

**How can CEOs influence HRM implementation? Unfolding top
management's role in HRM**

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Abstract

This paper investigates how CEOs can influence the implementation of HRM policies in their organizations. It does so by comparing the HRM implementation roles of the same CEO in two different companies as well as those of different CEOs in the same firm. Based on the findings, the study inductively develops a model that describes different types of CEO direct and indirect influence, unfolding the generic label of CEO “support” into a wide catalogue of actions, and identifying further behaviours other than support. The results also challenge some established ideas, such as the view of CEOs' HRM role solely as strategic decision makers, or that CEO influence necessarily involves overt action. Finally, our findings open several avenues for future research on a relevant and, so far, underdeveloped topic.

Keywords: CEO; Top management; HRM implementation; HRM beliefs; Influence;
Iran

Introduction

Implementation is important because the outcomes of HRM policies and practices are highly dependent on it; no matter the quality of policies being adopted, they amount to little unless implemented effectively (Woodrow & Guest, 2014). The realization that implementation does not automatically follow suit HRM decisions has raised scholarly awareness on this topic (Bondarouk, Trullen, & Valverde, 2018), paying particular attention to “HRM sensemaking [and] the specific roles that different actors [...] may play in the generation, development, and execution of HRM policies” (Trullen, Bos-Nehles, & Valverde, 2020, p.151).

In studying HRM implementation, scholars’ attention has often pointed towards the role played by line managers (Bos-Nehles, van Riemsdijk, & Looise, 2013; Gilbert, Winne, & Sels, 2015; Knies, Leisink, & van de Schoot, 2020; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Vermeeren, 2014). Front line managers do indeed deal with employees directly (Guest, 1997; Storey, 1992), often acting as interpreters of HRM practices, adapting them to their local contexts and shaping employees’ perceptions of HRM (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Stirpe, Trullen, & Bonache, 2013; Townsend, Wilkinson, Allan, & Bamber, 2012), all crucial activities for effective HRM implementation.

While a focus on line managers is sensible, it offers a view of implementation that is constrained to the execution of HRM practices, downplaying other relevant aspects such as their adoption or design (Bondarouk et al., 2018; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Trullen et al., 2020). In this study, we take an encompassing approach to the concept of HRM implementation that includes the decision to introduce a new policy, its design and development, its execution and the ways in which they are connected (Van Mierlo, Bondarouk, & Sanders, 2018). When HRM implementation is seen in this way, actors other than line managers may also be involved in HRM implementation at different

stages (Mirfakhar, Trullen, & Valverde, 2018; Steffensen, Ellen III, Wang, & Ferris, 2019; Trullen, Stirpe, Bonache, & Valverde, 2016). In particular, CEOs can play a crucial role, since they occupy the most influential position in the organization. This was already noticed by Guest (2011) a decade ago in his review of the literature on HRM and performance, when he argued that HRM “messages need to come from the top management team [and] not from the HR department” (p. 9), and that there was “scope to expand research on this process” (p. 9).

As a response to such claim, some authors have shown that top management support enhances HRM implementation effectiveness (Kirton, Robertson, & Avdelidou-Fischer, 2016; Stirpe et al., 2013; Tootell, Blackler, Toulson, & Dewe, 2009), but few studies have shed light into the mechanisms underlying such support (see Stanton, Young, Bartram, & Leggat, 2010 for an exception). Moreover, the role played by CEOs in HRM implementation is often a serendipitous or secondary finding, wrapped up in general expressions such as CEO’s support or commitment (Parkes, Scully, West, & Dawson, 2007; Tootell et al., 2009), without much accurate conceptualizations or illustrations of what this means in practice. Given the fact that such role can generate better or worse HRM outcomes, it is crucial to further examine it.

Hence, we pose the question: How can CEOs influence HRM implementation? In answering this question, we aim to provide a more comprehensive view of CEOs’ influence in the implementation of HR policies and practices, and contribute to the literature by unfolding the specific actions that constitute the HRM support role attributed to CEOs, as well as by looking beyond this narrowly defined supporting role. Moreover, this study locates these CEOs’ influences at different phases of HRM implementation processes. Furthermore, we take note of the variability in the forms of influence exerted by CEOs and link them to their HRM beliefs as precursors. Ultimately, the paper contributes by offering new insights and avenues for future research that may take us closer to

address Guest's (2011) original claim to raise awareness of the key role of CEOs in achieving effective HRM implementation.

A process-based view of HRM implementation

To pursue the aim of the study, its main concepts must be defined against a backdrop of extant literature. In the present section, we deal with HRM implementation, while the following section evaluates the evidence to date regarding how CEOs may influence this process.

The concept of HRM implementation is commonly used but seldom defined, which often results in confusion (Bondarouk et al., 2018). In this article, we understand implementation as a “dynamic process that starts with the decision to introduce a new (or significantly change an existing) HRM policy or practice [...], during which relevant HRM actors (such as line managers, HR specialists, user employees) engage with it, interacting among themselves and attempting to shape it to fit their requirements and needs, until the policy or practice becomes routinized” (Trullen et al., 2020, p.155). This definition of implementation makes several assumptions, with which we concur, such as understanding implementation as a process rather than a state, providing a beginning and end point, allowing for some flexibility in how policies are enacted, acknowledging its multi-actor nature, and specifying that implementation refers to a specific period of time that accompanies the introduction of a new policy or the significant modification of an existing one. Indeed, a focus on implementation accepts that designed practices at the corporate level (i.e. intended practices) may differ from those used across the organization (i.e. actual practices), which in turn may be differently perceived by employees (i.e. experienced practices) (Wright & Nishii, 2013). Distinguishing between intended, actual, and experienced practices provides by and large the basis for a more fine-grained understanding of how HRM affects performance, and more specifically, a

call to pay attention to different moments and agents of interest as processes of introducing new HRM practices unfold.

In line with this processual view of HRM, Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013) offer a model that delineates different implementation stages: the decision to adopt a policy or practice, its formulation or design, and its execution. While these stages may in reality be blended and mutually affect each other, they can be separated for analytical purposes (Van Mierlo et al., 2018). The first stage, adoption, is about the decision to introduce a new HRM practice, and whether or not the HRM practice is strategically needed for the organization. The second stage, formulation, deals with the design and content of HRM practices and the third stage, execution, refers to the enactment and use of the practice on the ground (Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013) distinguish here between line managers' decision to use HRM practices and the quality of such use, but we summarize these two as execution).

Both Wright and Nishii (2013) and Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013) acknowledge the role played by top management in implementation. The former locate top management at the point of design (intended practices). The latter distinguish between primary implementers of HRM policies and primary evaluators of implementation effectiveness: HR managers, senior executives and the CEO are primary implementers in the adoption stage, HR managers in the formulation stage, and line managers in the execution stage. The role of the CEO and senior managers as primary implementers is thus centered in the adoption stage, while in the formulation and execution stages they become evaluators of the implementation process rather than agents in their own right. While such categorizations seem sensible (and there is some empirical evidence that corroborates this, as explained in the next section, such as in Frear, Cao, & Zhao, 2012; Lopez-Cabrales, Bornay-Barrachina, & Diaz-Fernandez, 2017; Valverde, Ryan, & Soler, 2006), in this study we propose to

explore the possibility that CEOs can also act as primary implementers during the formulation and execution stages. We thus turn now to exploring the available evidence to date.

