A PARADOX PERSPECTIVE ON LINE MANAGER IMPLEMENTATION OF HRM PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

Human resource management (HRM) research has broadened its focus beyond the *intended* HRM designed by executives to include the *actual* HRM line managers implement. In this study of a global professional services firm, we investigate the content and process of HRM implementation. HRM content refers to the *degree* or extent to which line managers implement HRM practices. The process of HRM implementation entails two seemingly contradictory dimensions of those practices, *consistency* (treating team members uniformly) and *individual responsiveness* (considering individual differences in contributions). Studying 171 employees and their line managers in 60 consulting project teams, we jointly address the effects of consistency and individual responsiveness in line manager HRM implementation. Results indicate that the degree and consistency of HRM implementation by line managers is positively related to individual job performance. In addition, consistency is found to moderate the link between the individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation and individual job performance such that, the link is stronger when consistency is high. However, no impact is found for team viability. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Key words: Line manager implementation of HRM; paradox theory; project teams; equity and equality.

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"The test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."

- attributed to both F. Scott Fitzgerald and Oscar Wilde

The resources employees provide are important to sustainable competitive organizational advantage (Guest, Paauwe, & Wright, 2013; Wright, Gardner, Moynihan, & Allen, 2005). How to effectively manage human resources to achieve long term organizational goals, however, remains a critical scholarly and practical question. In seeking an answer, Wright and Nishii (2013) summarized three levels of assessment for strategic human resource management (HRM): *intended*, *actual* and *perceived* HRM. Intended HRM refers to the HR system or practices that the firm's executives seek to establish in order to increase firm performance. Its importance has been demonstrated by well-established research on the link between such HRM systems as high performance work systems, high commitment or high involvement work practices and firm performance (Guthrie, 2001; Huselid, 1995; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Wright, Gardner, & Moynihan, 2003) as well as several meta-analytic studies (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2013; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012; Subramony, 2009). In operationalizing the intended HRM, the majority of studies collected data by asking HR managers which HRM practices were available in their organizations (Fu et al., 2017; Guthrie, 2001; Huselid, 1995). Actual HRM practices constitute those HRM practices line managers implement in daily interactions with their direct reports. Studies operationalize actual HRM practices largely by asking line managers which HRM practices they have implemented (Ryu & Kim, 2013) or by asking employees about their perceptions of the quality of their line manager's HRM implementation (e.g., "I think my line manager is fair in his/her treatment of me;" Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees & Gatenby, 2013: 846). Perceived HRM represents HRM practices as experienced by

employees (Wright & Nishii, 2013). They tend to be operationalized by asking employees whether specific HRM practices actually occur, for example, whether training or information is regularly provided (Den Hartog, Boon, Verburg & Croon, 2013).

Intended HRM practices do not always translate into the actual practice - unless line managers execute them. The present study focuses on actual HRM, as implemented by line managers. It examines the consequences of line manager HRM implementation in terms of their subordinates' job performance and intention to stay in the team over time, the latter referred to here as team viability, both key indicators of positive team outcomes (Marrone, Tesluk, & Carson, 2007). Line manager HRM implementation serves as a critical linkage mechanism, enabling the design of the HRM system to effectively yield intended organizational outcomes (Jiang, Takeuchi, & Lepak, 2013; Wright & Nishii, 2013). Actual HRM practices are evident in the content and process by which line managers support developmental feedback and team participation, and shape the perceptions and attitudes of direct reports toward their work. Line managers play a key role in translating formal HR policies into the lived employee experience. In the present study, we use the term line manager to refer to those responsible for directly managing the on-the-job activities of subordinates, and include supervisors and team leaders.

The majority of recent studies on line manager HRM implementation (Op de Beeck, Wynen, & Hondeghem, 2016; Shipton, Sanders, Atkinson, & Frenkel, 2016; Sikora, Ferris, & Van Iddekinge, 2015; Vermeeren, 2014) focus on the HRM practices that line managers actually implement and the extent to which they fully implement them. In line with this research, the present study focuses on the *degree* of HRM implementation, that is, the extent to which HRM practices are fully implemented. At the same time, *how* managers actually implement HRM has largely been overlooked although the actual process used is key to effective HRM implementation. In this study, we identify two contradictory dimensions of the process of HRM implementation: consistency or equality (treating team members uniformly or equally with respect to specific HRM practices) and individual responsiveness or equity (reflecting individual differences in contribution in order to treat team

members equitably in implementing specific HRM practices). Consistency reflects qualities of similarity, uniformity and equal treatment, a key element in procedural justice (Cropanzano, Bowen, & Gilliland, 2007). Consistency of line manager HRM implementation is predicated on the idea that line managers should treat each team member similarly in line with their common needs and concerns. For example, line managers are expected to provide performance feedback to each team member, rather than just a few, since feedback is both broadly valued and motivating. We note, however, that equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965) supports paying attention to individual contributions when implementing HRM, in line with the value of taking contributions into account when allocating rewards. Individual responsiveness means treating subordinates in ways that reflect their personal contributions and expectations to motivate and retain them. Individual responsiveness, as applied in this study, reflects the concept of equity in distributive justice (Cropanzano et al., 2007). Equating consistency with equality and individual responsiveness with equity aligns with how Ramamoorthy and Carroll (1998) use these terms in the resource allocation process. Adopting paradox theory, which argues that contradictory practice dimensions can be deployed simultaneously in order to enhance performance (Smith & Lewis, 2011), we theorize that individual performance and team viability can be optimized when consistency and individual responsiveness are realized together.

Our study contributes to theory and practice in several ways. First, we investigate the concurrent effects of important aspects of line manager HRM implementation. Existing research largely focuses on the *what*, that is, the actual practices used in line manager HRM implementation, while little research addresses the *how,* that is, the process whereby line managers implement HRM. The latter entails the nature of daily interactions with direct reports, individually and in combination, providing opportunities for allocating feedback, development, interpersonal problem solving and so forth across team members. It manifests in decisions regarding how to apply HRM practices both consistently across diverse subordinates and in response to specific individual circumstances, including differential contributions. In addressing both the content and process of HRM implementation, this

study contributes to a better understanding of the effects that actual HRM execution by line managers has on the organization and its members.

