their HRM role. However, they suggested some improvement would assist them in performing better. This led to evidence about weaknesses in some HRM policies and practices implemented in the airports.

Similar findings were observed by Nehles et al. (2006) on challenges perceived by LMs. No more than one third of LMs perceived all factors as hindering them from performing their HRM role. However, the most concern was highlighted with two factors: support and HRM policy and procedures and these were related to each other. Generally, LMs mentioned they needed support from organisational members to implement HRM policy and procedures as this would assist them in understanding their HRM role expectations. Most studies in Western contexts, such as those by Cunningham and Hyman (1995) and Harris et al. (2002), highlighted insufficient HRM training for LMs; interestingly, this study reported the same. This indicated a lack of attention paid to skills development to prepare LMs with their HRM role. There was a gap between the intended and actual HRM role implementation by LMs, particularly in understanding their change agent role. Therefore, this study supported the necessity to ensure that HRM was seen as a crucial element in organisational training and

development programmes, as suggested by Maxwell et al. (2007). This would maximise LM contributions to organisational achievement.

In this study, agency factors (experience, individual values and religion) were identified as influencing the role enactment of LMs. These factors influenced LMs' perceptions of challenges, and the role of HRM policies and practices in assisting with their HRM role. Although Nehles et al. (2006) used the same factors to explore LMs' perspectives in performing the HRM role, the use of quantitative data limited their findings for detailed explanation of 'how' LMs enacted their HRM role and 'why' they behaved in a particular way. This study adds to the scant evidence of LMs' experience in enacting their HRM role by providing more prescriptive understanding on LMs' actions, based on qualitative data.

The findings of RQ1 and RQ2 led to the examination of the gap between LMs' HRM role performance and its influence on HRM effectiveness.

### **RQ3 What is the effect of LMs' HRM role performance on HRM effectiveness?**

The findings suggested that LMs' contribution to HRM effectiveness could be measured through four HR service areas: HR department, employees, unit operation and value added. The change agent role has been identified as the most important HRM role in providing HR services in most areas. This was attributed to the constant changes faced by the airports, which reflected the changing demands of the HRM function to achieve HRM effectiveness. Importantly, the identification of HR service areas that required the LMs' HRM role suggested that LMs' contribution for the overall organisational achievement was crucial as these areas covered the main aspects in the organisational system. As little attention has been given to the LMs' contribution to HRM effectiveness, this study's findings may serve as a basis for future studies linking LMs' HRM role and HRM effectiveness.

The current study has contributed to the literature in understanding the LMs' HRM role by comparing views from role holders and role evaluators. The findings suggested that

the LMs' HRM role would influence HRM effectiveness only if LMs were able to meet the HRM role expectations perceived by the role evaluators. This required clarity of the work role requirement through the interaction between role evaluators and role holders. While results of the study have shown the gap between the intended and actual LMs' HRM role, particularly in relation to the change agent role, this indicated that LMs' current performances were unable to contribute to the HRM effectiveness at the airports.

In line with the emphasis on the change agent role given by the role evaluators in defining the LMs' HRM role, this justified the importance of the change agent role for organisational achievement, particularly to achieve HRM effectiveness. Through the change agent role, LMs could contribute to achieving HRM effectiveness by being flexible and adapting to changes in managing employees. These abilities were important in current business environments, with the constant changes faced by the organisation, particularly in regard to the transformation that has occurred in the Malaysian airport sector. The changing demands of the HRM role meant role expectations lay in three main factors: efficiency, flexibility and service provider roles (Sheehan & Cooper, 2011).

The interaction between structure and agency in the role definition and role enactment may explain the gap between the intended and actual LMs' HRM role. Based on the findings of RQ1 and RQ2, the perceptions of LMs' HRM role definition was drawn from a company-wide perspective, while the role enactment of LMs was based on individual perspective. This explained the conflicting ideas about LMs' HRM role requirement between LMs and their role evaluators, indicating difficulties in aligning individual performance with business strategy, similar to that reported by Gratton et al. (1999).

While scholars agreed the HRM function contributed to HRM effectiveness (Ulrich, et al., 2012), this study showed the importance of LMs' HRM role in this respect. The company may have developed quality HRM policies and practices, but it was LMs who determined the

implementation of these practices in the work unit (Guest, et al., 2012). This was evident in the airports where role evaluators believed that LMs' HRM role could contribute to the unit and the organisation as a whole. The effectiveness of the HRM role implementation at the unit level influenced the effectiveness of the HR department's function in managing employee issues for the whole airport.

## **8.2 Summary of Main Findings.**

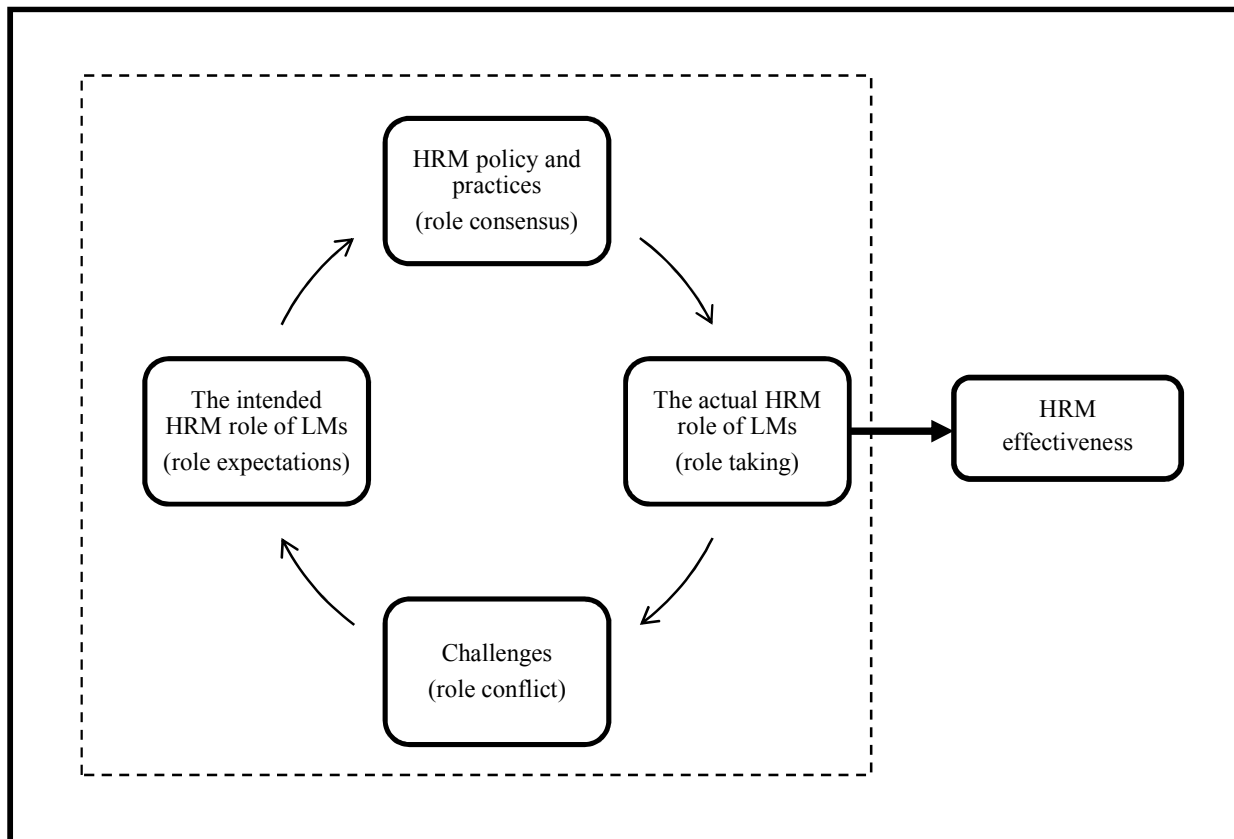
The main findings of this study are discussed in relation to the application of role theory in understanding the development of LMs' HRM role. In particular, the results of this study provide some clarification on the application of role theory concepts with the effect of modern workplace characteristics and the underlying causes that influence the LMs' HRM role.