The CEO as a key actor in HRM implementation

Among the different actors involved in managing people in organizations, CEOs have so far received the least attention in the literature even though they are considered the most crucial decision makers in HRM (Boada-Cuerva, Trullen, & Valverde, 2019). This could be because of the assumption that their influence is limited to the decision to adopt HRM policies (Lopez-Cabrales et al., 2017; Mayo, Pastor, Gomez-Mejia, & Cruz, 2009; Ng & Sears, 2020; Zhu, Chew, & Spangler, 2005) rather than during their formulation or execution. But beyond this key responsibility for strategic decision-making, some studies point to the fact that top management can also help translate HRM content (Arthur, Herdman, & Yang, 2016; Farndale & Kelliher, 2013; Stirpe et al., 2013) and Valverde et al. (2006) even found some companies where top management was involved in all HRM activities at all levels.

The literature to date

Looking more specifically at CEOs' role in the implementation of HRM policies, the evidence to date focuses on studying top management's role in terms of providing support and commitment to HRM initiatives as a means to achieve their successful implementation (Kim & O'Connor, 2009; Kirton et al., 2016; McCullough & Sims, 2012; Stirpe et al., 2013; Tootell et al., 2009; Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). However, this research does not speak about *how* CEOs exert such support or materialize their commitment: For example, McCullough and Sims (2012) refer to the crucial role played by top management in supporting the implementation of a new HR information system in a civil service agency in the US, but do not specify what this support involves beyond the fact that

senior management offered timely responses to project management questions on resource investments and risks. Similarly, Tootell et al. (2009) found that the degree of support from the CEO increased the chances for an HR measurement system to be accepted and used in a sample of six large organizations, but once again did not provide any details of what this support entailed or when it was more effective. Sometimes authors refer to the creation of a strong climate (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) as a key mediating mechanism that explains CEO influence on implementation effectiveness, but without analyzing how such climates are built. For instance, Parkes et al. (2007) argued that initiatives to increase employee involvement in NHS hospitals worked better when top management developed a culture of collaboration with employees and trade unions, and Woodrow and Guest (2014) also referred to top management's shaping of culture and priorities as a key explanation for observed differences in the take-up of anti-bullying policies in divisions of a large NHS hospital.

An evaluation and the need to focus on influence

Overall, this literature lacks in exploring other aspects of CEOs' role in HRM implementation beyond support and commitment, and in making explicit what specific actions constitute such support and commitment. However, a common trait of this empirical evidence points to the fact that most initiatives, although not well defined, are related to how CEOs impact or affect the perceptions and actions of other actors. This speaks about the political nature of implementation, and thus, our research must focus on how CEOs exert influence on other actors throughout the implementation process.

By CEO *influence* we refer to all those actions that the CEO may take to change the attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours of target individuals (Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, Blaauw, & Vermunt, 1999) -be those middle managers, HR professionals, or employees- towards HRM

policies. Focusing on influence is needed because organizational actors are likely to react in different ways, sometimes supporting but others resisting the adoption of particular policies (Ferris, Galang, Thornton, & Wayne, 1995), depending on how they expect a particular implementation to affect their own interests. Even when employees support a particular HRM strategy, the use of influence will still be necessary in order to orchestrate and provide common directions to the actions from multiple actors needed to implement HR strategies (Hardy, 1996).

Different CEOs, different forms of influence?

When enquiring about how CEOs influence implementation, we will aim to identify a range of actions undertaken by CEOs to exert such influence. In this examination, it will be necessary to consider how these actions differ among CEOs and moreover, to attempt to explain where those differences stem from. A theoretical framework that can come to aid with this explanation is upper echelons theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). According to upper echelons theory, the values, beliefs, characteristics, and experiences of top executives crucially shape the strategies and policies they adopt. Less emphasis is placed on the extent to which CEOs may also affect the implementation of those strategic choices. Yet, this link must exist for these to translate into organizational outcomes. Recently, Boada-Cuerva et al. (2019) have argued along these lines when combining upper echelons theory with a power perspective, arguing that while CEOs actions may be explained by their individual characteristics, they are also shaped by other actors' reactions and interests.

Within the HRM literature, there is evidence showing that CEOs' characteristics such as personalities, beliefs, or leadership styles may affect the adoption of HRM practices and the subsequent strategic role they award to the HR department (Aldrich, Dietz, Clark, & Hamilton, 2015; Arthur et al., 2016; Brandl & Pohler, 2010; Frear et al., 2012; Gurkov & Settles, 2013; Kelly

& Gennard, 2007; Lopez-Cabrales et al., 2017; Ng & Sears, 2020; Ren, Jiang, & Tang, 2021; Stanton et al., 2010; Zhu et al., 2005). In the same line, it will therefore be necessary to observe whether CEOs' characteristics and beliefs also play a role in the actions they undertake to influence HRM implementation.

Methodology

Given the scarcity of previous research on the role played by CEOs in HRM implementation and the complex nature of this phenomenon, this study adopts an inductive approach (Graebner, Martin, & Roundy, 2012). In particular, it uses the case study methodology, as we aimed for depth and nuances in the exploration of the topic (Creswell, 2007). This methodology is deemed as appropriate for addressing questions of "how" in an exploratory manner, especially when the phenomenon under study is relatively underexplored (Yin, 2009), when looking at phenomena bounded by time and space (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and when trying "to unravel the underlying dynamics of phenomena that play out over time" (Siggelkow, 2007, p. 22), that is, when looking at dynamic processes as is the case with the topic of HRM implementation.

Sampling

Sampling is a crucial step in case study research, as we trade generalizability for relevance, and thus it is key to identify an opportunity to illustratively observe the phenomenon of study. Hence the need for purposeful sampling, where we strategically select information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Two main conditions would have to be met to identify cases where we could examine the role of CEO in HRM implementation: First, a general context where the influence of CEO was sufficiently observable. This could be done, for example, in SMEs, where the CEO exerts a clear and direct influence over a small number of people, or in a cultural context where the CEO's

authority is ostensible. Patton (2002) describes this type of purposeful sampling as intensity sampling, where cases are selected because they are particularly rich in information, and manifest the phenomenon of study quite intensively, without necessarily being extreme or rare nor necessarily typical (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Second, we should be able to compare the actions of different CEOs, so ideally we should find HRM implementation situations in same or similar companies under different CEOs, or follow implementation processes under the same CEO in different companies. Thus, a comparative case study approach would be the most adequate scenario. Both conditions were met in the design of this study, by making the following choices:

Cultural context: Iran

Organizations in Iran are characterized by high power distance, hierarchical relationships and strong in-group loyalty (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003; Namazie & Frame, 2007; Yeganeh & Su, 2008). These cultural features result in CEOs having highly influential roles, where they can be considered as the most powerful actor in the organization. In addition, HRM has been slowly but steadily developing in Iran, where a struggle can be seen between meritocratic values commonly attached to Western HRM systems and entrenched cultural patterns that rely heavily on personal relationships and paternalistic management styles (Namazie & Pahlavnejad, 2016). Due to these characteristics, which would bring the role of the CEO to the fore, the Iranian context fits the first of our sampling purposes.