Second, to reflect the challenges managers face in implementing HRM such as the competing goals of treating people fairly and equitably, we adopt a paradox perspective (Smith & Lewis, 2011) to shed light on this issue. Although paradox theory has been used to explicate leadership behaviors (Quinn & Cameron, 1988; Smith & Lewis, 2012; Waldman & Bowen, 2016; Zhang, Waldman, Han, & Li, 2015), it has received limited attention in HRM. As above, we theorize two contradictory yet related aspects of how line managers implement HRM: consistency whereby line managers treat all team members uniformly and the individual responsiveness managers show by differentially applying HRM practices based on individual contributions. Paradox theory argues that seemingly contradictory yet interrelated dimensions can be realized simultaneously in order to promote higher performance (Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Such seeming contradictions reflect socially complex ways of organizing that have synergistic potential when applied with careful attention to superordinate goals and needs. Treating people in similar ways, while differentially responding to high and low performers, is made possible by upfront communication regarding the basis upon which supports are allocated: some being granted to all by virtue of team membership (e.g., personal support, training, and opportunity to participate) while others are contingent on individual contribution (e.g., promotion or merit pay) (Rousseau & Ho, 2000). We propose that consistency and individual responsiveness in HRM implementation can combine to enhance individual and team outcomes. The present study focuses on consulting project teams where members interact daily with their line manager, an appropriate context for examining HRM implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

HRM is an increasingly important system of practices in the knowledge economy as organizations strive to achieve higher performance and to gain sustainable competitive advantage. How organizations achieve these goals has been a central focus of strategic HRM for the past two decades. Since the 1990s, researchers have identified links between a specific set or bundle of HRM

practices, that is, high performance work systems and organizational outcomes (Evans & Davis, 2005; Fu et al., 2017; Guthrie, 2001; Huselid, 1995; Richard & Johnson, 2001). The typical focus in these studies has been organization-level intended HRM practices, that is, the policies and practices designed by HR professionals and top management to align with and support business strategy (Wright & Nishii, 2013).

Intended practices can differ from the actual HRM practices line managers execute. Line managers are key agents in implementing the organization's HRM policies and practices through the degree of support they provide for practices related to employee development (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990), performance management (Gardner, 2012), access to standard benefits and individualized rewards (Rousseau, 2005). Purcell and Hutchinson (2007: 6) argue that the line manager "has to be included in any causal chain seeking to explain and measure the relationship between HRM and organizational performance". The attitudes and behaviors line managers display shape employee perceptions of their job and the organization (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Harney & Jordan, 2008; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2013). Importantly, the quality of line manager communication influences employee perceptions of HRM practices (Den Hartog et al., 2013). In our study of consulting project teams, assignment managers who supervise project work interact daily with team members, manage their performance and promote their participation in task-related decisions. Such managers are thus key implementers of HRM in our study.

The Degree of Line Manager HRM Implementation

Consistent with the basic role of HRM in firms, line manager HRM implementation has an impact on employees, teams and organizational effectiveness (Alfes et al., 2013; Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, & Kees Looise, 2013; López-Cotarelo, 2018). In the present study, the first dimension of line manager implementation of HRM we address is the *degree* or extent to which the line manager implements a specific set of well-supported HRM practices. Degree concerns the content or amount of HRM practices that line managers execute. As indicated above, line manager implementation of

HRM links intended and actual practices (Wright & Nishii, 2013), and is a key factor for HRM effectiveness (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Jiang et al., 2012). The degree of line manager HRM implementation has been found to be positively related to firm effectiveness (Mitchell, Obeidat, & Bray, 2013; Ryu & Kim, 2013), individual job performance (Alfes et al., 2013; Sikora et al., 2015) and unit performance (Pak & Kim, 2016; Vermeeren, 2014).

The link between the degree of line manager HRM implementation and individual job performance can be explained by the ability–motivation–opportunity (AMO) model (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982; Guest et al., 2013). When implementing HRM, line managers influence individual team member job performance in several ways. First, they can improve a team member's job-related abilities through HRM practices such as staff selection, training and mentoring. By selecting members with required skillsets and providing them with appropriate training and development opportunities, line managers help members develop project-related knowledge and skills. Managers also enhance member motivation via mentoring and developmental feedback. Further, they provide members with opportunities to perform well by promoting employee participation in the team. The team member's abilities, motivation and opportunities to perform well are key inputs into their individual job performance. There have been varied views on how A, M, and O work together to increase individual performance. Some researchers argue that the three components complement each other (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982). Others argue they interact with each other (Delery, 1998) and must all be present to ensure high levels of job performance. Still, others maintain that their effect on performance is additive (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). The present study seeks to understand the impact of line manager HRM implementation on team member job performance rather than the nature of AMO effects per se. Thus, it adopts a holistic or systemic view by treating the above mentioned HRM practices as a bundle or set of mutually supporting practices (Guthrie, 2001; Huselid, 1995; Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Wright et al., 2003, 2005). According to Kehoe and Wright (2013: 368), "coherent systems of mutually reinforcing HR practices are likely to better support sustainable performance outcomes than are any individual practices". Line manager HRM implementation has a variety of other important

effects on employees as individuals. It has been found that line manager HRM implementation is negatively related to their turnover intentions and positively to their job performance and participation in decision making (Sikora et al., 2015). Based on this body of research, we expect a positive relationship between degree of line manager HRM implementation and employee outcomes, including individual performance, the individual-level outcome which is the focus for the current study.

Line manager HRM implementation can also have a positive impact on team outcomes (Jiang et al., 2012). Based on Jiang et al.'s (2012) theoretical work, line manager implementation of HRM is expected to enhance team human capital, which is critical to knowledge-intensive work where team members depend on each other's expertise in completing projects. Line manager HRM implementation can enhance team member job-related knowledge, skills and abilities via developmental feedback, mentoring and on-the-job training. It also can enhance team-level cooperation. Positive experiences of HRM practices implemented by line managers are expected to give rise to member perceptions of support and consideration, reciprocated in turn by positive member attitudes and behaviors (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). Part of this reciprocity is expected to take the form of working well in teams. When line managers implement supportive team-based practices, members are more likely to cooperate and communicate in a timely fashion, producing a positive team climate. Such positive team attitudes increase member willingness to continue to work together, essential underpinnings of team viability.

