

2014

# Line Managers' Involvement In HRM Activities: A Malaysian Case Study

Nik Hazimah Nik Mat

Pattanee Susomrith

*Edith Cowan University*, [p.susomrith@ecu.edu.au](mailto:p.susomrith@ecu.edu.au)

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This article was originally published as: Nik Mat, N., & Susomrith, P. (2014). Line Managers' Involvement in HRM Activities: A Malaysian Case Study. *International Review of Management and Business Research*, 3(3), 1660-1670. Original article available [here](#)

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.

<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworkspost2013/682>

## Line Managers' Involvement in HRM Activities: A Malaysian Case Study

**NIK HAZIMAH NIK MAT**

School of Maritime Business and Management, University Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia

Email: [nikhazimah@umt.edu.my](mailto:nikhazimah@umt.edu.my)

Tel: +619 6684430

**PATTANEE SUSOMRITH**

School of Business, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia

Email: [p.susomrith@ecu.edu.au](mailto:p.susomrith@ecu.edu.au)

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### *Abstract*

*Despite evidence on greater line managers' involvement in many HRM activities, the overall picture of their HRM role is still blurred especially in terms of their coverage and depth of involvement in HRM activities. For line managers to deliver their HRM role effectively, it must be clearly defined so they can enact the role according to the expectations of their role evaluators, who include the line managers' supervisors, employees and HR specialists. The expectations of role evaluators are important because the assessment of line managers' performance depends on what the role evaluators perceive as valuable. However, the expectations of the role evaluators change and this is a factor that contributes to variation in the HRM role of line managers. This paper presents the preliminary findings of a study conducted in Malaysian airports. A qualitative study through case study was conducted at three airports. Drawing on role theory concepts, interviews were conducted with senior managers and HR representatives at these airports to explore their perceptions of the HRM activities of line managers. Content analysis was employed to interpret the interviews data for themes related to role theory. Results indicate differences on the perceived HRM activities of line managers between airports as they differed in terms of airport category, size and operation. This finding has important implications in developing the line managers' HRM role as the structural differentiation is likely to influence the expectations of role evaluators, which is crucial in achieving consensus between the intended and actual implementation of line managers.*

**Key Words:** *Line Managers, HRM Role, Role Theory, Malaysia.*

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### **Introduction**

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 Human Resource Management (HRM) activities to the line managers (LMs) is an important practice in the increasingly competitive environment (Budhwar, 2000). The main purpose of devolving HRM activities is to give opportunity to HR specialists to focus their attention at the strategic level so that the HRM function can be effectively integrated into the business strategy. Towards that, LMs are given primary responsibility to manage HRM activities at the operational level. The assumption has been made that LMs are more responsive to the needs and local conditions which enable them to take responsibility for HRM in their areas. However, the LM's HRM role has become prominent as they are increasingly involved in many HRM activities including performance appraisal, training and development, recruitment and selection, pay and benefits, career development, industrial relations, safety and health and expansion and reduction (Budhwar, 2000; Currie & Procter, 2001; Larsen & Brewster, 2003).

The prominent role of LMs is justified through their influence on employees' attitudes and behaviour (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Employees' attitudes and behaviour are essential to connect HRM and organisational performance, and this implies that LMs' HRM role is greater than what has been 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 their 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 support the organisational goals (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 impacts on the HRM effectiveness and contributes to increased organisational performance (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). 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. In particular, the focus of this study is on the involvement of LMs in the HRM activities in order to describe the specification and depth of LMs' HRM role in the organisational system.

## Literature Review

### LMs' HRM activities

Generally, LMs were 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 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, p. 148).

Performance appraisal is the most common HRM activity devolved to the LM (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995). LMs play a major role in this activity as they are responsible for assessing the need of employees' training and development through employees' performance. Nevertheless, some researchers found a weak link of LMs involvement in the performance management system because LMs were reluctant to take responsible (Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1999). Limited responsibility and uneven devolution of responsibility to LMs, contributes to the ambiguity about their role (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1997). Ambiguity is 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 did perform well (Renwick, 2000).

Cunningham and Hyman (1995) argue that LMs are also involved in recruitment and selection. Even though decisions on recruitment and selection often handled by HR specialist, LMs are sometimes involved

in the decision making (Nehles, Riemsdijk, Kok, & Looise, 2006). Thus, the finding on LMs' involvement in recruitment and selection suggest that LMs do not exert great influence over these activities.

There appears to be little research on the involvement of LMs in the training and development activity (Renwick & MacNeil, 2002). These activities can be 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 enables the creation of an environment that enhances employee performance and increases their satisfaction at work (Gibb, 2003).