### **8.2.1 The use of role theory concepts.**

This study provided insights on the use of role theory concepts to understand the development of the LMs' HRM role in modern organisations, particularly in the Malaysian airport sector. The findings suggested that role theory concepts are relevant to understanding the underlying causes that influence the development of a 'role' in modern organisations, amidst changes in the organisational environment as reported in much literature. However, in line with those changes, the application of role theory concepts to LMs' HRM role development required some modification to accommodate complex situations and the preferences of a new environment. The study addressed this through the exploration of four role theory concepts used to answer the research questions: role expectations, role taking, role conflict and role consensus.

The preliminary attempt to disentangle the role theory concepts in understanding the development of the HRM role of LMs is demonstrated in Figure 1 (as shown in chapter 1).

Classical role theory states the process of sending and receiving the message for role expectations of role taking continued until consensus was reached between the role sender and role holder (Wickham & Parker, 2007). Given that weaknesses in this process were observed in this study, the findings informed the modification of role theory application to suit the changing environment of the modern organisation. Although the LMs' HRM role expectations changed, there was a failure of senior management to redefine the role and send a clear message to LMs. Therefore, some recommendations have been made regarding the application of role theory concepts, unlike the preliminary research framework and the classical role theory model. The modified research framework is illustrated in Figure 6.



*Figure 6.* Modified research framework.

Considering the changing expectations of LMs' HRM role over time, this framework suggested that the process of developing the role was more likely to be parallel between all concepts, rather than one concept at a time being described, as in the classical role theory

model. For LMs to understand the changing expectations of their HRM role, this required redefinition of the intended HRM role and modification of HRM policies and practices as a signalling device. Findings of this study indicated the need to improve the process of role redefinition so LMs could be aware of how they should react to any changes and what role they play in realising the company's goals. Awareness could be gained through written documents, i.e. job specification and clear guidance from their superior. For instance, LMs job description did not indicate their cost reduction efforts, and so LMs believed that financial issues were not their problem.

Much attention to reconceptualise role theory concepts has been given to role taking, role conflict and role consensus. However, this framework demonstrated role expectations as important to the role development process. In this study, it was revealed that the consensus on role expectations should be achieved among role evaluators because it was the main priority in the development of HRM policies and practices to deliver information about LMs' work role requirements. A clear and consistent understanding of the requirements of the LMs' HRM role needed to be shared amongst role evaluators as this could influence the design and implementation of HRM policy and practices. The clearer the role expectation, the better HRM policy and practices could be formulated and implemented. The role of HRM policy and practices did not occur only when LMs faced challenges to perform their HRM role, but was also required early in the process of defining the HRM role. While LMs' HRM role performance was based on the role evaluators' assessment, the shared understanding of the HRM policy and practices could probably contribute to consistency in the actual LMs' HRM role.

Further, identifying challenges faced by LMs in performing their HRM role was a good source of information for the company to redefine the LMs' HRM role. This would enable them to revise the application of the existing HRM policies and practices to deliver

messages about changing HRM role expectations. The presence of challenges in performing their HRM role meant there was a gap in using HRM policies and practices as a signalling device to convey messages to LMs on HRM role expectations and requirements.

### **8.2.2 The weaknesses of HRM policy and practices.**

An interesting issue revealed in this study was that the weaknesses of the HRM policy and practices in assisting LMs to understand their HRM role requirement were based on two aspects: design and implementation. However, this study has shown that the weaknesses of HRM policy and practices implementation have more effect on LMs' ability to perform their HRM role than policy design. Similar arguments were made by Kaufman (2010), who suggested that most HRM theories are incomplete, especially in seeking explanations about the implementation of HRM policy and practices in organisations. Indeed, this issue was also raised by Purcell (1999), who urged attention be placed on 'how' and 'when' HRM policies and practices should be used to react with the changing demands of the HR function, rather than on the 'best mix' of policies to be used (p. 37). A lack of attention on the implementation of HRM policy and practices has resulted in gaps between the intended and actual HRM role of LMs.

In this study, the parent company had developed well-designed HRM policies and practices and continued to upgrade their HRM system to increase employee satisfaction. In fact, this was supported by an analysis of the company's documents. Company documents were a reference to employees, such as employee job descriptions, agreement on rewards and benefits and the company SOP. The dissatisfaction expressed by LMs on the design of HRM policy only focused on training, while HRM policies were currently being implemented, improvements to their implementation was generally needed. Inconsistent feedback that LMs received from senior management in the implementation of HRM policy and practices had caused uncertainty among LMs in understanding the expectations of their role.