Defined as a team's "potential to retain its members through their attachment to the team, their willingness to stay together as a team" (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006: 52), team viability provides a team its capacity for sustainability and growth (Bell & Marentette, 2011; Foo, Sin, & Yiong, 2006; Marrone et al., 2007). Viability is one of three dimensions of group effectiveness identified by Hackman and Oldham (1976). In evaluating group effectiveness, there is no simple answer as to which dimension should be used (Goodman, 1986). We use team viability (Bell & Marentette, 2011) as a team effectiveness indicator since it is important in the context of consulting project teams where

team formation is central to successful completion of client projects (Fu, Flood, Bosak, Morris, & O'Regan, 2013). In this professional service context, the team formation process starts with a partner receiving a request from a client. That partner then selects a manager with requisite expertise in addressing the client's needs who in turn selects team members based on their functional knowledge and availability. A key factor in team formation is the quality of relationships among potential team members (Fu et al., 2013; Gardner, Gino, & Staats, 2012). As indicated by the HR partner from our field site, the same team members tend to be chosen for similar future projects *if* they have worked well together previously, on the assumption that they will work well together again. Based on the above theorizing, we expect a positive relationship between the manager's implementation of HRM and team-level viability.

Hypothesis 1. The manager's degree of HRM implementation will be positively related to individual job performance (1a) and team viability (1b).

How Line Managers Implement HRM: Consistency

The traditional focus upon the degree to which line managers implement HRM practices has downplayed attention to how they actually execute these practices. Nonetheless, how managers allocate resources (Greenberg, 2009) and developmental opportunities (Greenhaus et al., 1990) across individuals affects their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors related to their team and organization.

Consistency is an important aspect of HRM implementation. Baron and Kreps (1999) identify three forms in HRM: 1) single-employee consistency (consistency among the different elements of the firm's HR system); 2) between-employee consistency; and 3) temporal consistency (continuity of an organization's HR philosophy over time). The present study focuses on the second type of consistency, i.e. between-employee consistency, posited to be an important factor in achieving HRM effectiveness (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). The principle of consistency implies uniform or standard treatment across employees. Line managers who treat team members in the same way do so by applying HRM practices consistently across members. Consistency of line manager HRM implementation is in line with equality theory, which assumes that everyone in the same position

should be treated similarly (Espinoza, 2007; Roche, 2013; Zhang et al., 2015). Our conceptualization of consistency based on equality is comparable to the definition by Cropanzano et al., (2007: 38) who recognize consistency as a key element of procedural justice: "[a] just process is one that is applied consistently to all, free of bias, accurate, representative of relevant stakeholders, correctable, and consistent with ethical norms". The importance of equality is supported by Goncalo and Kim (2010) who find group productivity to be greater under equality when jobs are interdependent.

Consistently implementing HRM is a challenge organizationally and individually (Wright & Nishii, 2013). At the organizational level, the challenge is to ensure that managers execute the same set of HRM processes in their work units. Doing so requires that line managers understand the intended HRM practices, a condition attained through managerial communication and training. To effectively implement intended HRM practices, managers need to apply them across all team members consistently, a condition attained where line managers recruit employees into the team through similar systematic procedures, keeping all members informed of training opportunities, and providing each member with developmental feedback and support. When managers implement HRM in a consistent way, members perceive a clear, coherent and fair message regarding the organization's values, processes/procedures and expectations (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

From an individual employee's perspective, consistency avoids the appearance of favoritism (Lewis, 2000; Zhang et al., 2015) and promotes intrinsic job motivation (Zapata-Phelan et al., 2009). Consistency is related to procedural justice where team members perceive that their line manager applies HR-related practices without bias (Colquitt, 2001; Cropanzano et al., 2007). The importance of consistency in line manager HRM implementation is supported by the profound impact of justice perceptions on individual job performance (Aryee, Chen, & Budhwar, 2004; Zapata-Phelan, Colquitt, Scott, & Livingston, 2009) and the impact that procedural justice has on the intrinsic motivation of team members (Zapata-Phelan et al., 2009) and their satisfaction with organizational rewards (Wu & Chaturvedi, 2009). Where line managers are inconsistent in implementing HRM and otherwise fail to adhere to formal HR policies and procedures, employees can have difficulty understanding the

firm's HRM practices and respond less favorably to the organization's benefits and opportunities (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Jiang et al., 2012). Inconsistent messages regarding the firm's HRM practices can lead employees to become dissatisfied and less engaged (Li, Frenkel, & Sanders, 2011), thereby reducing their commitment to the organization (Sanders, Dorenbosch, & de Reuver, 2008), and increasing intentions to quit (Li et al., 2011). Where managers treat team members consistently, employees are likely to perceive fair treatment and be motivated to perform to their full capabilities. Thus, we expect a positive relationship between the consistency of line manager HRM implementation and individual job performance.

A line manager's consistent implementation of HRM also plays an important role in promoting collaborative team member relationships (Sikora et al., 2015). It makes team members more likely to perceive a fair and open process and to be motivated to work together in the future, supporting team viability. Findings in the justice literature support this, including the impact of procedural justice perceptions on trust among team members (Chen, He, & Weng, 2018; Cropanzano et al., 2007), a positive team climate, and employee willingness to help each other (Aryee et al., 2004). Thus, we expect a positive relationship between line manager's consistency in the implementation of HRM and team viability.

Hypothesis 2. The manager's consistency of HRM implementation will be positively related to individual job performance (2a) and team viability (2b).

How Line Managers Implement HRM: Individual Responsiveness

Responsiveness to individual differences, particularly with regard to contributions, is another important dimension of line manager HRM implementation (Zhang et al., 2015). Individual team members can contribute variably and perform at different levels, raising issues of an equitable allocation of recognition, supports and opportunities. The concept of individual responsiveness in this study is based on equity theory, whereby employees are expected to compare their job inputs and outcomes with those of co-workers or other reference groups; employees who perceive themselves in an inequitable situation are expected to reduce inequity by one or more of several methods, including

exerting lower effort or greater absenteeism and turnover (Adams, 1965). Equity is a key element in distributive justice (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Cropanzano et al., 2007), a form of justice focused on outcomes rather than allocation processes or procedures. The outcomes addressed in this study are not financial rewards but rather the ways managers implement specific HRM practices across individuals in order to reinforce team member performance. In this study, individual performance is seen as the input, that is, how much effort and capability an individual member puts into the work. At the same time, the line manager's HRM implementation is seen as the output, that is, the amount of resources the individual receives in return. Team members are expected to compare the resources each obtains from their line managers with the amount that others receive and adjust their own job performance accordingly. High performers are expected to receive more resources from line managers than lower performers, resulting in their greater satisfaction with the line manager's HRM implementation. If high performers do not receive more resources than low performers, equity issues can arise.