Increasingly LMs are involved in managing discipline but HR specialist authority has been found 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 handle 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 handle issues. For example, employees with longer periods of tenure were dealt with in a more conciliatory fashion as they were valuable to the organisation. The way LMs handle grievance and discipline issues is affected by the limited authority they have and therefore they are 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 this varies depending on the situation. Their study was conducted at Edward Hospital Trust, a partly government owned institution and this impacted the boundaries within which decisions about pay and benefits could be determined. So for instance, 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) conclude that although LMs role tends to vary, they play an important 'link pin' role between operational and strategic level activity regardless of the situation facing the organisation. LMs involvement in career development is viewed as a shared responsibility with HR specialists (Renwick & MacNeil, 2002). Only with HR specialist support could LMs play a role in career development activities. This is the case as many HR specialists view LMs as lacking skills to manage career development activities (Hall & Torrington, 1998). As a result, researchers point out that HR specialists should also be responsible for poor HR role implementation by LMs on career development as it reflects on the failure of HR specialists to fulfil their role to support and advise the LM on related matters (Renwick & MacNeil, 2002).

Despite evidence on greater LMs' involvement in many HRM activities, the overall picture of their HRM role is still blurred (Currie & Procter, 2001). In fact, HRM frameworks never explicitly define LMs role in undertaking HRM activities (Hall & Torrington, 1998). Organisational members' expectations of LMs change and this is a factor that contributes to variation in the LMs HRM role. The impact of these expectations seems to be critical to the exploration of LMs' HRM role. Role theory is relevant for the exploration of the line managers' HRM role as it is widely used to understand employee behaviour in organisations and provide understanding of the causes and outcomes of employee behaviour, specifically on the role they play (Lopopolo, 2002).

### Role Theory

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 well known in social sciences and contributes to understanding people's behaviour in various social systems (Biddle, 1986). Early developments of role theory suggested that expectations were the crucial aspect affecting the performance of a particular role. The development of the role is influenced by the expectations 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 the role and delivering the right message to the role holder so that the expected role behaviour can be achieved. As Katz and Kahn (1978) noted, the allocation of work roles reflects the required behaviour expected by the organisation, which should be complied with by employees to ensure that the work is performed effectively towards 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). This framework is underpinned by four assumptions:

1. *Role taking* suggests that employees will accept roles that are 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* happens when employees comply with the expected behaviour of their role.
4. *Role conflict* will arise when the expectations of other members of the organisation are not consensual.

The above-mentioned concepts are obviously pertinent in the diverse demands of the role of line managers when they undertake HRM responsibility. For instance, besides being responsible for the quality and quantity of production of their immediate work force, they will also be responsible for training new workers and conducting performance evaluations of their staff. Having multiple roles significantly affects the way the HRM role is enacted by line managers (Lynch, 2007). Therefore, an understanding of the basic concepts underlying role theory can assist in investigating the development of the HRM role of line managers.

This study provides a good foundation for understanding the development of the HRM role of line managers through identifying the HRM role expectations among the key members in the organisation who are closely related with the role and thus clearly defining the role. Subsequently, this understanding may lead to the exploration of the actual HRM role of line managers through their interpretation of the message about the HRM role expectations. To this end and drawing on role theory, this paper investigates the expectations of key members that closely related with the HRM role of line managers on the line managers' HRM activities. In this study, line managers are defined as managers at the lowest hierarchical level who are directly responsible for employees' work and performance, regardless of department, except the HR department.

## Methods

This is a qualitative study based on three Malaysian airport case studies: Airport X, Airport Y and Airport Z. These airports were purposively selected to reflect a range of airport categories and sizes, but particularly for the accessibility to interviewees they provided. Following ethics approval from the researcher's university, interviews were conducted with senior managers and HR representatives at each airport. In this study, senior managers and HR representatives are the role evaluators of the HRM role of line managers. A total of 13 interviews were conducted. Most of the role evaluators are Muslim Malays and male. However, they varied in terms of age, educational background and tenure as shown in Table 1. Semi-structured interviews were employed because they enabled participants to give as much information as possible and the researcher to investigate the meaning of responses thoroughly. The main elements explored in the interview were the perceived HRM activities of line managers. All interviews were



recorded and transcribed. As well as recording the interviews, the researcher took notes and maintained a reflective diary of the interview process to assist with subsequent analysis of the transcripts. Since the majority of interviews were conducted in Malay, the transcribed scripts were translated into English prior to the data analysis. Document analysis was employed to obtain general information about the airport background and to compare findings from the interviews. This process involved websites and some documentation such as job descriptions and organisational chart. This study applied role theory concepts; therefore, content analysis was appropriate for describing the content of written documents (the company documents) and spoken material gathered from interviews. A cross case analysis is conducted to identify similarities and differences of LMs' HRM activities perceived by role evaluators at all airports.