According to LMs, the implementation of the HRM policy and practices acted as a guideline and source of information. This was important for them to understand the requirement of their HRM role. The findings of this study implied that LMs did not only refer to the written document in performing their HRM role. Instead, LMs relied more on the assistance and information obtained from other parties, such as senior management and their superiors, in guiding them to perform the HRM role. As a result, although the parent company prepared a well written document for LMs to perform their HRM role, it was rarely used by the LMs. Even if they had referred to certain documents, their understandings of the requirements for the HRM role were not comprehensive and of a standard required by top management. This was evident in this study when LMs were unable to manage the employee issues in broader perspective, rather than within their functional unit.

The reference to other parties for understanding HRM role expectations may explain the importance of experience for LMs. LMs often related their ability to perform the HRM role according to observations of their former leaders. In addition, employees in all airports had a strong working culture. This was evident from LMs' understandings of the company's shared values, which emphasised teamwork. This was observed in former leaders. These values possibly reinforced and superseded the development of new initiative, particularly in the introduction of new HRM policy and practices by the parent company. This could have been due to the LMs' backgrounds, as most of them were senior employees with low-level educational qualifications. In fact, LMs learnt to perform their responsibilities in the airport through experience, as they had started working with the company at junior levels.

Although a strong working culture was good for employees in the organisation, the only issue arising in the airports was that changes occurring in their environment required LMs to be adaptable to current business needs and strategic priorities. This was consistent with the contention that some changes were hard to adopt and may have influenced change

programmes developed by the organisation's senior management (Holbeche, 2009). For instance, the existing values held by LMs may not be relevant to new expectations from senior management. While LMs may have felt comfortable with the old culture, this justified the gap in their understanding of HRM role expectations.

### **8.3 Contributions of the Study**

This study makes the following contributions in terms of theoretical and practical implications.

#### **8.3.1 The LMs' HRM role in the Malaysian airport sector.**

The LMs' HRM role in the Malaysian airport sector is important for airport operations. This can be seen through the expectations of the role evaluator for the LMs to perform as a change agent in line with the changes in the airport environments. Further, the change agent is an important indicator to determine HRM effectiveness. The failure of LMs to perform their change agent role indicates that they did not contribute to the HRM effectiveness at the airport. This is an important finding as there is scant literature on the relationship between the LMs' HRM role and HRM effectiveness.

It is interesting to note that LMs' contribution fades due to the weaknesses in the role development process. As a result, LMs performance fail to impress their role evaluator as they were expected to do more than what they were "told" to do. Although the expectations from the role evaluator increased over time, the written document may require some times before it can be revised. This is where Malaysia's unique characteristics influence the understanding of the LMs' HRM role expectations. The high power distance in Malaysian society suggests LMs need authority to perform their role beyond what is stated in the job description. Without power and authority, LMs believed that they had to continue performing what they usually did. There were differences between this study and other Western studies, such as

Cunningham and Hyman's (1995) and Harris et al.'s (2002), who have reported LMs as being reluctant to accept authority for fear of being blamed.

In terms of the LMs' HRM role enactment, Islamic values played an important role in accepting the 'responsibility' to perform at work. This value influenced LMs' understanding on how they should perform their HRM role. Whenever LMs were asked to perform a new task, they were always prepared to do new things. They also were willing to sacrifice their own satisfaction in order to perform their responsibilities. This indicates the value held by Muslims as they believe that being responsible at work is one way of worshipping God (Rees & Johari, 2010).

### **8.3.2 Recommendations for the refinement of the role theory.**

The modern business environment can be portrayed through the dynamic nature of the workplace, such as workforce diversity, increased age and cultural differences. Critics of the refinement of role theory in relation to the dynamic nature of modern workplaces have mainly focused on the application of three concepts: role taking, role conflict and role consensus (Wickham & Parker, 2007). Less attention has been given to role expectations. However, this study suggests that the effect of current workplace characteristics is actually rooted in role expectations. This is particularly true when discussing the development of LMs' HRM roles in the Malaysian airport sector. This is evident in the effect of role expectations on the implementation of other concepts in the model. The understanding of role expectations amongst role evaluators may determine how the role is defined in the organisation. This explains the importance of the role definition process, so that the role evaluators can have the same understanding of HRM role expectations, which influences their feedback on role taking among LMs. Subsequently, this understanding may contribute to the effectiveness of the design of HRM policies and practices and increase the chances of arriving at role consensus.

This study suggests that problems in the development of the LMs' HRM role were actually started when role evaluators themselves had difficulty reaching the understanding of LMs' HRM role expectations. As such, different expectations were reported among role evaluators based on their educational background, experience and age differences. As a result, although some HRM policies designed by the parent company were good, they failed to function effectively because of weaknesses in implementation. This influenced the HRM role taking and role conflict because the perception of role evaluators determined the ongoing and future HRM role behaviours of LMs and influenced the evaluation of LMs' HRM role performance (Guest, et al., 2012). This study reported that the gap between the intended and actual HRM role of LMs was not attributed to weaknesses in HRM policies, but it was more about the implementation of the policy among role evaluators. This implies that consensus on role expectations among role evaluators is crucial in the development of other concepts of role theory. This is particularly true when considering the effect of the dynamic nature of modern workplaces, reflecting the complexity of situations in organisations, including the characteristics of role evaluators as they evaluate performance. The classical role theory model fails to consider the variety of expectations among role evaluators in the interaction between role expectation and role behaviour. Instead, deviance in role expectations was only viewed in the context of the role holder, to explain the gap between the intended and actual role.

Based on the above findings, this study supports critics of the assumption of role consensus as applied in the classical role theory model. In the classical role theory model, role consensus can be achieved if the work roles are agreed on and static (Wickham & Parker, 2007, p. 446). However, with the constant changes in the modern organisation, it is difficult for the work role to be fixed, depending instead on the changing needs and situations. This suggests complexity in achieving role consensus. In addition, the focus on achieving role

consensus is that role holders need to share the same norms and values to ensure the fulfilment of role expectations (Biddle, 1986). Findings of this study imply that the concept of role consensus should also be emphasised to other members in the 'role set', particularly role evaluators. The role evaluators could influence the formulation and implementation of HRM policies and practices. The consensus among role evaluators could ensure that role holders receive consistent feedback on their role performance. Therefore, findings of this study support the need for reconceptualising classical role theory assumptions to suit current organisational environments.

### **8.3.3 HRM policy implications.**

Based on the findings of this study, several courses of action are suggested for the parent company to improve the implementation of HRM policy and practices.