The importance of the line manager's responsiveness to individuals when implementing HRM has garnered recent attention. A study by Kossek, Ollier-Malaterre, Lee, Pichler, and Hall (2016) finds that line managers provide high performers more flexible work conditions. Doing so can entail making exceptions or adjustments to standard practices. Arising from the fact that team members differ in gender, personality, education and work experience, they can also have divergent notions of what constitutes equitable treatment along with different expectations and needs for developmental and future opportunities. For these reasons, Knies, Leisink, and van de Schoot (2017) argue that line managers should tailor the application of HRM practices to individual employees. Since individuals have both common interests and differences in expectations, capabilities, and contributions, line manager HRM implementation needs to reflect equity in managing team members. To explicate these features, we use individual responsiveness in HRM implementation to represent equity or consideration of individual contributions.

A line manager's individual responsiveness in HRM implementation reflects recognition of differential team member contributions and the need to treat them equitably. It can also entail providing appropriate support in order to meet any differences in job demands individual team members face. When leaders pay attention to differences in employee performance, they contribute to individual development (Bass, 1999). Responsiveness to individuals in HRM implementation is thus expected to influence individual job performance. For example, when managing performance, high performers might perform well with more autonomy, less support and less control-based activities from their managers while lower performers might need more direction. When individual differences are not factored in to the implementation of HRM practices, team members can feel less valued or appropriately supported by their managers with the knock-on effect that they are less motivated. On the other hand, if line managers weigh individual contributions in implementing HRM, individual team members are more likely to be motivated to perform better. Examples of responsiveness to individual differences include line managers providing individual recognition and accommodation to personal needs based on contribution. The impact of individual responsiveness on team member job performance can also be explained by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976). This perspective proposes that team members are motivated to demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors when they perceive that their manager values their contributions, also reinforcing a sense of equity (Brewer, 1991; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Roche, 2013). If high performers do not receive recognition for their contributions, a sense of inequity can result, giving rise to dissatisfaction which, in turn, can impede subsequent contributions (Pritchard, 1969). Therefore, we expect a positive relationship between individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation and individual job performance.

In addition, individual responsiveness on the part of line managers influences team viability by promoting team member job satisfaction, cooperation and positive beliefs about the team's capabilities. When line managers pay attention to individual differences in needs and contributions, team members are more satisfied with their job and manager (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004). In

consulting teams, members with prior experience working together are more likely to be able to integrate team knowledge and improve the team efficiency and performance (Gardner et al., 2012). To increase member willingness to work together on future projects, the line manager plays an important role in promoting member job satisfaction, by taking individual differences into account in implementing HRM. The impact of individual responsiveness on team viability involves a bottom-up effect. In a multilevel framework, this bottom-up effect entails phenomena originating at a lower level with emergent properties for higher-levels (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). Such is the case where individualized arrangements that attract talented people to a work group can improve the group's overall performance. Thus, we hypothesize a positive relationship between individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation and team viability.

Hypothesis 3. The manager's individual responsiveness of HRM implementation will be positively related to individual job performance (3a) and team viability (3b).

The Joint Impact of Consistency and Individualized Responsiveness: A Paradox Perspective

Taken together, our lines of reasoning above imply that managers should treat team members consistently while concurrently attending to differences in their contributions (Zhang et al., 2015). On the surface, consistency and individual responsiveness in HRM implementation might seem contradictory. Smith and Lewis (2011) describe such contradictions in terms of the paradox of organizing and belonging. Expressed in terms of the tensions between the individual and the collective: "Organizing involves collective action and the subjugation of the individual for the benefit of the whole. Yet organizing is most successful when individuals identify with the whole and contribute their most distinctive personal strengths" (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 384; see also Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). The value of apparently contradictory HRM practices is echoed in the observation that "Paradoxes are contained in the practice of leadership per se….(they) pertain to how individual leaders relate to their contexts, especially followers" (Waldman & Bowen, 2016: 318).

Paradoxes occur when there is "persistent contradiction between interdependent elements" (Schad et al., 2016). Similarly, Smith and Lewis (2011: 382) define paradox as "contradictory yet

interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time". Individual elements of management practice may appear contradictory when juxtaposed, however a paradoxical leadership response seeks to manage these elements in a way that embraces their potential synergy (Zhang et al., 2015). Approaches to paradox entail both acceptance and resolution; the former implies living with the paradox, the latter implies a more proactive strategy to attain resolution by meeting the competing demands of each element concurrently (Clegg, da Cunha, & e Cunha, 2002; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). The ability of the line managers to address an paradox in reconciling consistency at team level and responsiveness at individual level exemplifies recent theorizing that paradoxes are 'nested, cascading across levels' (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 384; see also Schad et al., 2016). Indeed, Waldman and Bowen (2016: 318) identify five dimensions of paradoxical leadership behavior at team level, one of which is "treating subordinates uniformly while allowing individualization". They see this as part of an overarching paradox inherent in leadership practice balancing the individual and the collective, or in their terms agency and communion. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2015: 541) maintain that "treating people uniformly while allowing individualization" is one of five core paradoxes in people management, an approach that has been applied to employee compensation and rewards (Kim, Park, & Suzuki, 1990; Leung & Iwawaki, 1988). Paradox theory thus suggests consistency and individual responsiveness can be achieved simultaneously, in an interaction that promotes individual performance and team viability.

Let's consider how such team-level paradoxes might be managed. Line managers need to apply HRM practices to all their members reflecting the needs they hold in common, such as knowledge sharing and timely communication. However, all employees may not want the same developmental opportunities and may differ in their interest in participation and responsibility. When training programs are introduced, line managers can inform all members about such opportunities and their purpose, while considering individual contributions and likely benefits for each team member in attending such training. Similarly, line managers may inform all team members about job rotation opportunities but make decisions regarding whom to rotate based on the member interests and career

needs. In the case of developmental feedback, line managers might communicate with each team member while varying the mode and nature of the feedback according to their abilities and past performance. With team participation, line managers may encourage all members to attend team decision sessions while supporting with greater influence those with more expertise and experience.

