

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

NIK HAZMAH NIK MAT

Bachelor of Management (Technology), Malaysia

Master of Management, Malaysia

**Faculty of Business and Law
Edith Cowan University
Western Australia**

2014

THE HRM ROLE OF LINE MANAGERS: A MALAYSIAN CASE STUDY

NIK HAZIMAH NIK MAT

Bachelor of Management (Technology), Malaysia

Master of Management, Malaysia

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

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Business and Law

Edith Cowan University

Western Australia

2014

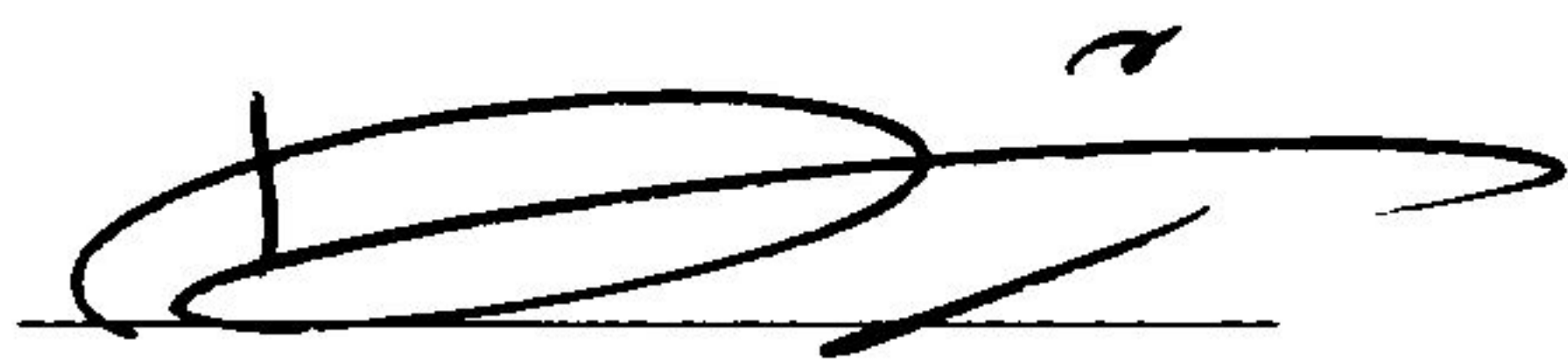
Declaration of Originality

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i) Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii) Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- iii) Contain any defamatory material.

I also grant permission for the Library at Edith Cowan University to make duplicate copies of my thesis as required.

Signature:



Date: 11/6/2014

PUSAT PEMBELAJARAN DIGITAL SULTANAH NUR ZAHIRAH

Abstract

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

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

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