#### ***8.3.3.1 Highlight the importance of the LMs' HRM role in the service organisation***

The LMs' HRM role was found to be critical in these airports facing changes in their environments. The LMs' HRM role directly influences employees through their close relationships. It is crucial for service organisations to consider the importance of the LMs' HRM role as it is through this role employees are able to satisfy customers. Realising that service industry play an important role to generate income to many countries in the world, this finding may be useful to guide other sectors in the service industry, not only the airport management. Service organisations seek to provide services that meet the satisfaction of the end users, satisfaction is key to the survival of these businesses such as those in the healthcare and education sector. The understanding of the important of the LMs' HRM role especially their part as a change agent could be replicate by other sectors to become competitive in the industry. This may also be part of the business strategy in adding value to the company by utilising the human resources to achieve the goals. The LMs' HRM role should be utilised so

employees can achieve customer satisfaction and determine the success of the business strategy set by the top management.

#### ***8.3.3.2 Consider structural differentiation in HRM policy making.***

While the study reported that the airport specific differences contributed to differences in role expectations and role taking, this should be considered in the HRM policy development to ensure employee contributions can be used to achieve airport goals. Some existing HRM policy and practices implemented by the parent company were ineffective in aligning employee contributions and the company's strategic priorities because they failed to consider these differences. This failure should be highlighted because the misalignment between LMs' understanding and company expectations reflects the ineffectiveness of current HRM policies to contribute to organisational achievement. This may have a long term impact on airport operations because individual understandings were not aligned with organisational goals.

To reduce the misalignment between individual understandings and company expectations, a clear work structure and delegation process should be developed, considering the structural differentiation between airports. Structural differentiation should be highlighted in formulating the work structure, so that LMs in both airport categories have a clear understanding of the specific nature and depth of tasks they are responsible for. Specification and depth of tasks may ensure that LMs are clear about the requirements of their role in the airport and guide their performance to contribute to the company's goals. This is especially true in the domestic airports as the parent company tried to manage operational costs by reducing the number of employees in the airport.

In addition, structural differentiation may also be included in setting up KPIs for employees, particularly LMs. The KPIs for LMs in different airports may differ based on the airport category. Instead of a general statement, each KPI should reflect a clear definition of

what and how their achievement can be measured. This is useful for both parties: role evaluators and role holders. This initiative may avoid different understandings of the role expectation between both parties due to individual differences.

#### ***8.3.3.3 Align the content of job descriptions with the airport's strategic priorities.***

While structural differences occur between airports, especially with regard to the airport category and size, this should reflect the development of employee job descriptions, including LMs. The parent company may consider the strategic priorities they want within airports and differentiate the requirements to perform jobs based on different strategic priorities. This means that the development of job descriptions may include the main priority of the airport operation, so that employees have a clear view of what is expected from them. This is important, as findings show that LMs only perform what they are told to do. In addition, this could improve LMs' motivation to contribute to the airport operation through their HRM role.

Since the aeronautical income of the domestic airports may be difficult to increase in the short term, the parent company may encourage the development of initiatives to increase non-aeronautical income, as this was more possible to generate. This priority should be included in the job description, so that LMs realise they can contribute to the airport operation through their HRM role. Indirectly, the understanding of different strategic priorities between airports may improve employees' motivation, especially those in the domestic airport regarding their contribution to company revenue. Further, this could potentially increase LMs' satisfaction with HRM policy and practices, as they will not make comparisons between what has and has not been done at their airport and another.

#### ***8.3.3.4 More investment in HRM training.***

Although experience plays an important role in assisting LMs in performing their HRM role, formal training is still required because expectations change over time and this

may require different skills and knowledge. The parent company could consider developing more HRM training for LMs to improve their current performance. This is important to equip LMs with the necessary skills to meet with the expectations from senior management. As findings of the study demonstrate the significant contribution of LMs' HRM role to organisational achievement, particularly for HRM effectiveness, this should encourage decision makers to revise investment in LM training.

Apart from HRM training, other training that would be beneficial for LMs, in line with the constant changes in the airport environment and future needs, may include computer proficiency and English literacy. In fact, this study reports that the role evaluators and LMs themselves agreed that the lack of skills in both aspects hindered effective performance. In addition, this could bridge the gap between newer and older LMs.

#### ***8.3.3.5 Improve the communication flow.***

Findings of this study indicate that the different working hour systems between top management and LMs caused some communication problems that affected LMs' performance. This was because LMs had no access to the email during their day off. As a result, this limited their ability to respond to messages sent by their superior during that period. One of the solutions for this problem is updating LMs' knowledge about available technology to improve the communication flow between top management and LMs, such as smart phones. This is particularly true, as most LMs in the case study airports were more than 40 years old (generation X and baby boomers), and had limited technical ability compared to the newer LMs (Martin, 2005). This initiative may assist in minimising communication breakdown and avoid misunderstandings between top management and LMs. In addition, this will help LMs to improve their HRM role performance. This is true in explaining the multiple roles assigned to LMs, as they are assigned to manage HRM tasks while still being responsible for operational duties. In fact, Lynch (2007) suggests that the effect of



communication technologies (e.g. cell phones, email and instant messaging) can increase LMs' capabilities to manage multiple roles and meet the changing demands of the organisation.

#### **8.4 Limitations of the Study**

The first limitation of this study is due to the use of the Corner and Ulrich's (1996) typology to examine the intended and actual HRM role of LMs. Although it is a well-known model used to study the HRM role, Ulrich and his colleagues introduced a new typology in 2012 after the data for this study was gathered. Instead of three roles in the previous typology, Ulrich and his colleagues expand the understanding of the HR function into six roles reflecting the new work requirements needed to be performed by the HR people. The new HRM typology may better reflect the changing demands of the HRM function in the new business environment. Using the latest model may result in greater understandings and specifications of the HRM role of LMs in contemporary organisations. This model specifies the activities involved in each role that may be useful in providing an understanding of the requirements for the increased demand of HRM roles to organisational members.

Second, this study employs multiple case studies, which are restricted to three selected airports, representing only the northern and central regions of the Malaysian Peninsular. The findings may be somewhat different in different regions, say Sabah and Sarawak, where different demographics, landscape and culture could influence perceptions of the LMs' HRM role. While each region has its own culture and customs, this potentially creates different structure that influence employees' way of thinking and perceptions of workplace issues. This can influence the understanding of the LMs' HRM role, which may have an important effect on the development of the role in the Malaysian context.