Not only can consistency and individual responsiveness co-exist, but they can be synergistic when consistency strengthens the impact of individual responsiveness on individual and team outcomes. We hypothesize that the impact of responsiveness will be stronger under high levels of consistency due to the enhancing effects of a climate of justice and interpersonal trust that consistency promotes (Greenberg, 2009; Rousseau, 2005). Indeed, the beneficial effects of individual responsiveness for individual members are more likely to spill over to the broader team when managers also implement HRM practices that benefit all team members. This synergistic effect is expected to arise largely from two effects of high consistency: reduced vigilance to differences in individual treatment (Rousseau, 2005) and increased commitment to the team (Greenberg, 2009).

Treating team members differently is a socially complex management practice, due to the sensitivity individuals display to unequal treatment (Greenberg, 2009). Consistency of line manager HRM implementation can reduce that sensitivity by making employees less likely to monitor and react adversely to differences in their treatment. This reduction in vigilance arises from the prevailing sense of fairness that consistency of HRM implementation gives rise to, which in turn reduces concerns regarding favoritism and increases the likelihood that differences in treatment will be viewed as acceptable and justified. A key issue is the paradox of consistently implementing differential treatment, which means regularly applying socially acceptable principles when making decisions regarding special treatment. When individual responsiveness is consistently and transparently applied, for example, some special treatment is granted contingent on the individual meeting certain conditions employees find acceptable (e.g., serious need or valued contributions). As a result, employees will be less vigilant and more likely to perceive individualized treatment as justified, resulting in higher perceptions of fairness (Rousseau, 2005). On the other hand, when

individual responsiveness is applied in an inconsistent and non-transparent way, members are inclined to be sensitive to favoritism and to perceive unjustified special treatment, resulting in lower perceptions of fairness. Continuing our example of training above, if the line manager did not inform everyone about the training program (thereby treating team members inconsistently) but chose instead to send certain members to the training based on their experience and contribution to the job, team members will perceive the line manager has acted unfairly by treating team members inconsistently. Fairness perceptions are expected to affect the job performance of those receiving special treatment in two ways. First, the recipient is more likely to enjoy good cooperation and communication with team members when they view his or her treatment as fair. Second, individuals who enjoy special arrangements, and are accepted by their peers, will benefit from being in good standing with their team, as a result, the value of any individualized resources their manager provides is enhanced. High individual job performance is expected under the joint condition of high line manager individual responsiveness and high consistency in HRM implementation. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4. The manager's consistency of HRM implementation will interact with his or her individual responsiveness of HRM implementation such that the effect of individual responsiveness on individual job performance will be greater at a higher level of consistency.

Similarly, when managers implement HRM practices consistently, they foster member commitment to the team by virtue of the climate of fairness created and the shared understandings among team members about how to access valued resources and opportunities, which in turn help attract and retain team members. When line managers are able to implement HRM practices in a fashion that is both consistent and responsive to individuals, the benefits of these practices are enhanced. Individual responsiveness, under conditions of consistency, leads to team member satisfaction with both their jobs and manager along with a commitment to working in a team where they are treated equitably. Further, the climate of fairness that consistency creates helps to build team relationships and enhances the impact of individual responsiveness on team viability by motivating high commitment, particularly on the part of members who receive customized treatment. In the

context of consulting teams, individual members work closely together and see themselves as a team, and sometimes even as a community. Thus, when the line manager treats everyone the same by implementing common procedures and processes, team members are likely to perceive the manager as acting fairly, making them more willing and motivated to work together and for each other. Thus, high team viability is expected under the joint condition of high line manager individual responsiveness and high consistency in HRM implementation. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 5. The manager's consistency of HRM implementation will interact with his or her individual responsiveness of HRM implementation such that the effect of individual responsiveness on team viability will be greater at a higher level of consistency.

Figure 1 presents our theoretical model with proposed hypotheses.

Insert Figure 1 about here

METHODS

Data Collection

The sample organization, PremierConsult (pseudonym), is a global consulting firm employing 2,500 people within their offices in North America, Europe, the Nordics, the Gulf and Asia Pacific. PremierConsult provides consulting services for a wide range of industries including energy, financial services, life sciences and healthcare, manufacturing, government and public services, defense and security, telecommunications, transport and logistics. During our communications with the Senior HR Partner, we described the objectives of this study and requested access to project teams. The senior HR partner agreed to allow the teams to participate, providing access to 60 consulting teams. The average team size was 8, with a range from 4 to 17 in any one team. Due to time constraints placed on their consultants (who charge their time in billable hours) we gained access to 3 team members per team. To ensure the effectiveness of randomization of the team members, we ran Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and found no significant differences between the selected and non-

selected members in terms of gender, age and tenure. Therefore, we proceeded with data collection. A web-survey including questions about their line managers, and their work experience in the teams was conducted during November and December 2014. We issued an invitation letter and four reminder notifications. Individual job performance data was provided by the organization, and the data was collected two months after the staff survey was completed.

In this study, we focused on the project assignment line managers and their implementation of HRM for two reasons. First, Keegan, Huemann and Turner (2012) found that assignment project managers have HR responsibilities in project-based organizations that support the project manager's role in implementing HRM for team members. Determining how much project managers share HR responsibility is based on the interactions between team members and project managers. In our sample organization, team members worked closely with their assignment manager, interacting on a daily basis and directly reporting to him or her. According to the Senior HR Partner, these assignment managers implemented many HR activities focused on employee wellbeing and development. Additionally, these managers were highly involved in several assignments; (selecting new people to join the assignment team); training and development (informing and encouraging learning opportunities, mentoring/coaching team members); performance management (managing performance on the project); job design (planning job rotations); and, promoting a culture of participation. As such it is appropriate to ask team members to evaluate these assignment managers' HRM implementation. In the present study, we refer to them as *line managers* since team members directly report to them.

Sample Profile

A total of 174 responses were received, generating a 97% response rate overall. After deleting incomplete responses, the valid sample size was 171 (95%). Among the respondents, 73% were male and 96% were permanent staff, 45% held junior positions, 39% held middle and 16% held senior positions. Respondents had an average of 5.63 years in the organization (S.D. = 6.63).