Comparative case studies of HRM implementation

In the search for information-rich case studies, we located and gained access to two companies within an Iranian holding group. A particular characteristic of this setting was that the once CEO of the first company became CEO of the second one. The two companies served as a good basis for comparison, as they were similar in several relevant aspects to the topic of study: Both

companies were large, with about 800 employees each, and operated in similar markets and environmental context. Moreover, they both had similarly engineering-oriented corporate cultures. This comparative case sampling matches the “most similar case” design (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), in which cases similar on all background conditions that might be relevant to the dependent variable (in our case, HRM implementation), only differ on one key dimension (in our case, the CEO).

As a result of both the CEO transfer and the similarity between both firms, we could establish a logic of replication (Yin, 2009). On the one hand, we could see whether the same CEO had similar effects in terms of HRM implementation on the two different -yet comparable- organizations (i.e., literal replication). On the other hand, we could also observe whether different CEOs impacted HRM implementation differently within the same organization (i.e., theoretical replication).

This design allowed us to explore the actions of three different CEOs (CEO_X, CEO_Y and CEO_Z) in the two companies (A and B) before and after CEO_X's move. As a result, we compared four different cases: Case 1 was Company A headed by CEO_X before his move, Case 2 Company B before the move (headed by CEO_Y), Case 3 Company A after the move (headed by CEO_Z), and Case 4, Company B headed by CEO_X after his move.

Data collection

Data were collected by the first author through semi-structured interviews after the move of CEO_X. The choice of this type of interview affords enough structure so that the themes previously identified in the literature (e.g. the process based conceptualization of HRM implementation with its different stages of adoption, formulation, execution) and the anchor on specific HRM practices shape the topic list to provide the basis for later comparison among interviewees, while allowing

the sufficient openness to maintain an inductive approach, whereby relevant themes would be identified and pursued if they surfaced without prompts, as explained below.

Since our conceptualization of HRM implementation acknowledges the roles played by different actors (e.g. HR managers, line managers, or employees), we deemed necessary to interview a variety of actors. Specifically, the first author interviewed the following stakeholders from each of the two companies: 3 senior managers, 3 middle/line managers, 2 employees, the head of HR function, and 3 HR specialists/managers. The 24 interviews were conducted in Farsi (Persian) and ranged from 35 minutes to two hours with an average of one hour, and were audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewees.

In order to allow for direct comparison of implementation processes among different informants and further assuring rigor of the data gathered, we needed to focus our questions on specific HRM policies that had been implemented. To select them, we first enquired about the practices that had changed after the CEO move, that were relevant in their view, and for which they could easily evoke information and opinions in both companies. This would ensure that interviewees were aware of the events surrounding those practices, thus minimizing recall error. The practices chosen were recruitment and selection and performance management. Apart from the importance of these two practices in the specific context of the sample companies, both also have characteristics that make them particularly suitable for our study. For example, it has been shown that performance management implementation is highly dependent on HR support (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017), as well as on a congruent corporate culture (Aguinis, Joo, & Gottfredson, 2011), both aspects over which CEO can exert considerable influence. In addition, both practices have been long recognized as particularly open to the use of politics and influence by the actors involved (Ferris & King, 1991). Moreover, our review of work on HRM in Iran also points at these two as the most difficult

HR policies to implement in Iranian organizations. For example, Namazie and Pahlavnejad (2016) argue that recruiters in Iranian companies often look at qualifications, seniority, and connections before looking at skills and competencies in making recruitment decisions, and they recognize the presence of nepotism. As for performance management, the same authors argue that in many firms it becomes more of an administrative task focused on past performance, rather than a developmental tool, and that oftentimes it lacks fairness and objectivity. Hence, both policies were controversial enough in the local context to be noticed by respondents.

Interviewees were asked to describe each practice and its purpose in their own words. Being interested in a process-based approach and the CEO influence in HRM implementation, interviewees were also openly asked about who was involved in adoption, formulation, and execution of each practice and what subsequently happened at each stage. Only when CEOs were mentioned by respondents without prompting, did the interviewer pose probing questions about their role, the actions they took at each stage, and what, in their opinion, were the reasons for the CEOs influencing the implementation process the way they did. They were also asked to assess the extent to which the practice was used and whether they were satisfied with it. It is interesting to highlight that, in most cases, it was not even necessary to ask interviewees whether there were differences in the practice before and after the change of CEO, as such differences were highlighted to the interviewer unprompted.

In order to distinguish between CEOs in terms of factors typically considered by upper echelons theory, we gathered data about their background (education, age, management experience, etc.). In the same line, during the interviews we took notice of accounts that reflected their values and beliefs towards HRM. In keeping with the inductive approach taken in this study, these questions were not asked directly to prevent social desirability and confirmation biases (Nickerson, 1998),

but clarifications and/or elaborations were sought when respondents made references to CEOs' opinions or views about HRM. The differences in management styles between the CEOs were so salient that it dispelled any doubts as to any possible recall bias. Finally, a word of caution is in order: given the fact that our informants were not the CEOs themselves, when referring to CEO beliefs in the results section, we are indeed describing informants' perceptions of those beliefs. We further reflect on this issue when discussing the study's limitations.

Data analysis

Interviews were coded by looking for illustrations of whether and how each of the CEOs influenced the different stages of HRM implementation with their actions, as well as by noting variances in CEOs' beliefs about HRM. Echoing our approach to data collection, the analysis of the data combines an inductive data-driven approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), where relevant themes were identified as they emerged openly from the data, with a theory-driven approach, where some themes were labeled based on categorizations previously established from the literature reviewed (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

Following Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014), for the first cycle coding, open descriptive codes such as "personal interest" and "view" were used for illustrations of CEOs' beliefs, and process codes such as "getting feedback" and "applying pressure" were used for the actions and roles of CEOs in each of the three stages and each of the two practices in all four cases. For the second cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014), data were further analyzed by looking at the co-occurrences of codes related to CEOs' views and actions at every implementation phase. At this stage, the coded data were rearranged to give structure and to identify common themes.

For a category to be finally included in the findings, we imposed the condition that there must be at least various comments from different types of interviewees pointing to the same idea about

CEO beliefs and actions. While in qualitative research the standing of a theme is not dependent on and should not be determined by its frequency in the dataset but its importance and capacity to illuminate a concept (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we decided to enforce this protocol to ensure a consensus from different voices in attributing beliefs and actions to CEOs since they had not been interviewed. Discussion about these themes as well as further interpretation of the data in order to build the findings was carried out by the three authors. A summary of the analytical coding process and some illustrative quotes leading to the different categories is provided in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Findings

In this section, the findings based on the analysis carried out are presented in a narrative format using quotes from the interviews as illustrations.