Table 1: The participant' demographic background

No.	Factors		Airport X	Airport Y	Airport Z	Total
1.	Gender	Male	3	3	3	<b>9</b>
		Female	1	2	1	<b>4</b>
2.	Age	30 – 39	2	1	1	<b>4</b>
		40 – 49	0	2	1	<b>3</b>
		>50	2	2	2	<b>6</b>
3.	Ethnicity	Malay	4	5	4	<b>13</b>
4.	Religion	Islam	4	5	4	<b>13</b>
5.	Education	Secondary school	1	3	2	<b>6</b>
		Certificate/Diploma	0	1	2	<b>3</b>
		Bachelor	3	1	0	<b>4</b>
6.	Tenure	<10	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
		10 – 19	0	1	1	<b>2</b>
		20 – 29	0	3	1	<b>4</b>
		30 – 39	2	1	2	<b>5</b>
7.	Unit	Unit 1	1	1	1	<b>3</b>
		Unit 2	1	1	1	<b>3</b>
		Unit 3	1	1	1	<b>3</b>
		Unit 4	1	2	1	<b>4</b>

## Results

HRM activities are the related activity aimed to ensure that organisations can utilise employees' capabilities and contributes to accomplish the organisational goals (Aminuddin, 2008). The importance of gathering perceptions about HRM activities lie towards getting a clear picture on LMs' involvement in these activities so that their HRM role can be described in specific.

Table 2: Case studies comparison on the LMs' HRM activities

HRM activities of LMs	Case study airports		
	Airport X	Airport Y	Airport Z
Performance management	Yes	Differed based on the unit size	Differed based on the unit size
Rewards management	Yes	No	No
Attitudes and disciplinary management	Yes	Yes	Yes
Work arrangement	Yes	Differed based on the unit size	Differed based on the unit size
Training	Differed based on the unit requirement	Differed based on the unit requirement	Differed based on the unit requirement

One of the similarities between airports was that LMs were expected to involve in many HRM activities. Although number of HRM activities to be performed by LMs differed between airports, this study provides evidence which consistent with earlier studies that LMs were expected to involve in more than one HRM activity (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995; Renwick, 2003).

As shown in Table 2, role evaluators in Airport Y and Z have the same understanding on LMs' HRM activities. The main difference on the perceived HRM activities of LMs can be seen in Airport X. Role evaluators in Airport X expected their LMs to involve in five HRM activities, while four HRM activities were reported in Airport Y and Z. Moreover, there is agreement amongst role evaluators in each airport on the HRM activities of LMs in their airport.

In terms of the activity, the only exception that differentiates between airports is the rewards management. Four HRM activities have been the same comprised of performance management, attitudes and discipline management, work arrangement and training. Performance management is the most mentioned activity by participants in the study.

This is 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 are also reported to involve in the attitudes and discipline management consistent with the literature which provided evident on the increased involvement of LMs in this activity (IRS (2001) as quoted in Renwick, 2003).

Although there is no discussion made by researchers on LMs involvement in the work arrangement activity, participants in this study highlighted this activity as part of the HRM role of LMs in the airport. This relatively includes activity of administering employee leave and managing work roster which is crucial to ensure that each unit can be operated as required by the company.

The last HRM activity revealed by the participants is training. This study adds to the previous literature about LMs involvement in training as there is lack concentration has been given on this activity (Renwick & MacNeil, 2002).

Although four HRM activities were common in all airports, however this similarity does not reflect the role evaluators' consensus on the coverage and depth of involvement of LMs in each of the HRM activity. Differences on activities entail each of the HRM activity expected by role evaluators between airports are summarised in Table 3. Based on the findings, more coverage were expected from LMs in Airport X as compared to Airport Y and Z. The activities performed by LMs in Airport X are dominated by the heads of units in Airport Y and Z.

The coverage on HRM activities also differed between units in Airport Y and Z where the small units have less involvement compared to LMs in the large units. Due to the differences in the coverage and depth of involvement of LMs between airports, findings of the study reported that LMs in Airport X have higher influence in each of the HRM activity compared to LMs in Airport Y and Z. This is measured through their involvement in HRM processes and documentations. The more they participate in HRM process and documentation, the higher their influence in the HRM activities.