The research team followed a number of steps to alleviate non-response bias including pre-notification, use of an embedded survey as opposed to an email attachment, guarantees of confidentiality, and repeated reminders. These 60 teams were randomly selected by the senior HR partner. We checked for non-response bias by exploring differences in responses between early versus late respondents, as it has been suggested that late respondents are similar to non-respondents (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). We found no differences. The representativeness of the sample for the entire company was confirmed by our contact in the organization.

Measures

Team viability. Team viability refers to "the extent to which a team was able to increase its ability to perform as an intact unit over time" (Marrone et al., 2007: 1430). We adopted the three-item measure from Marrone et al. (2007) to measure team viability. A sample item is "Working in my current team, I would welcome the opportunity to work as a group again in the future". The reliability coefficient of the team viability scale was .84. Varied techniques have been used to justify aggregation. In the present study, we utilized two common aggregation tests: inter-rater agreement and inter-rater reliability (LeBreton & Senter, 2008). Inter-rater agreement was assessed using R_{wg} (James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984, 1993). The median of R_{wg} for team viability was .89, well above the rule of thumb for R_{wg} of .60 (James, 1982) and the more commonly acceptable value of .70, thus, indicating that members in each team agreed on team viability. Both inter-rater agreement and inter-rater reliability were assessed using intra-class correlations (ICCs). ICC(1) is the amount of variance in the variable of interest that can be attributed to team membership and ICC(2) can be viewed as the reliability of the means (LeBreton & Senter, 2008). ICC(1) and ICC(2) were calculated with a one-way random-effects analysis of variance based on McGraw and Wong's (1996) formula which was adopted by LeBreton and Sentor (2008). In this study, the ICC(1) value for team viability was .15, which was within the recommended range from .05 to .20 (Bliese, 2000) and higher than the median value of .12 reported by James (1982). The ICC(1) value is comparable to similar studies that aggregate individual attitudes into the team level, e.g. ICC(1) =.12 for employee perceived service

climate in Liao and Chuang (2004); ICC(1) = .06 for employee commitment in Nishii, Lepak, and Schneider (2008). The ICC(2) value for team viability was .34, lower than the .60 cut-off point recommended by Glick (1985) but comparable to coefficients in Liao, Toya, Lepak, and Hong (2009) whereby ICC(2) values ranged from .28 to .38). The lower ICC(2) may be due to the small team sizes (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). Based on the above results, team viability was aggregated to the team level.

Individual job performance. We used two distinct measures to operationalize individual job performance. To obtain an objective measure of individual job performance for use as a dependent variable in our analyses, the organization provided a job performance score for each participant, using a four-point Likert scale (1 = Not achieved, 2= Achieved, 3= Exceeded, and 4 = Substantially exceeded). Constituting an individual's official performance rating over an entire year, this archival data was obtained from the organization's performance management system records. In that system, whole year performance is a function of both contribution (i.e. role-specific objectives, other contributions to the organization and to people development) and capability level (i.e. relative to an attributes framework applied to each job grade). The firm adjusted this overall score based on a desired distribution for both the business unit and the organization as a whole (the latter reflecting in part the firm's annual financial performance). Bonuses were rewarded to high performers. The individual job performance score is thus not only meaningful within the team but also across teams within the broader organization. This objective performance measure serves as a dependent variable.

Each individual employee also provided a subjective rating of his or her own job performance, which was used to compute our Individual Responsiveness measure. A one-item measure was adopted from Schat and Frone (2011): "Considering all of your duties and responsibilities, how would your assignment manager rate your overall performance at work during the past 12 months?'' Respondents answered using a four-point Likert scale from 1 = poor to 4 = outstanding. Note that the subjective rating correlates with the objective performance measure (r = .40, p <.01) and with education (r = .19, p < .01) (Table 1), demonstrating evidence of its construct validity both in the

convergence of the two performance measures and in the anticipation by more educated workers of higher ratings from their managers. This subjective job performance measure is used to operationalize perceived individual contribution in calculating individual responsiveness in the line manager's HRM implementation.

Degree of line manager HRM implementation. According to Gerhart, Wright, McMahan, and Snell (2000), employees and line managers were appropriate informants regarding the actual HRM practices line managers implement. We used team member evaluations of line manager HRM implementation to avoid self-report bias. Consistent with Bos-Nehles et al. (2013), we asked respondents to indicate how satisfied they were with their line manager's execution of various HRM practices. From consultation with the Senior HR Partner and one senior consultant in the organization, we ascertained that line managers played a key role in implementing six HRM practices. They included: selecting new people to join the project team, informing and encouraging their learning opportunities, mentoring/coaching them, managing performance on the project, planning job rotations and promoting a culture of participation. Respondents were asked to evaluate their line manager's implementation of the following HRM practices: *"selects new people to join the team", "informs and encourages training & development opportunities", "mentors team members", "manages our performance", "encourages job rotation",* and *"promotes participation within our team"*. The scale used was a five- point Likert scale from 1 = very unsatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. Its reliability coefficient was .84. Following Sikora et al.'s (2015) approach, we operationalized the degree of HRM implementation by calculating an index of line manager implementation of HRM. We did so by calculating the mean of all six HRM practices implemented by the line manager as assessed by team members and computing the team-level mean. This approach reflects the consensus model which indicates that a team level construct relies on the average of individual responses within a team (Chan, 1998). It is supported by inter-rater agreement and inter-rater reliability assessed by R_{wg} (median = .86) and inter-correlation coefficients (ICC(1) = .22, ICC(2) = .53). The lower ICC(2) may be due to the small team sizes (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000).

Consistency of line manager HRM implementation. The consistency dimension assessed here is a key factor in HRM effectiveness (Baron & Kreps, 1999; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). As defined in previous sections, consistency of line manager HRM implementation reflects the extent of uniformity in team member treatment by line managers. In our operationalization of consistency we use the dispersion model as used in multi-level modelling (Chan, 1998), that is, the degree of within-group variation which has been applied in management research on diversity (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Knight et al., 1999), climate strength (Colquitt, Noe, & Jackson, 2002) and leader-member exchange differentiation (Cobb & Lau, 2015; Gooty & Yammarino, 2016; Ma & Qu, 2010). We operationalized consistency as the reversed within group standard deviation (SD) on line manager implementation of HRM.