The initial exploration of the data pertained to the differences among the CEOs in terms of the elements considered by upper echelons theory: Regarding their backgrounds, the three CEOs were very similar as to their education (first degrees on engineering and postgraduates in management), age, management experience (about 30 years) in the same industry, etc. This lack of variability meant that no inferences could be made in this regard. By contrast, all the various respondents' accounts about the CEOs' beliefs related to HRM differentiated them very clearly, hence we focus the analysis of possible precursors to their ways of influencing HRM implementation solely on this aspect.

We thus move to the description of CEOs' HRM beliefs concerning the role played by HRM in the organization. We then go on to portray ways in which CEOs influenced HRM implementation

directly and indirectly in their organizations, noticing the link between CEOs' beliefs and their subsequent actions. To signpost this explanation, Figure 2 depicts a model of how CEOs can influence HRM implementation summarizing our main findings. It is important to highlight, however, that the model was built inductively and thus it does not represent a departing point or template for analysis, but it reflects instead the outcome of our analytical effort. It is thus placed at the beginning of this section simply for the sake of clarity. The figure is unfolded throughout this section and a summary of the results in the form of Table 1 can be found at the end of the findings.

Insert Figure 2 about here

CEO's HRM beliefs

The interviews had a remarkable number of passages where respondents, unprompted, talked about the CEOs' views and opinions about HRM and its importance for the success of the business. These naturally occurring accounts (i.e., not imposed by the researchers for data collection nor for analytical purposes) resonated with Arthur et al.'s (2016) concept of "HR cause-effect belief", understood as the belief that investments in HRM will yield positive returns for the firm. In this sense, a high HRM belief means that CEOs think that investing in HR will have positive effects on organizational outcomes. In contrast, a CEO with low HRM belief will consider that it is not worthwhile investing efforts and resources in HR or less worthwhile than investing in other types of programs. This classification was thus used as the analysis progressed and the originally open codes were refined.

There were substantial differences in the way CEO_X (Cases 1 and 4) viewed HRM in contrast to CEO_Y (Case 2) and CEO_Z (Case 3): CEO_X saw investments in HRM as unnecessary and negatively affecting profitability. His mind was set in carrying out projects on schedule and within budget constraints, and HRM was seen mostly as a burden rather than an enabler to achieving those objectives, as noticed very similarly by all interviewees who had worked with CEO_X:

'The current [CEO_Z] is very interested in HRM topics but the previous [CEO_X] was not like that, he was mainly after projects and progress at any cost and any form [not being interested in HRM issues]'. (Middle manager from Company A)

'After the changes [arrival of CEO_X], that attitude [positive attitude towards HRM issues] faded away, or it is even better to say that it disappeared'. (Senior manager from Company B)

In the same line, CEO_X was not in favor of developing the capabilities of employees or introducing HRM policies. Quite differently, CEO_Y and CEO_Z were in favor of developing their employees and had a personal interest in HRM topics:

'As far as I know [CEO_Y], he considered himself as the HR manager. He used to say that "I am the HR manager before being the company CEO"'. (Member of HR unit from Company B)

'It's really good... our [CEO_Z] believes in HRM issues and their complexities'. (Member of HR department from Company A)

In sum, our interviewees clearly pointed at the differences in HRM beliefs between CEO_X (low) and the other two CEOs (high). Indeed, CEO_X saw HRM initiatives as costs rather than investments, and gave low priority to HRM related projects. The contrary was true for CEO_Y and CEO_Z, who thought of HRM policies as key instruments for building a strong and competitive corporate culture.

CEO's influence on HRM implementation

Differences in CEO HRM beliefs were relevant because, in line with upper echelons theory, they translated into actions and decisions that directly affected HRM implementation. This was summarized in the following reflection:

'Sometimes implementation [of new HRM practices] is because of change in managers, for example a CEO comes who is interested in HRM issues and he supports the HR department. The [HR] department starts some new practices and they move forward. Suddenly the CEO changes. With the change of the CEO, all the practices and programs are destroyed'. (Senior manager from Company A)

In particular, CEOs could influence implementation at any of the three stages described before, including the decision to adopt HRM policies, their formulation, and their actual use by line managers and employees. Their influence in these three stages is now analyzed.

CEO influence in the adoption stage

Differences between CEO_X and CEOs _Y and _Z were already noticeable at this stage. For instance, in Case 1, during his tenure in Company A, CEO_X (low HRM belief) adopted a passive stance, never taking initiative to decide on new policies. Instead, it was the HR manager at Company A bringing about changes in recruitment and selection, suggesting the adoption of performance management, and trying to convince CEO_X to adopt the practice, even if this was not a priority for CEO_X, who rejected the initiatives or simply disregarded them by not giving them the required support.

'[During the tenure of CEO_X] we only had recruitment, a simplified version. In practice, other people were making decision on who to recruit and HR used to do the administrative work. We [the HR unit] started by remodeling the recruitment policy [...]. Simultaneously we started other practices too, such as performance management. [...] but as you know, implementing each of the managerial practices requires the leadership's support, [which] we did not have'. (Member of HR department from Company A)

In Case 4, CEO_X had a similar behavior when in Company B, where he prioritized non-related HRM issues. As a result, no new initiatives were taken. In this case, the HR manager made no suggestions either. This HR manager was appointed by CEO_X at his arrival, and also showed a passive attitude. Having been the leading company in the holding group in using performance management in the past, Company B ended up no longer using that practice as a result of CEO_X discontinuing it.

'Unfortunately, after the CEO changed [arrival of CEO_X], he ended this practice [performance management]. [...] We [some HR employees] fought a lot to [keep it]... because we got good results from it [during the tenure of CEO_Y]. Despite our efforts, we could not keep it'. (Member of HR unit from Company B)

In contrast to CEO_X, CEOs_Y and _Z (high HRM belief) shared a positive view of HRM and its strategic relevance for the organization. In Case 2, CEO_Y was open to HRM issues and was particularly interested in performance management and authorized its adoption. During his tenure, Company B was among the first companies in the holding group to effectively adopt performance management. In Case 3, something similar happened with CEO_Z, who believed that performance management was very relevant for the organization and, together with the HR VP, decided to initiate the policy.

CEO influence in the formulation stage

We found that CEOs' behaviors also diverged a great deal in the extent to which they were more or less involved at the formulation stage. A clear example of non-involvement was that of CEO_X at Company A in Case 1, where the HR manager and his team were the only ones working on the design of the performance management practice.

The case of CEO_Y in Case 2 was different. Even though he was not personally involved in the formulation of the policy, he did help along the process by providing the HR VP with resources

such as offering the help of external consultants and endorsing the initiative by encouraging other managers to provide feedback. CEO_Y was thus pivotal in building enough momentum for the practice to be taken to launch and perceived as relevant by other managers.