Generalisability is one of the main criticisms of the use of case study approach. As such, 36 interviews were conducted in three airports. The findings gathered from such a

modest number of respondents may not be generalised to represent the airport sector or other service company in Malaysia. However, whilst quantitative researcher employ ‘statistical generalisation’ mainly through a large sample to represent the population of their study, qualitative researchers depend on “analytic generalisation” to explain their contribution (Yin, 2003). A single case or multiple case studies is sufficient when the case or cases are found to support previously developed theory used to guide the data analysis. Therefore, the issue of generalizability can be dealt with accordingly by comparing the findings of the case study airports with the role theory concepts to explore about the LMs’ HRM role from the perspectives of key members of the airports. Findings indicate that the role theory concepts (role expectations, role taking, role conflict and role consensus) exist in the process of explaining the LMs’ HRM role definition and enactment.

In addition to HR specialists and LMs’ superiors, gathering responses from employees may yield useful results regarding the expectations of the LMs’ HRM role. This is due to the importance of LMs’ HRM responsibility, which requires them to deal with employees. This may provide insights from different perspectives to explore the expectations of LMs’ subordinates. In this study, the focus was given to organisational members who had higher position than LMs in the organisational structure, and were likely to be involved in decision making. The purpose of doing this was to obtain the expectation of the policy maker and compare their expectations with LMs, who were the implementers of the HRM role. Although employees hold their own expectations about the LMs’ HRM role, they were not directly involved in policy making.

Another limitation of this study is the time for interviews, which were mostly conducted during the participants’ working hours. As a result, some participants wanted to finish the interview sessions quickly, so they could continue their work. Thus, there was possibility that their responses were distracted and answers were given without full attention

to reflect on the real situation that they experienced. However, all participants were willing to provide their contact details had the researcher required any further explanations. Moreover opportunities were given to the participants to provide feedback of issues surrounding the process of the LMs' HRM role development beyond answering the interviewer's questions. As a result, this study's findings have demonstrated understanding of how the HRM role of LMs is defined and enacted in the organisation.

## **8.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

This study has provided useful insights into the development of LMs' HRM role, but further research could be undertaken in the following areas.

### **8.5.1 Combining role theory with other theories or models.**

To enhance more understanding of the development of the LMs' HRM role, future studies could combine role theory with another HRM theory, such as the resource based view to expand other related and relevant variables, especially in line with current workplace characteristics. This may include the exploration of dynamic capabilities and dynamic fit to reflect organisations' resources that develop to align LM contributions to organisational achievement. This combination is needed as the limitations of role theory are evident in this study. It fails to consider the complexity of situations in the modern organisation that influence the role's development. A resource based view may provide a good combination with role theory as organisations are looking for the best ways to use internal resources particularly HR capabilities in adding value to organisations in competitive environments.

### **8.5.2 Considering different levels of LMs.**

This study concentrates on a lower level of LMs in the organisation, which had a direct influence on employees at the work floor. Future studies may consider LMs from different management levels to increase the understanding of LMs' HRM role and the effect of different management levels on perceptions of HRM policies and practices implemented to

assist them with the role. Importantly, considering LMs from other levels of management may identify possible perceptual divergences among organisational members on the LMs' HRM role. While this study informs the importance of role expectations in shaping the actual LMs' HRM role, the perceptual divergence on their role expectations may have negative effects on LMs' performance. Therefore, determining the expectations of different levels of LMs is important to guide LMs in performing their HRM role, and assist organisations to provide necessary support for LMs to meet these expectations.

### **8.5.3 Comparing results of airports from other regions.**

The airports that participated in this study were from the central and northern regions of Peninsular Malaysia. Findings reported that organisational culture influences LM attitudes to their HRM role. It would be interesting to compare experiences of employees from other airports and further investigate the influence of organisational culture in developing the LMs' HRM role. This may enhance understanding of the underlying causes that influence LMs' attitudes to their HRM role and generalise the findings on the development of the LMs' HRM role in Malaysian airports.

## **8.6 Study Summary**

Despite understanding how the HRM role of LMs is defined and enacted, this study provides insights on the use of role theory concepts in the process of role development in the organisational system. Emphasis should be given to the processes of developing role expectations. These reflect the requirements of the HRM role that need to be performed by the role holder, namely LMs. Importantly, the message for role expectations should be obtained through consensus among role evaluators, who will assess performance in the role.

There is a clear need for improvement in the implementation of HRM policy and practices to increase the effectiveness of policies in delivering messages about the LMs' role expectations. This could potentially be achieved if individual understandings are aligned with

organisational expectations. A well-designed HRM policy may be useful if it is implemented well by superiors as a reference for LMs to perform their HRM role.

While this study demonstrates that LMs' HRM role can contribute to HRM effectiveness, the gap between the intended and actual HRM role should be bridged so that LMs' contributions can be used to achieve organisational goals.

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## Appendix 1 Interview guide for the role holder

### *Interview guide for the role holder (line managers)*

#### **The Human Resource Management (HRM) Role of Line Managers (LMs): A Malaysian case study**

Name : \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time : \_\_\_\_\_

Airport/Department : \_\_\_\_\_

#### **General information of an interviewee**

1. What is your current role?
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. How long have you been in this organisation?
4. How many people are in your department?

#### **A. Questions regarding the actual Human Resource Management (HRM) role of LMs**

1. What are the current HRM activities that you undertake in your organisation?
2. How well do you think each of the HRM activities you performed?
3. How do you think your HRM role contributes to the company?
4. How have the requirements of the HRM role been communicated to you?
5. In your opinion, do LMs actions need to be based on organisational policy or flexible to cater for different situations?

#### **B. Questions of role conflict**

*(Challenges in performing the HRM role)*

1. How do you feel about your willingness to perform your HRM role?
2. How do you feel about time provided to perform your HRM role?
3. How do you feel about your knowledge and skills to perform your HRM role?
4. Is there anybody who assists you to perform your HRM role? How does this person help you to perform your HRM role?
5. How do you feel about HRM policies and practices to assist you in performing your HRM role?
6. Is there anything else that allow/hinder you in performing your HRM role?

**C. Question of role consensus**

*(The role of HRM policies and practices in communicating the intended HRM role)*

1. How do you understand expectations of your HRM role?
2. How HRM policies and practices help you to understand expectations of your HRM role?
3. How satisfied are you with your HRM role?
4. How satisfied do you feel with your organisations HRM policies and practices in assisting you to perform your HRM role?