An alternative dispersion measure is the coefficient of variation (CV). CV reflects consensus relative to the group's average level, calculated as the SD divided by the group mean, as used in calculating demographic heterogeneity (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). Both of these indices have advantages and disadvantages (Newman & Sin, 2009). According to Roberson, Sturman, and Simons (2007: 585), when modeling both mean and variance, "researchers may be better served by using standard deviation as a dispersion measure". Thus, we reversed the SD by multiplying it by -1 to measure the consistency of line manager HRM implementation. The higher the score, the more consistently the line manager enacted HRM within the team.

Individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation. Individual responsiveness means the extent to which individual team member differences in contributions are reflected in implementing HRM. In this study, we operationalized individual differences in contributions using the employees' subjective performance rating, a perception likely to be associated with between-employee differences in expectations regarding treatment. This performance measure reflected member self-evaluation, appropriate for calculating the individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation as reflected in the individual's experience of equity. To operationalize individual responsiveness, a dummy variable was created according to Equation 1.

$$z_i = \begin{cases} 1 & if \frac{x_i}{y_i} \in (\mu - \sigma, \mu + \sigma) \\ 0 & otherwise \end{cases} \qquad \text{Equation 1}$$

Where:

x_i line manager implementation of HRM evaluated by the i^{th} case

y_i subjective individual job performance of the i^{th} case

z_i individual responsiveness of the i^{th} case

μ mean of line manager implementation of HRM divided by individual job performance $\mu = \frac{1}{N}\sum_{i=1}^{N} x_i/y_i$

σ standard deviation of line manager implementation of HRM divided by subjective individual job performance $\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N}\sum_{i=1}^{N}(x_i/y_i - \mu)^2}$

N number of cases (sample size)

The above operationalization of individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation is consistent with equity theory (Adams, 1963) and its applications in managing employees (Cropanzano et al., 2007; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). In our analyses, line manager HRM implementation was treated as the output variable. Subjective job performance, as assessed by individual members, was treated as the input variable. Pritchard (1969) provides a summary of equitable and inequitable situations whereby different inputs are given for the same level of output which is inequitable. In the present study, when a line manager's HRM implementation is comparatively too high or too low with respect to others with the same subjective rating of performance, non-responsiveness is inferred; on the other hand, when HRM implementation falls within the range of others with the same subjective performance level, responsiveness exists. As indicated in Equation 1, if the x_i/y_i (line manager HRM implementation/subjective individual job performance) falls in the interval between one standard deviation below the mean and one standard

deviation above the mean, we assign 1 to reflect individual responsiveness; or else we assign 0, to reflect not individual responsiveness.

Control Variables: We controlled for individual gender, education, and tenure with the line manager. These factors indeed might influence either the individual's subjective belief regarding his or her performance or perceptions of line manager HRM implementation. Gender was coded 1 = female, 0 = male. Education was coded in ranking order (1= Bachelor's Degree or equivalent, 2 = Master's Degree or equivalent, and 3 = PhD or equivalent). Tenure with the line manager was assessed in months. We controlled for two variables at the team level, team size and percentage of females. Team size was the number of team members, a key factor in team-member exchange and trust (Amason & Sapienza, 1997). It was operationalized by its nature log. Percentage of females was the number of female workers divided by team size, both provided by the organization, and which was regarded as an important factor in previous team studies (Baer, Vadera, Leenders, & Oldham, 2014; Hoogendoorn, Oosterbeek, & van Praag, 2013; Inesi & Cable, 2015).

Analytic Strategy

Respondents were nested in teams having the same line manager. In particular, the degree and consistency of line manager HRM implementation and team viability was operationalized at the team level; the individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation and individual job performance was operationalized at the individual level. Multi-level analysis using Mplus was used to test the hypotheses. In order to test the bottom-up effect, we examined the relationships between individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation and team viability at the between-team level. In testing the moderating effect of consistency in the relationships between individual responsiveness with individual job performance and team viability, grand-mean centering was used for both consistency and individual responsiveness.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for this study's core variables. Table 2 provides the results of hierarchical linear modeling for hypotheses testing.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

H1 proposed that the degree of line manager HRM implementation would be positively associated with objective individual job performance (1a) and team viability (1b). Models 1.2 and 2.2 in Table 2 indicate no effect for either objective individual job performance (B = -.08, *n.s.*) or team viability (B = -.40, *n.s.*). Thus, H1 was not supported.

H2 proposed that the consistency of line manager HRM implementation would be positively associated with individual job performance (2a) and team viability (2b). Models 1.2 and 2.2 results show a positive effect of consistency on individual job performance (B = .07, $p < .05$) but no effect on team viability (B = -.06, *n.s.*). Thus, only H2a was supported.

H3 proposed that the individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation would be positively associated with objective individual job performance (3a) and team viability (3b). Models 1.2 and 2.2 results show a positive effect of individual responsiveness on objective individual job performance (B = .29, $p < .05$) but no effect on team viability (B = 2.05, *n.s.*). Thus, only H3a was supported.

H4 proposed that the consistency of line manager HRM implementation would interact with the individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation such that the effect on objective individual job performance would be stronger at a higher level of consistency. A moderation test was conducted, along with related tests for H5, where both individual job performance and team viability were entered into the model. Based on Aguinis, Gottfredson, and Culpepper's (2013) suggestions, we used grand-mean centering for the degree, consistency, individual responsiveness and both control variables at the team level (team size and the percentage of female workers in the team) and used group-mean centering for all other control variables at the individual level (gender, education and work tenure with the line manager). Model 1.3 results show that the interaction of consistency and individual responsiveness was related to individual job performance (B = .11, $p < .05$). To further

explore the moderating effect, we plotted the interaction (Figure 2). The plot indicates that when line managers enact HRM with higher levels of consistency, the effect of individual responsiveness on individual job performance was stronger than at lower levels of consistency. In addition, we conducted simple slope analysis, providing further support for the interaction (high consistency gradient = .65, t = 2.87, $p < .01$; low consistency gradient = -.25, t = -1.33, *n.s*). Thus, H4 was supported.

Insert Figure 2 about here

H5 proposed that the consistency of line manager HRM implementation interacts with the individual responsiveness such that the effect on team viability will be stronger at a higher level of consistency. Model 2.4 results show no significant effect for the interaction term on team viability (B = -.43, *n.s.*). H5 thus was not supported[1].