*'[For the development of a performance management system during CEO_Y tenure] almost all managers and some employees were involved. [...] there were meetings. For example, there was a meeting with senior managers, then there were meetings with each of the departments to include their views. [...] consultants were also in the meetings'.
(Member of HR unit from Company B)*

If CEO_Y exerted his influence by playing an indirect role in formulation, CEO_Z in Case 3 was even more hands-on: After having the HR department prepare a first design proposal and gather opinions of middle managers and a group of line managers and employees, CEO_Z together with VPs and senior managers gave feedback to HR and tried to improve the formulated policy, as well as to consider roles for implementing the policy. CEO_Z also provided input and contributed with his own ideas to its formulation.

*'For designing the practice [...] we had a Pioneer Team. [It] was comprised of few managers: senior managers and middle managers [...] and] the CEO also took part'.
(Member of HR department from Company A)*

CEO influence in the execution stage

Throughout our interviews, we also identified a variety of ways in which CEOs could exert influence in the execution stage, with a corresponding result of strengthening or weakening implementation. As an illustration of the latter, in Case 1, CEO_X (low HRM belief) at Company A was invited by the HR manager to give a speech on performance management to VPs and senior managers in order to encourage them to use the new policy. The HR manager recalls how, instead, the speech dismissed the policy, effectively halting the whole project:

'I remember we gathered unit managers and were talking about implementing [performance management] in the units. Before that, we had organized training courses in [...] and gained managers' support. Here I went to the CEO before the meeting and

talked to him for an hour, explaining what he should say in the meeting, what we would be saying.... The CEO then came and delivered what I had said superficially, and at the end he said that "I already told him [the HR manager] that now it's not the time for us to do this [implementing performance management]". He ruined the whole thing!' (Member of HR department from Company A)

In an opposite example, in Case 3, CEO_Z championed and advocated for the use of performance management in various meetings and events legitimizing the practice. Moreover, he acted as a role model using the practice with his VPs, having coaching sessions with them, and providing them with feedback and using a consultant to help him.

'In [...] meetings and training sessions we asked [VPs and CEO_Z] to come talk about the positive and negative experiences that they had [with using the practice]'. (Member of HR department from Company A)

'Our goal setting [for performance management] starts with the CEO. CEO [CEO_Z] sets goals for the VPs. [...] these goals need to be in accordance with the strategic objectives'. (Member of HR department from Company A)

CEOs also shaped and controlled execution by other means. This was the case of CEO_Y in Case 2, who encouraged the VPs and other middle managers to implement performance management in their teams by linking its use with VPs' monthly bonuses. This CEO refused on occasion to pay the bonuses to some VPs who did not use performance management in their departments.

'We had the CEO's support. He even made bonuses depend on the implementation and use of performance management; if the performance reviews were not done in that round, he wouldn't allow the bonuses to be paid to the VPs'. (Member of HR unit from Company B)

CEO_Y also incentivized the execution of performance management by linking the results of the performance evaluations to additional monetary rewards and acknowledgement certificates to be paid and issued to the best performers of each department. This measure proved extremely effective to increase managers' as well as employees' use and endorsement of the performance management policy.

'Another pressure, not pressure, a facilitating tool [was that] we suggested to choose best performers in each unit [...], in total there would be 40 employees [chosen as best performers]. We gave them an extra reward, [...], approximately one month salary. This was a very good tool and helped a lot [to implement performance management]'. (Member of HR unit from Company B)

With the arrival of CEO_X (Case 4), though, the additional rewards for best performance and the linkage of the bonus programs to manager's execution of performance management were discontinued, even if they had represented an insignificant sum for the company. The withdrawal of incentives sent a message to the organization that performance management was no longer a priority.

One final way in which CEOs influenced execution was by preventing or allowing bypasses of company policy by employees. For example, regarding the recruitment and selection policy, we saw how in Case 3, CEO_Z controlled the execution by asking VPs and senior managers to stick to procedures.

'The CEO asks for the decision of the acceptance recruitment committee before approving the recruitment of a candidate'. (Member of HR department from Company A)

'To be fair, we had the support of the CEO. These changes were gradually added to the [recruitment] procedure, it was revised multiple times and the CEO approved it continuously. And in situations where the CEO was told by the VPs that the "HR [department] is resisting [the recruitment of a specific person], and I [the VP] can tell who is suitable for the job I need", the CEO would reply "if it is according to the procedure, I support it; if not, forget it".' (Member of HR department from Subsidiary A).

Instead, CEO_X at Company A (Case 1) allowed bypasses and permitted senior managers to ignore the recruitment policy, and let them pick their own candidates at will. Moreover, in Case 4, during CEO_X's tenure in Company B, recruitment was halted and was influenced by nepotism.

'Before [during the tenure of CEO_Y], it [recruitment and selection] had a structure and a procedure, but now [during the tenure of CEO_X] it doesn't have it. Without a doubt, most of them [recruitments] are based on connections [nepotism]'. (Senior manager from Company B)

'The job market has shrunk and this has led to big people, those in higher organizational level, introducing people to be recruited. Such recruitments have led to incompetent people being hired'. (Employee from Company B)

CEO's influence on the HR department's strategic role

In addition to CEOs' direct influence at different stages of implementation, our findings also point at a subtler, yet quite powerful, way in which CEOs' decisions shape HRM implementation: This has to do with the role that CEOs assign and allow the HR department to play within the organization. This CEO decision holds consequences for the process and outcome of HRM implementation. In particular, the CEOs of our cases exerted influence by: (1) downgrading or upgrading the position of the HR department in the organizational structure, (2) selecting HR managers with more or less HR expertise, and (3) allowing or preventing direct communication between members of the HR department and the firm CEO.

First, with regards to the placement of HR in the architecture of the organization, in Case 1 and during CEO_x's tenure (low HRM belief), Company A had an HR unit structurally placed under the Finance and Administration (F&A) department, meaning that the HR manager was reporting to the VP of F&A, and hence had low capacity for decision-making. Instead, in Case 2, Company B had an HR department with a VP directly working with CEO_y (high HRM belief), which provided that HR manager with higher decision-making capacity. After CEO_x's move to Company B, the situation was reversed so that in Company A (Case 3) the HR unit became an HR department with a VP working directly with CEO_z, while in Company B (Case 4) the HR department was downgraded into a unit under F&A. In line with upper echelons theory, this shift illustrates the impact of the CEO's HRM beliefs on the role given to HR within the overall structure of the firm.

'Unfortunately, the problem is that we have a F&A VP. The F&A VP does not feel the need to be involved in HR management; he is more into financial issues. Even his job

title implies that. Before the changes [during the tenure of CEO_Y] we had two separate departments, one for finance and one for HR, each of which were working directly with the CEO. They had more authority. But this is not the case anymore'. (Senior manager from Company B)

A second way of influencing the relative power position of the HR function was in the selection of the HR manager himself. Prior to CEO_X's move from Company A to Company B, in Case 2, the HR manager in Company B had extensive experience as HR manager in other companies and was considered as an HR professional. With the arrival of CEO_X (Case 4), this HR manager left the firm. His replacement, appointed by CEO_X, was someone with a degree in an unrelated field, and with no previous HRM-related experience.