**D. Demographic information**

1. What is your educational background?
2. Briefly explains your employment background?
3. Age?
4. Ethnicity?
5. Religion?
6. Contact details.

**Closing**

Lastly, is there anything else that you would like to add about the line managers' HRM role in your company?

**Thank you for your participation and assistance.**

## Appendix 2 Interview guide for the role evaluators

### *Interview guide for the role evaluators*

#### **The Human Resource Management (HRM) Role of Line Managers (LMs): A Malaysian case study**

Name : \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time : \_\_\_\_\_

Airport/Department : \_\_\_\_\_

#### **General information of an interviewee**

1. What is your current role?
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. How long have you been in this organisation?
4. How many people that you supervise?
5. How many staff that report to you?

#### **A. Questions of the intended HRM role of LMs**

1. What are the current HRM activities of LMs in your organisation?
2. How well do you think each of the HRM activities has been performed?
3. How do you think the HRM role of LMs contribute to the company?
4. How have the requirements of their HRM role been communicated to LMs?
5. In your opinion, do LMs actions need to be based on organisational policy or flexible to cater for different situations?

#### **B. Questions of HRM effectiveness**

1. Overall, how do you think the HRM of LMs contribute to achieve organisational goals?
2. Do you think LMs give their contribution as expected? Why do you think so?
3. How do you think the HRM role of LMs impacted on employee?
4. How do you think the HRM role of LMs impacted on the unit/airport operation?
5. How do you think the HRM role of LMs impacted on supporting HR department function?
6. How do you think the HRM role of LMs impacted on adding value to the company?

**C. Demographic information**

1. What is your educational background?
2. Briefly explains your employment background?
3. Age?
4. Ethnicity?
5. Religion?
6. Contact details.

**Closing**

Lastly, is there anything else that you would like to add about the line managers' HRM role in your company?

**Thank you for your participation and assistance.**

## Appendix 3 Summary of the research process

### *Summary of the research process*

#### **Phase 1: Preparation and development**

1. Review of the literature on the HRM role of LMs was conducted to identify the gap and potential issue for the study.
2. The potential issues identified and the research questions developed.
3. The methodology had chosen which was appropriate to answer the research questions.
4. Sets of questions prepared to promote discussion during interviews.
5. The organisational structure was studied to identify the criteria of participants (role evaluators and LMs) who will involve in the study.
6. Company representative was contacted to explain the criteria of the participants needed for the study.
7. Each airport nominates specific staff that will involve in the interview and schedule the session that suit with their staff.

#### **Phase 2: Data collection**

1. Individual interviews were conducted with LMs, heads of unit and HR representatives for each airport in the study.
2. Each interviewee was provided with the Participant Information Letter to read. Questions were answered to their satisfaction.
3. The interview process and confidentiality issue briefly explained by the researcher to ensure that interviewees fully understood the purpose of the study.
4. Each interviewee was asked to sign the consent form if they agreed to participate and return it to the researcher.
5. Questions were asked and notes were taken by the researcher. Each interview was also recorded with the permission of the interviewee.
6. Interviewees were thanked for their participation and cooperation.

#### **Phase 3: Data analysis**

1. Interviews were transcribed in the language they were conducted.
2. Transcripts were translated into English before data analysis commences.
3. Data was stored using Nvivo software prior to the data analysis.
4. Results were analysed with reference with the literature to seek for clarification.
5. Research questions were answered.

## Appendix 4 Information letter

### *Information letter*

### INFORMATION LETTER

#### ***The Human Resource Management (HRM) Role of Line Managers: A Malaysian case study***

Dear Participant,

My name is Nik Hazimah Nik Mat and I am a student in the School of Management at Edith Cowan University. This research entitled "*The Human Resource Management (HRM) role of line managers: A Malaysian case study*" is undertaken as part of the requirements of a PhD degree.

You are invited to take part in this research which aims to explore how the line managers' HRM role is defined and how their role contributes to HRM effectiveness. You have been selected due to your direct involvement with the HRM role of line managers. In addition, you have been nominated by senior management in your organisation.

The proposed research intends to explore how the line managers' HRM role is defined and enacted in a Malaysian organisation. This is achieved by interviewing the key members in the organisation that are closely related with this role. The interview questions and discussion are guided by the latest academic literature in this field, together with the concept of role theory. It is anticipated that the interview will last about one hour and will be audio taped with your permission. This will allow your answers to be more thoroughly analysed. If you do not want the interview to be recorded, please advise me at the commencement of the interview and I will take detailed notes instead. If you agree to participate, please sign and return the attached consent form to the researcher.

The risks of this study are minimal as it generally explores your experiences related to the HRM role of line managers in your organisation. No payment or reimbursement is available from participating in this research and no direct benefits to you as an individual. However, the information obtained from this study may be valuable to assist your organisation in understanding the impact of the line managers' HRM role particularly to improve HRM effectiveness.

All information collected will be completely confidential and anonymous. This information will be coded and the identity of individual participant will be erased. The information will be stored

securely at the researcher's office and will only be accessible by the researcher. Once the information has been analysed, the audiotapes and transcripts will be destroyed.

The outcomes of this research will be included in the resulting thesis and may also be reported in other reports such as conference paper and publications. However, no individuals will be identified in any reports or presentations arising from this research, unless specific consent has been obtained. A copy of the published result may be accessible electronically if you desire.

Participation in this research is voluntarily. Whether or not you decide to participate, your decision will not disadvantage you in any way. No explanation or justification is needed if you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the interview session at any stage or decline from answering any question.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on (+614) 2469 3418 or [hnik@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:hnik@our.ecu.edu.au) or my principal supervisor, Professor Rowena Barrett on (+618) 6304 2209 or [r.barrett@ecu.edu.au](mailto:r.barrett@ecu.edu.au) should you have any further queries relating to this research or your participation.

Should you have any concerns or comments about this research and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on (+618) 6304 2170 or email [research.ethics@ecu.edu.au](mailto:research.ethics@ecu.edu.au).