Other similarity within airports is found regarding final decision on HRM activities. Regardless of the LMs' influence in the HRM activities, there is agreement in all airports that final decision on these activities is owned by the heads of unit. This idea is parallel with Cully et al.'s (1999) study as they found that although LMs have increasingly been involved in the HRM matters, however this development does not reflect the increased authority for LMs to make final decision in HRM activities they involved (Renwick, 2000).

Table 3: Differences in activities entail each HRM activity perceived by role evaluators between airports

No	HRM activity	Airport X	Airport Y	Airport Z
1.	Performance Management System (PMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluated employee' performance</li> <li>Conducted performance review sessions</li> <li>Justified the evaluation given to the employees where necessary</li> <li>Completed the merit and demerit form</li> <li>Completed the employee performance evaluation form</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acted as the first evaluator in employee performance evaluation</li> <li>Discussed together with the head of unit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluated employee performance with the heads of unit</li> <li>Provided information about employees' performance</li> <li>Delivered the feedback from performance evaluation to employee (only large unit)</li> </ul>
2.	Reward management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommended employee reward based on their performance</li> <li>Filled the form for employee reward</li> </ul>	-NIL-	-NIL-
3.	Attitudes and disciplinary management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recorded employee' attendance</li> <li>Monitored employees' discipline</li> <li>Responded to the disciplinary problems when necessary</li> <li>Maintained proof and evidence of employees' misconduct</li> <li>Informed the head of unit concerning any serious problem of employee' discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsible to influence employees' attitudes as they are very close with employees</li> <li>Informed the head of unit on disciplinary problem amongst employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informed employees' disciplinary problem to the head of unit</li> <li>Monitored employees at all work station to ensure the operation is run smoothly</li> </ul>
4.	Work arrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead the shift</li> <li>Managed employee leave application</li> <li>Forwarded the leave application to the head of unit</li> <li>Monitored overtime, sick and emergency leave</li> <li>Organised the roster and manning</li> <li>Ensured the number of employees are sufficient in each shift</li> <li>Arranged for the substitute if not enough employees are present</li> <li>Informed about the workforce shortage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided input that necessary for planning the work arrangement (large unit)</li> <li>Scheduled the roster and change employees if necessary (large unit)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scheduled the roster and change employees if necessary (large unit)</li> <li>Managed the employee leave application (large unit)</li> <li>Ensured the work requirements are fulfilled</li> </ul>
5.	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted roll call and training</li> <li>Conducted lectures and KSS</li> <li>Suggested any training and forward to the head of unit for consideration and approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assisted the head of unit in classes and lectures only where necessary</li> <li>Conducted the roll call and physical training (based on the unit requirement)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted the roll call and physical training (based on the unit requirement)</li> <li>Assisted the head of unit in Knowledge Sharing Sessions (KSS) (large unit)</li> </ul>



## Discussion

The case studies differed in airport category, size and operation, but a number of similarities were identified as the role evaluators' perceptions on the LMs' HRM role. This is particularly true for Airport Y and Z, while significant differences were found in Airport X.

The concept of role expectation is applied to interpret findings of the role evaluators' perception about the LMs' HRM role. Role expectations is 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 will influence the design of the company's HRM policies and practices to assist LMs in meeting with the requirements of their HRM role. In understanding the allocation of work roles in the organisation system, role theory highlighted the important of role evaluators' expectations because it is assumed that the role holder enacts their role based on what is expected and required by others in the role set (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Whilst early developments of role theory noted that expectations are the crucial aspect that affects the performance of the role (Biddle, 1986), this study confirmed that it remains the same in the modern organisation. This is particularly true in discussing about the perceived HRM activities of line managers amidst the constant changes of the Malaysian airports' environments.

Differences on the number of HRM activities between airports can be explained by a number of factors, mainly due to the airport category and size. This finding is consistent with the literature which revealed that organisational size was one of the factors that influence role expectations (Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Zaleska, 2002). Researchers suggest that more expectations were reported in the large organisations compared to the smaller organisation. This explains the reason why LMs in the Airport X were expected to involve in more HRM activities compare to LMs in Airport Y and Z. As the international airport, Airport X is regarded as larger in size and consisted of more employees to be managed than domestic airports (Airport Y and Z). In addition, more operation undergoing Airport X as it has longer operation hours and is capable of accepting more and large aircrafts per day that generates more revenue to the company compared to Airport Y and Z.