Finally, CEOs could also strengthen or weaken the HR function position within the firm by encouraging or inhibiting direct communication between them and HR employees. For instance, in Case 2, HR employees in Company B held regular meetings with CEO_Y to discuss HRM related issues. This stopped after the arrival of CEO_X in Case 4:

'Before, sometimes we, as [HR] employees, would interact directly with CEO_Y. I myself used to ask him questions or he would comment on issues. But now we never see CEO_X, only the F&A VP'. (Member of HR unit from Company B)

In Case 4, there was evidence that the relative significance of the HR function in the organization had consequences for HRM implementation more generally, and that losing power demotivated members of the HR department, and decreased HR credibility in front of employees resulting in less motivation from HR employees to engage in efforts to implement HRM practices, and a lack of willingness from managers and employees from other functions to dedicate time and effort to implementing HRM practices that were not supported by powerful actors.

'I feel that [HR] employees have become indifferent, I mean they are a bit demotivated, [...] in my opinion, these changes have affected the employees and their views'. (Member of HR unit from Company B)

'From my point of view a bunch of people are working [in the HR unit] but it is useless'. (Employee from Company B)

'Those who are in charge of HRM issues, they themselves do not consider such issues as issues, you know? They are managing everything at administration level. [...] The HR manager has said a few times [...] that anybody who is not satisfied can leave, even to us as HR employees. [...] With such view, do you expect to have performance management or talent management?' (Member of HR unit from Company B)

'Performance management disappeared gradually. What I can say is that in comparison to the past [CEO_Y's tenure], it is not being used, it exists on paper but even I myself [who was an active member] am not willing to do it. [...] When we saw that it [performance management] is not being valued and seriously followed [...] by the ones who are responsible in the HR unit and the HR manager and even the CEO [CEO_X], we thought that we were doing something useless and therefore we abandoned it.' (Senior manager from Company B)

As a recap, a summary of CEOs' HRM beliefs, how they directly influence HRM implementation at each of the three stages of adoption, formulation, and execution, and how they indirectly influence it through the strategic role of HR departments in all four cases is provided in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

CEO influence by action or omission

Beyond the analysis of each phase of implementation, an overall and, to a point, unexpected finding of this study must be highlighted, namely the fact that CEOs influence the implementation of HRM practices when they undertake actions towards it, but also when they do not. Indeed, we have seen a broad array of activities in which CEOs engage throughout the implementation process, from initiating the practice, authorizing its adoption, endorsing its formulation, providing resources, offering and requesting inputs for its design, legitimizing its execution, role modelling, controlling its execution, and incentivizing its use. In all these instances where the CEO is taking a positive initiative, there is an impact on the attitudes and behaviors of other individuals involved in the implementation process, as expected. A similar but opposite impact is seen when CEOs take

actions such as rejecting the adoption of a new practice or discontinuing an existing one, or when withdrawing incentives towards its execution. But when CEOs take a more passive stance towards HRM implementation, whether by disregarding the new practice altogether, not being involved in its formulation or not controlling its execution, other actors involved are also influenced by this omission (lack of action). Indeed, they will make their interpretations about what the inaction or omission signal and act accordingly, whether by taking on (or not taking at all) initiatives themselves, participating (or not) in the formulation of practices, bypassing procedures, etc., which will ultimately shape the implementation of the HRM practice. Although influencing by omission seems at odds with the purpose of this study in terms of observing “actions” as well as with the definition of influence used for the study as actions taken to change other actors’ attitudes, beliefs or behaviors, it is nonetheless a highly relevant finding to take into account.

Discussion

This study sought to understand how CEOs can influence the implementation of HRM policies. Our findings show that CEOs clearly shape this process as they influence all stages of implementation by enacting a wide variety of actions and even when taking a more passive stance (see Figures 1 and 2). In line with part of upper echelons theory, CEOs influence is exerted differently depending on their HRM beliefs.

Implications for research

Both practitioners and scholars agree that CEO support is relevant for the implementation of HRM policies (Kirton et al., 2016; Markoulli, Lee, Byington, & Felps, 2017; Stirpe et al., 2013; Tootell et al., 2009). This, in itself, is not surprising. Less emphasis has been placed, though, in understanding how such influence may be exerted and with what results. As noted in the

introduction, CEOs are often not the main focus of research on implementation and empirical evidence on their actions and subsequent impact is scarce. It thus seems that the literature tends to make plausible assumptions about CEO influence -for instance, that it helps create implementation friendly climates or cultures (Parkes et al., 2007; Woodrow & Guest, 2014)-, but these assumptions are sometimes backed only by scant or anecdotal empirical evidence, lacking a dedicated focus and analysis.

This study extends our current knowledge about the specific forms of CEO influence, translating the more generic label of “support” into a wide catalogue of actions and identifying further behaviors other than support that can also influence HRM implementation. Mapping out the terrain of CEO influence on implementation can be useful to later build hypotheses on the types of influence that are more effective, as well as offering CEOs themselves some insights on how their actions impact HRM outcomes more generally. Our study thus complements the dominant focus on the role of line managers in the HRM implementation literature (Steffensen et al., 2019) at a time when researchers are increasingly paying attention to other actors in combination (Katou, Budhwar, & Patel, 2020).

Our findings also challenge current knowledge in different areas. For example, it is commonly assumed that CEOs are in charge of strategic decisions, acting as primary implementers mainly at the adoption stage (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). In line with Valverde et al. (2006), we show instead that CEO influence may be exerted throughout all the stages of implementation. CEOs who positively influence HRM implementation do so more or less continuously. Their influence permeates HRM at different levels (Renkema, Meijerink, & Bondarouk, 2017), including the shaping of an HRM philosophy, the formulation of policies, and the translation of such policies into specific practices on the ground.

We also challenge the idea that CEO influence necessarily involves overt action. In some cases, it was precisely a lack of action that often resulted in poor implementation outcomes, as it allowed inconsistent and opportunistic behaviors on behalf of senior managers. This supports Hardy's (1996) idea that even when there is no apparent resistance to new initiatives, power still needs to be used in order to coordinate the efforts of different actors.

As a side point that would require further exploration, our findings also question the extent to which CEO demographic characteristics can be used -in line with upper echelons theory- as proxies to determine CEO beliefs about HRM, at least in the Iranian context. In this study, similar CEOs in terms of education, tenure, and functional background had contradictory views on HRM investments. Although our evidence in that respect is only anecdotal, it suggests that the relationship between CEO characteristics and beliefs may differ across countries. Previous research has shown there are national differences in the way upper echelons theory works in different countries, for example, in terms of CEO discretion (Crossland & Hambrick, 2011). It is possible that in countries like Iran, where the popularity of engineering degrees among students has resulted in a large population of managers with an engineering background (27% based on Statistical Centre of Iran, Donya-e-eqtasad, 2019), there is less variance in CEO backgrounds, and reasons for differences in CEO beliefs could be found in other areas, such as CEO personalities. The engineering-oriented culture of the sample companies would also explain the similar profiles of the CEOs of this study.