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

---

(Nik Hazimah Nik Mat)

PhD Candidate

School of Management

Faculty of Business and Law

Edith Cowan University 270 Joondalup Drive

Joondalup, Western Australia, 6027

## Appendix 5 Consent form

### *Consent form*

School of Management,  
Faculty of Business and Law  
For further information:  
Supervisor: Professor Rowena Barrett  
Tel: (+618) 6304 2209  
Email: [r.barrett@ecu.edu.au](mailto:r.barrett@ecu.edu.au)

Researcher: Nik Hazimah Nik Mat  
Tel: (+614) 2469 3418  
Email: [hnik@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:hnik@our.ecu.edu.au)

### ***The Human Resource Management (HRM) Role of Line Managers: A Malaysian case study***

I have read the Information Letter on the research of “*The Human Resource Management (HRM) Role of Line Managers: A Malaysian case study*” which will be conducted by Nik Hazimah Nik Mat from Edith Cowan University and understand all the information provided by the researcher. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and all queries have been answered to my satisfaction. I am aware that I can contact the research team should I have any additional questions.

I understand that the research will be conducted in accordance with the procedures as outlined in the Information Letter. I will be asked a number of questions related to the HRM role undertaken by line managers in my organisation and am aware that the interview may be audio recorded and notes will be taken. I understand I can request for the interview not to be taped. Moreover, I understand I can withdraw from this interview at any time, without penalty, and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

I understand that all information collected will remain confidential and my identity will not be revealed to anyone other than the researchers without my consent. I am aware that all information gathered from this interview will only be used for the purpose of this research. I understand that all information will be stored securely and once the information has been analysed, the audio tapes and transcripts will be destroyed.

I agree to voluntarily participate in this research and give my consent freely.

.....

Printed Name of Participant

.....

Signature of Participant

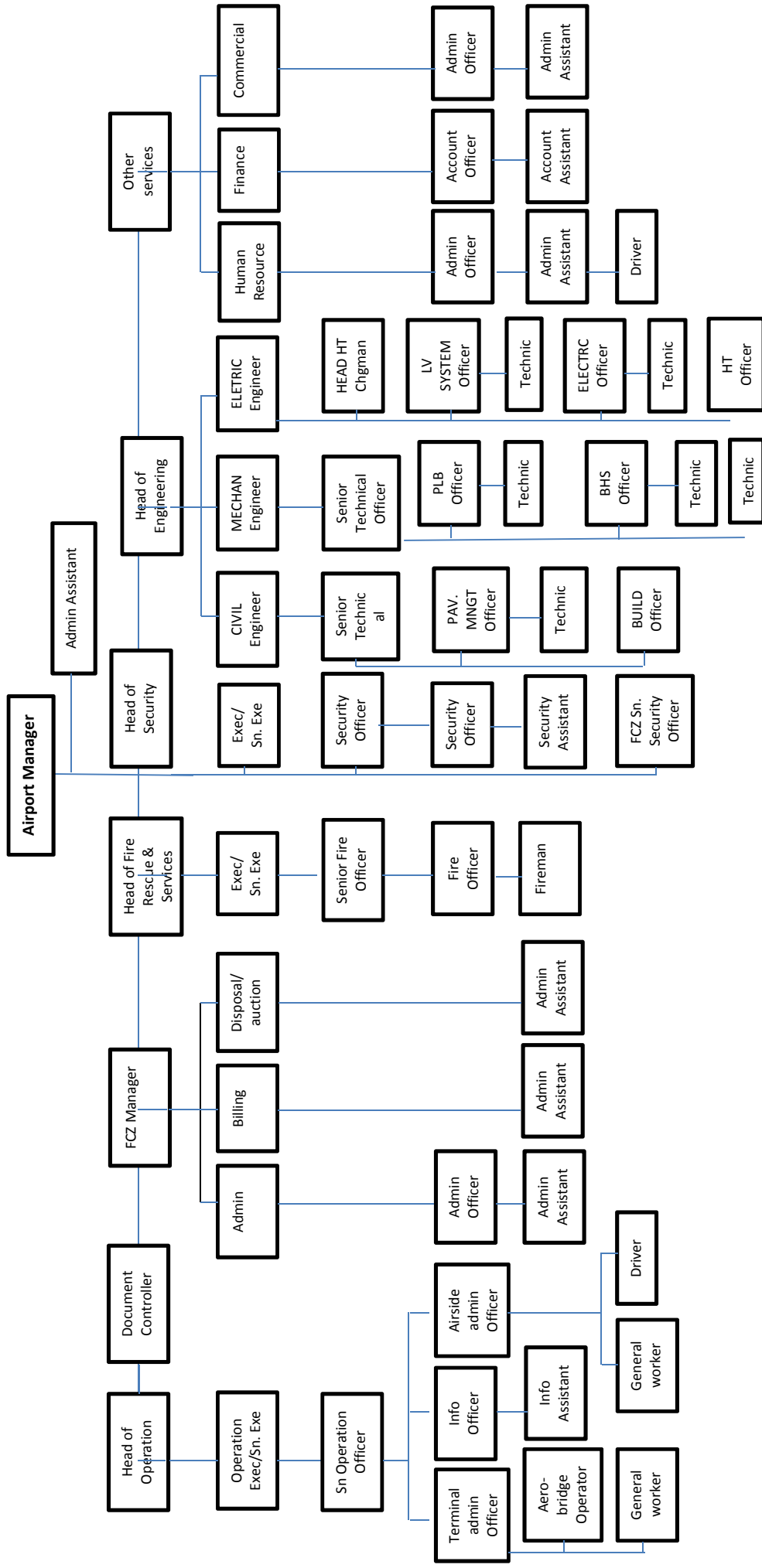
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Date