Due to its size of operation, employees in Airport X are more than Airport Y and Z. Therefore, LMs in Airport X were perceived to have more influence in HRM activities compared to the other airports. The high involvement of LMs is viewed in their participation in most HRM processes and documentation. In fact, the strength of their involvement has contributed to their involvement in more HRM activity than reported in the domestic airports namely the rewards management. As LMs in the Airport X were responsible to manage the form for employee performance evaluation, this has directly involved them in the rewards management. LMs in Airport X are responsible to complete the performance evaluation form and give recommendation on the employee rewards which also included in the form. This responsibility requires these LMs to continuously monitor employee performance to assist their judgement and make the right evaluation for each and every employee under their supervision. This differs with LMs in Airport Y and Z because documentation for performance management system is mainly done by the heads of unit who were held accountable for the decision on employee rewards.

In general, role evaluators perceived that LMs involvement in the HRM activities for Airport Y and Z is difficult to define because their involvement often overshadowed by the influence of the heads of unit. This is consistent with Regner (2003) who suggested that the situations in the organisational peripheries required LMs to be more flexible and explorative depending on the situations. This is contributed to the situation in the organisational peripheries which is regarded as more complex and instable compared to the organisational centre. Regner's (2003) findings are best to explain the situations in the airports. For instance, as an international airport, LMs' HRM activities in Airport X are defined clearer by the role evaluators compared to Airport Y and Z. This is possibly happen due to Airport X's function as regional centre while the other airports were considered as peripheries due to the need for the managers to report to the regional managers in the Airport X. More employees employed in the Airport X allowed the allocation

of work to be made based on different function and specialisation. This situation is agreed by Marginson et al. (1993, cited in Renwick, 2000) to reduce the tendency for employees to do cross-functional tasks which lead to clearer definition of LMs' HRM role in the airport X compared to airport Y and Z.

As domestic airports, airport Y and Z are facing with the complex situations as they need to deal with the employee shortage while maintaining the standard quality services in the airport. This has been identified as a major factor that influence the allocation of work amongst employees in the units including LMs. Due to that, the allocation of employee work in these airports is more likely to be influenced by the need and situations. As evident, results of the study show that expectations on LMs involvement in the domestic airports differed based on the unit size where LMs from the large unit size involved more in the HRM activities. The small unit is defined as the unit that has less than 15 employees while the larger unit size composed of more than 15 employees. The assumption has been that the larger unit size consisted of more employees to be managed compared to the small size unit, thus indicate the need for more LMs involvement in the HRM activities. However, involvement of LMs in the large units at Airport Y and Z is still less than LMs involvement in the Airport X. The lower involvement of LMs in Airport Y and Z is described as they participated partly in the HRM activities while the heads of unit' influence still dominated most of the HRM processes and documentation. No involvement is best to define the situation of LMs in the small units because they usually just provide the necessary information if requested by the heads of unit. LMs in the small units are needed to perform more operationally oriented tasks because a limited number of employees in the unit required them to oversee several areas in the operation part while the HRM activities are given to the heads of unit to manage.

Interestingly, this study found that the increased expectations of LMs to involve in the HRM activities have not been integrated with the adjustment on the power structure in the airport. Although LMs were held accountable for the outcomes of the decision on employee work and performance in the unit, they were actually had to bear with the consequences of other's decisions and not their own. This is particularly true for LMs in Airport X as they had high involvement in most HRM processes whilst the ultimate decisions were depended on the heads of unit. Document analysis of LMs' job description confirms this finding as LMs were only responsible to make decision on operationally oriented task. As a result, this potentially affected LMs ability to perform their role as required by the role evaluators.

## Conclusion

This study shows that LMs in all airports are expected to involve in many HRM activities: performance management, rewards management, managing employee attitudes and discipline, work arrangement and training. However, differences on the number of activities were found between airports as they differed in terms of airport category, size and operation. Since the airport specific differences contributed to differences in role expectations, particularly regarding the LMs' HRM activities, this factor should be considered in the HRM policy development because role evaluators' expectations reflect the understanding of organisational achievement. Role evaluators' expectations should be communicated clearly to LMs to ensure that LMs' performance conform to the expectations of their role and thus can be used to achieve airport goals. The failure to align the organisational goals and individual understanding may affected the organisational achievement. 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. 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.

Whilst this phase of the study discovered that more attention is required to clearly define the HRM activities of line managers, on-going data collection is required to further substantiate this finding. Future studies could also compare the perceptions of the role holder and role evaluators towards achieving consensus on the HRM role of line managers.

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