Finally, although our empirical focus was on CEOs, we believe our findings also apply to top management more generally, such as functional VPs (Boada-Cuerva et al., 2019; Steffensen et al., 2019) or top management teams by and large. Due to their hierarchical position, top management

may shape HRM implementation by being involved at the different stages of implementation, as well as through their interactions with and power balance vis-à-vis the HR department.

Limitations and future research

The findings in this study open several avenues for further research, some of which are based on its own limitations. The first future research path is associated with its methodological characteristics. As in other instances of case study research, there is a trade-off between in-depth exploration and generalizability. In particular, the nature of our findings is bounded by the type of organization (a large holding firm), the industry, and chiefly by the national culture (one with high power distance and a focus on hierarchical relations) even though they were purposefully selected to highlight the phenomenon under study. Future research could thus explore whether our findings would hold in cultures with lower power distance and higher levels of individualism than Iran.

Another interesting area for further work is that of CEO HRM beliefs. In our study, CEOs themselves could not be interviewed, and hence their beliefs were described based on other actors' perceptions. These were large companies with strong hierarchical structures, which prevented the possibility of direct meetings with CEOs for research purposes. In addition, one of the CEOs had just passed away during the data collection and thus we would not have been able to compare and contrast CEOs beliefs based on their own accounts. Moreover, Namazie and Frame (2007) suggest that senior managers in Iran echo the same strategic HRM discourse that is found in more Western countries, but that such espoused values are not necessarily related to the values-in-use in these firms. This suggests that the unprompted reference by other actors to CEO's beliefs, opinions and actions may indeed provide a more accurate picture. To ensure rigor on this respect, we bring in the voices of many different actors and have noted only the references to the CEO's actions and ideas that were expressed by at least three different individuals. Despite all these precautions, not

being able to interview CEOs prevented us from directly exploring their beliefs and perceptions. It also prevented us from understanding how such beliefs were formed, and in particular, how different contextual aspects -e.g., demands from other top management actors in the holding firm- may have shaped CEOs priorities in their own companies.

In any case, future research could address CEOs' beliefs enquiring about which ones are more relevant for the effective implementation of HRM policies. So far, we find few but relevant examples in the literature: Arthur et al. (2016) focused on HRM cause-effect beliefs (understood as the belief that investing in HR will yield positive returns) as well as top management employee-centered values, and Brandl and Pohler (2010) on CEO beliefs about HR competence. It would be interesting to develop a taxonomy of CEO HRM beliefs and connect these with HRM by and large, and implementation of HRM practices in particular. Still looking at CEOs individual characteristics, upper echelons theory suggests that CEO beliefs are partly the result of individual characteristics such as previous professional experience, personality, etc. Hence, future research should also try to problematize CEO beliefs rather than take these as given. Why do CEOs develop certain HRM related beliefs? To what extent do previous experiences with HR departments and HRM activities influence those? Finally, future research should also combine CEO leadership styles with HRM implementation processes. As noted, so far previous work in this area has mainly concentrated on predicting the adoption of practices (e.g. Lopez-Cabrales et al., 2017), but there is room for expanding this work from HRM content to HRM implementation (Steffensen et al., 2019).

A further limitation of this study was the retrospective nature of the interviews, which could render some information subject to recall bias. To mitigate this, precautions were taken throughout the research process: in the design, we included a variety of actors at different organizational levels

with varying relationships to the CEOs; in collecting data, we focused on HRM practices that were relevant to interviewees and hence vivid in their memory, and we let interviewees refer to CEOs' actions or decisions unprompted and just probed them to elaborate when they were naturally bringing them up; and in analysis, we only kept categories reflecting forms of CEO influence and other insights that had been raised by at least three different interviewees. Interviews and observations closer to the time of events could have allowed to collect other types of data, such as the emotional reactions of participants, which is an unexplored yet relevant topic in implementation research (Trullen et al., 2020). In fact, since implementation is by definition a process, researchers willing to study this topic should take into account the temporal elements of the topic under enquiry, both in terms of how far back in time events occurred and of their sequences and interactions. To that end, provisions should be made to apprehend the phenomenon under study as exactly as possible, whether by taking measures like the ones mentioned above or, even better, by trying to obtain access to implementation processes as they unfold. In the latter case, repeated interviews could be organized, but also other methodologies should be considered, notably the use of diaries to be closest to relevant episodes. Given the generalized accessibility of respondents to recording tools in the form of smartphones, audio or oral reflective diaries (Hewitt, 2017) should be prioritized given that they allow for easy, non-invasive collection of the data, in a not necessarily structured but in-depth manner (Crozier & Cassell, 2016).

Future research could also focus on other aspects of HRM implementation. For example, it could emphasize the bottom-up emergence of HRM activities in organizations, whether at the initiative of line managers (Conway & Monks, 2011), employees (Budjanovcanin, 2018) or other actors. While we did not find much evidence of bottom-up processes in our study to warrant a consolidated place in the findings -maybe due to the specific cultural context of these firms-, it would certainly

be relevant to understand how CEOs stimulate or hinder these emerging processes. Finally, there is also space for a more systematic investigation of the relative effectiveness of different types of CEO influence. Are hard or soft tactics (Trullen & Valverde, 2017) more appropriate and under what circumstances? How many different types of influence can be combined in more effective ways and what types of influence are more appropriate to deal with different organizational actors during implementation? And in connection to upper echelons theory, are there particular CEO characteristics or backgrounds that make the use of certain types of influence more likely than others?

In conclusion, this study inductively develops a map of CEO influence in HRM implementation, opening a wide array of new questions. We hope that our in-depth exploration of this phenomenon attracts the attention of other scholars to do work in this area. After all, and despite the increasing relevance of bottom-up processes, CEOs remain key forces in their organizations.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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Table 1 - Summary of findings in the four cases

		Before CEO _x 's Move from Company A to Company B		After CEO _x 's Move from Company A to Company B	
		Case 1: Company A lead by CEO _x	Case 2: Company B lead by CEO _y	Case 3: Company A lead by CEO _z	Case 4: Company B lead by CEO _x
CEO HRM Beliefs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low
HRM Implementation Process (Direct Effect)	Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO takes a passive role. HR manager takes the lead, but faces disregard (lack of support) or rejection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO follows the lead of HR manager in practice adoption and authorizes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO and HR manager decide on practice adoption, jointly initiating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO decides to discontinue already existing practice
	Formulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO is not involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO supports HR manager by bringing in the help of consultants and requesting input from senior and middle managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO provides input and feedback to HR manager and actively takes part in formulating the new policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO is not involved
	Execution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO dismisses the policy, effectively stopping its execution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO links senior managers' bonuses to the implementation of practices CEO together with the HR manager introduce additional rewards for best performers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO stresses the importance of practice use in formal and informal speech CEO role models by using practices himself CEO prevents senior managers from bypassing existing practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO removes existing incentives associated with HRM implementation CEO allows senior managers to bypass existing practices
HR Department Strategic Role (Indirect Effect)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR unit under F&A department HR manager with HRM background HR employees do not interact with CEO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR unit at VP level HR manager with HRM background HR employees interact with CEO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR unit at VP level HR manager with HRM background HR employees interact with CEO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR unit under F&A department HR manager does not have HR training or expertise HR employees do not interact with CEO