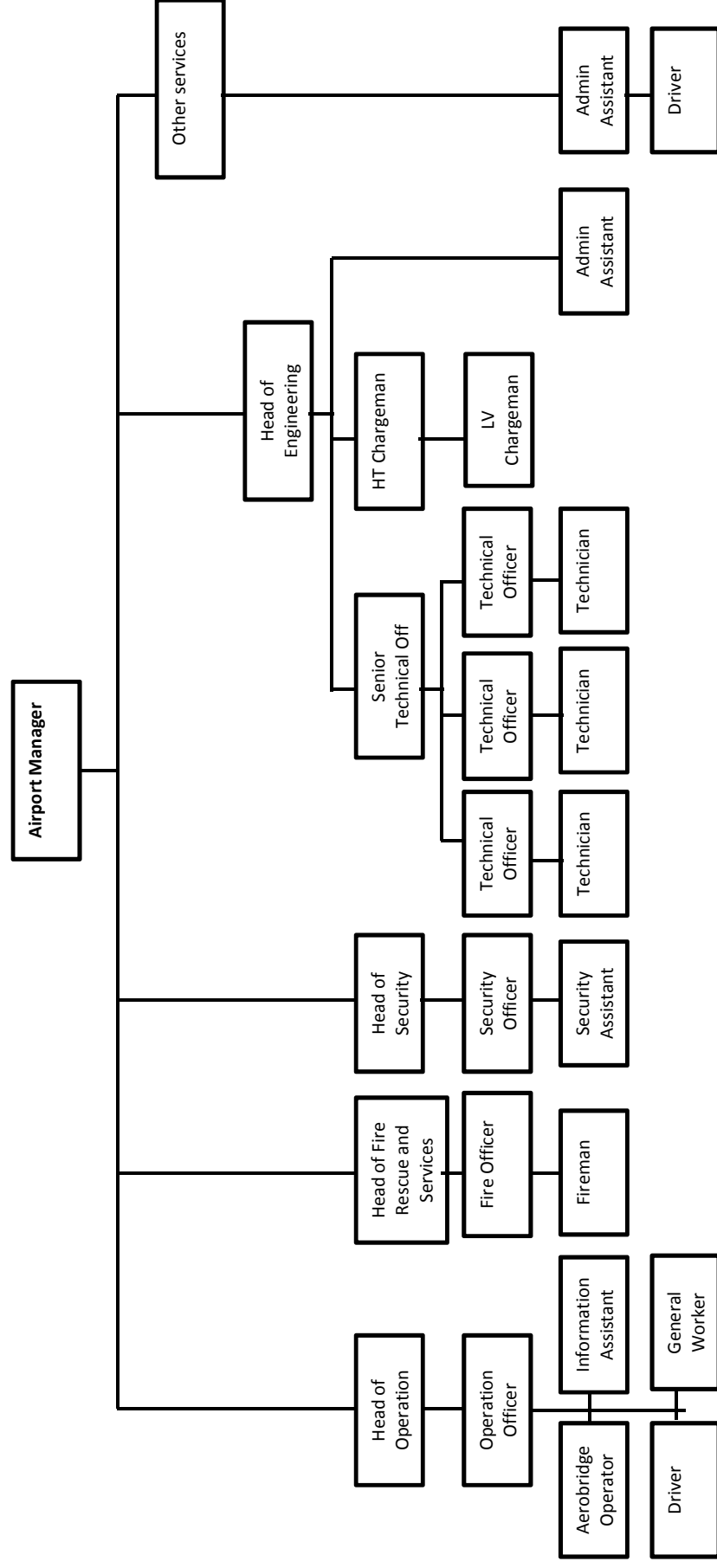
## Appendix 6 Airport X organisational chart

*Airport X organisational chart*



## Appendix 7 Airport Y organisational chart

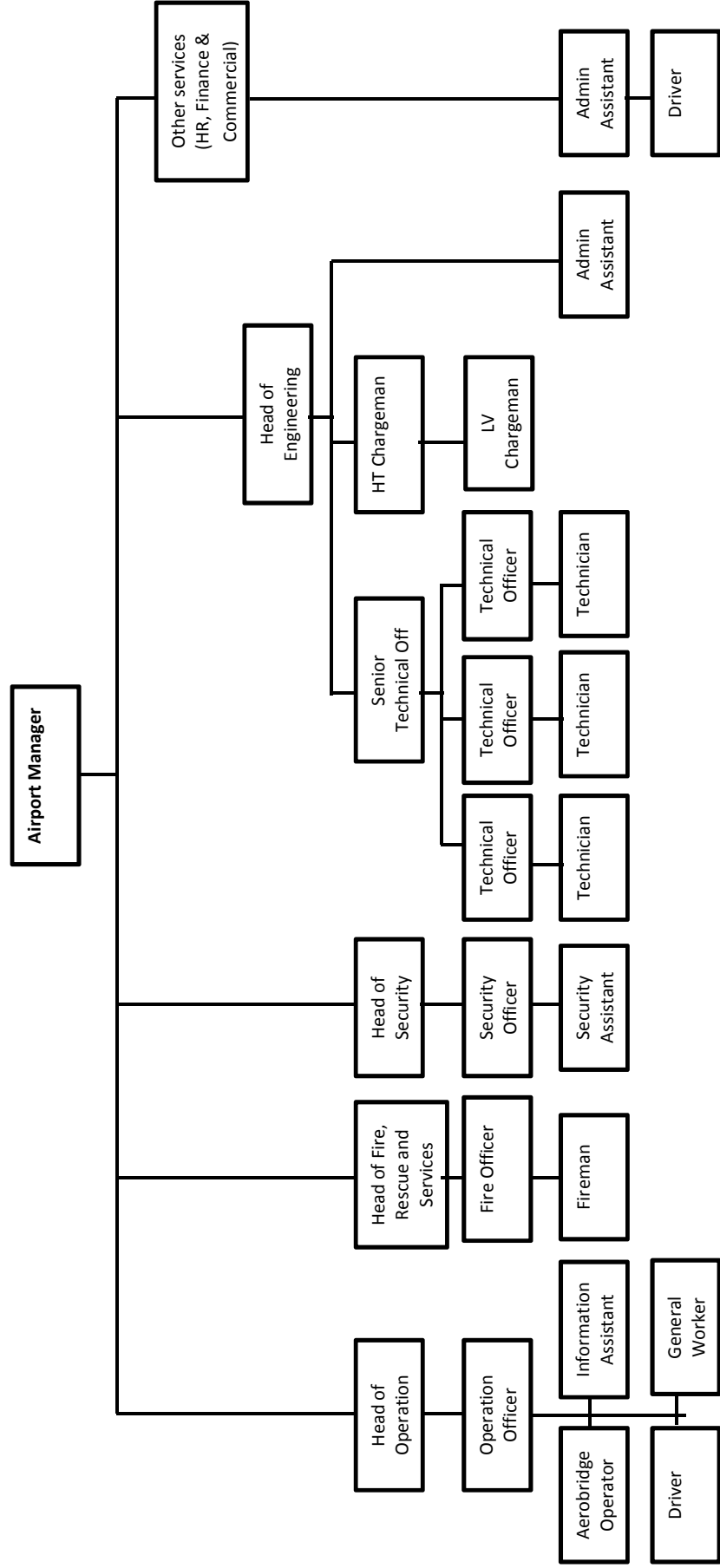
*Airport Y organisational chart*



Source: Company document

## Appendix 8 Airport Z organisational chart

*Airport Z organisational chart*



Source: Company document