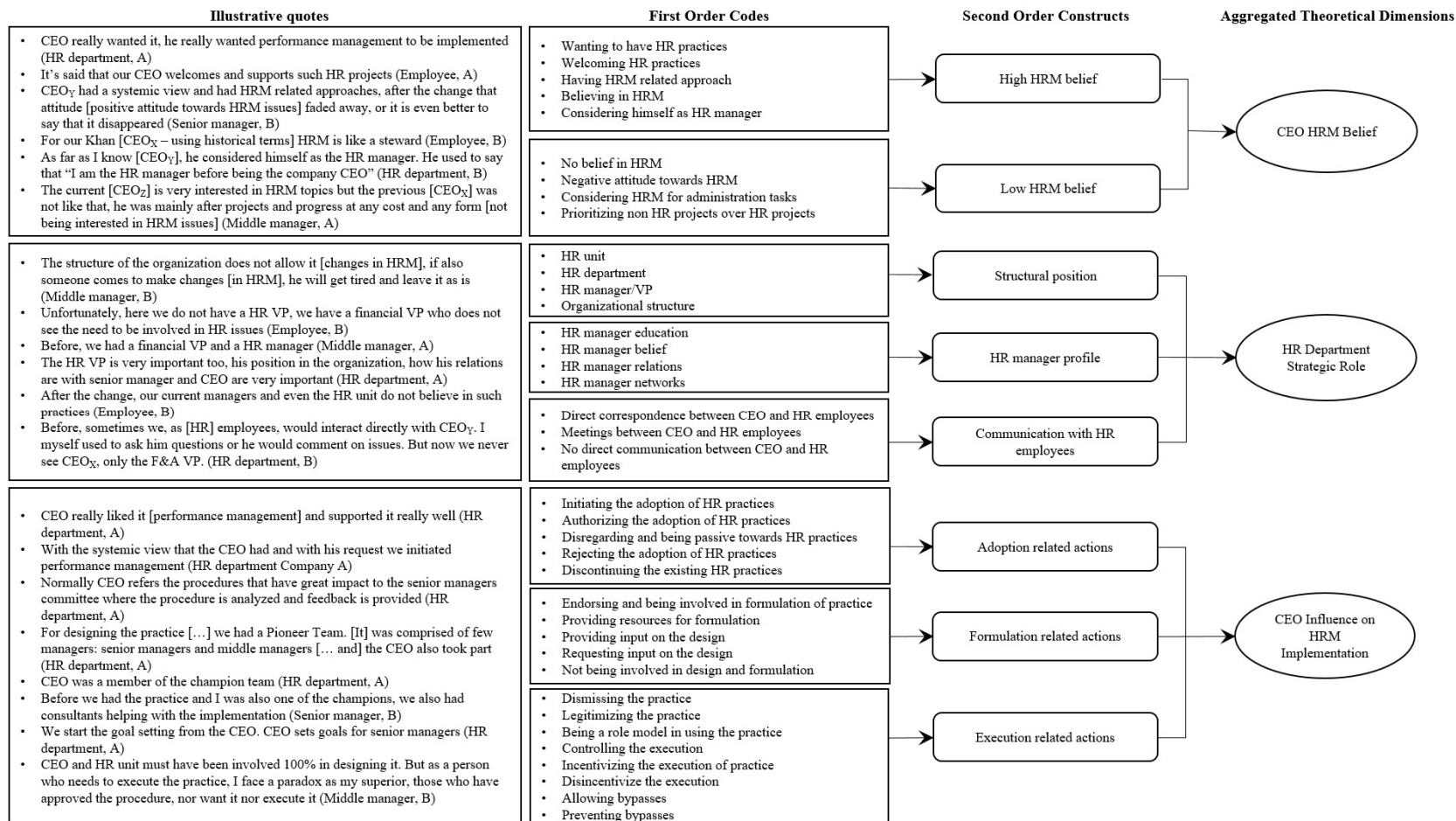


Figure 1 - Analytical coding process

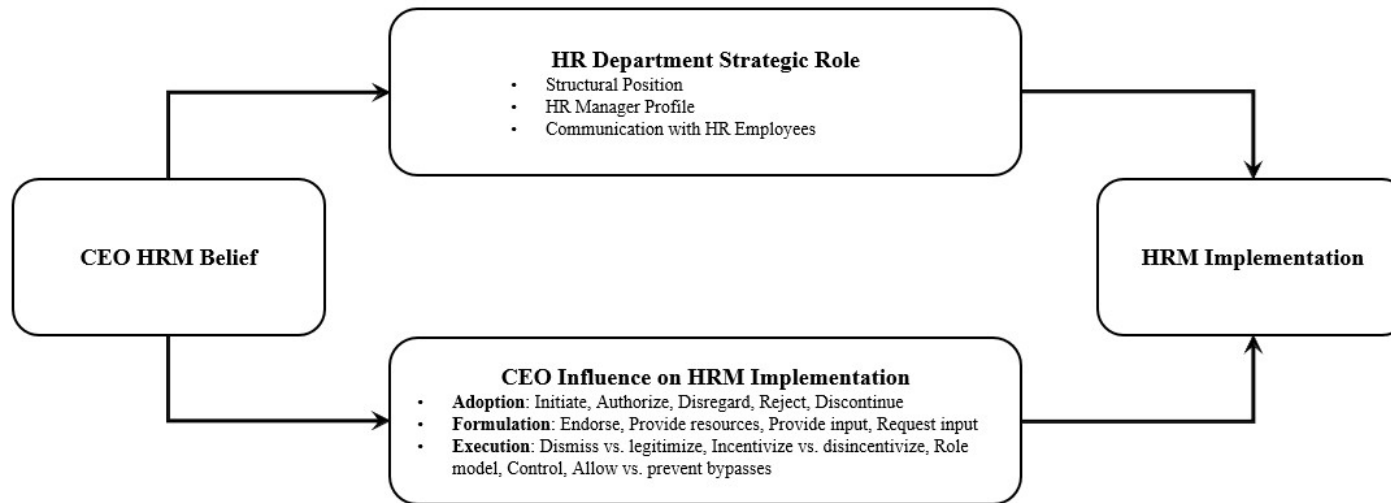


Figure 2 - Model of CEO influence on HRM implementation