DISCUSSION

This study examined team member satisfaction with HRM as implemented by line managers (Wright & Nishii, 2013) and its effects on individual and team outcomes. Line manager HRM implementation was operationalized in terms of member satisfaction in its degree (content), consistency and individual responsiveness (process). Multi-level analyses indicate that consistency and individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation are linked to individual job performance. In addition, cross-level moderation effects indicate that the performance impact of individual responsiveness is stronger when consistency is also high, an illustration of how combining seemingly contradictory practices may be beneficially enacted in managerial and HRM practice. This study thus informs our understanding both of how managers implement HRM and how members experience it, highlighting the roles played by both equal and equitable treatment.

Our findings contribute to theory in several ways. First, this study sheds light on the effects of line manager HRM implementation on individual outcomes, answering the call for research on actual

HRM as implemented by managers (Bondarouk, Trullen, & Valverde, 2016; Brewster, Gollan, & Wright, 2013; Jiang et al., 2012; Wright & Nishii, 2013). HRM has been found to impact many employee and firm outcomes (Beltrán-Martín, Roca-Puig, Escrig-Tena, & Bou-Llusar, 2008; Boxall, Ang, & Bartram, 2011; Fu et al., 2017). Yet prior studies have adopted a universalist approach asserting a direct effect whereby investment in HRM practices at the organizational level leads to higher firm and individual performance. These studies have tended to focus on the intended HRM practices as reported by key executive-level informants. In contrast, the present study focuses on the key implementer of these HRM practices, the line manager, who interacts daily with team members, and member satisfaction with that manager's HRM implementation. The implementation of HRM by line managers enables an organization's well-designed HRM policies and practices to be directly experienced by employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

In addition, this study extends line manager HRM implementation research beyond "*what*" to "*how*" (Jackson et al., 2013) by focusing on the allocations of practices line managers make. Prior research indicates that the more HRM responsibilities line managers perform, the more effective a firm's HRM strategy will be (Mitchell et al., 2013). Also the more HRM practices line managers actually carry out, the lower the levels of employee turnover and the greater the levels of job satisfaction and performance will be (Sikora et al., 2015). In the present study of line manager HRM implementation, we not only focused on the content (degree) but also the process how line managers implement HRM among team members. The consulting teams we studied operate in dynamic environments where complex client demands require both coordinated team-member interactions and individual autonomy. They embody many of the central challenges of managing paradox. By adopting the paradox perspective, we argue that line managers who treat team members uniformly and responsively can help them perform better by promoting a fair work environment. These tensions can be embedded, as in the present study, in the simultaneous management of two forms of fairness: consistent or uniform treatment of team members and responsiveness to individual contributions. Yet consistency and individual responsiveness may be deployed concurrently by making clear the

conditions under which individuals might receive differentiated treatment (e.g. for valued contributions in a variety of forms) while at the same time emphasizing the common resources and supports all team members share. Our findings underscore that when managers implement HRM practices, they need to treat members in a uniform way (i.e. selecting people using the same procedure, mentoring everyone who needs such support, providing performance feedback to all members, and informing all members about how developmental opportunities are allocated). Meantime, they need to potentially factor in individual differences in needs and values as well as contributions (e.g. offering support for the different kinds of development individuals value, or promoting flexible hours and schedules for those who respect the needs and concerns of their co-workers).

This study found the line manager's consistency and individual responsiveness, as predicted, had positive effects on objective individual job performance. We also observed that the potential tension between consistency and individual responsiveness can be managed in ways that consistency enhances the impact of individual responsiveness on individual performance. Individual job performance is at its highest when consistency and individual responsiveness are both high. Our findings highlight the role that team-level deployment of seemingly contradictory practices, consistency and individual responsiveness, play in the actual execution of HRM by line managers. Embracing the competing demands of these two practices enables managers to work through socially complex tensions, resulting in their learning of how to create synergies that persist over time (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Van de Ven, 2013; Miron-Spektor, Ingram, Keller, Smith, & Lewis, 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Our findings affirm the importance for teams of managing fundamental tensions between collective and individual interests (Smith & Lewis, 2011), and enrich our knowledge about the process of HRM implementation by line managers and provide evidence for its importance to individual outcomes.

By investigating the joint effects of consistency and individual responsiveness, this study also contributes to the debate on the performance impact of equality and equity. As a brief summary of the issues, Hysom and Fişek (2011) used a scenario approach to study situational determinants of

reward allocation, including group size, status differentiation among members, and the type of task. They report that these situational factors affect perceived equality and equity such that co-worker relationships and task types affect the balance between the two. When status differentiation is high, equality contributes more to maintaining equilibrium among group members. In contrast, under interdependent work, equity contributes more. This finding contradicts Goncalo and Kim (2010), who observe group productivity to be higher under equality when work is highly interdependent. Our study of interdependent teams suggests a mutually reinforcing interaction between equality and equity where individual performance is concerned. Our finding that individual performance is highest when both equality and equity are high suggests the value of considering both simultaneously, and attending to the potential balance between them.

Furthermore, introducing paradox theory into HRM enriches its theoretical bases and helps explain some of the inherent challenges of its execution. Some scholars have focused on broad categories of paradox in organizations, particularly with respect to learning, performing and belonging (Smith & Lewis 2011). Others address paradox at the individual manager level with a focus on the cognitive skills and behaviors necessary to address paradoxes effectively (Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995; Schad et al., 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Smith & Tushman, 2005). A small number of studies consider how teams work through paradoxes (Blatt, 2009) or the kind of leadership needed (Zhang et al., 2015) but scant research exists on the HRM implications at the team and individual levels. It is at this stage that leaders might need to manage daily contradictions in interactions with the team and its members, implementing HRM in a collectively consistent and yet individually equitable way. We extend organizational research by considering how paradoxical principles apply in practice, responding to the call for research into paradox effects at different levels (Schad et al., 2016). In doing so, our work moves beyond such broad organizational level paradoxes as strategic exploration and exploitation to address paradoxes in the everyday management of front line teams. Future research might explore how team leaders achieve a balanced interaction between consistency

and responsiveness, in particular the skills they deploy in combining seemingly opposing principles without being 'stuck in the middle' (Waldman & Bowen, 2016).

Lastly, data were obtained regarding team members nested in knowledge-intensive consulting teams using time-lagged multiple source data. By adopting a multi-level approach, our study extends traditional HRM research largely focused on one level, either organizational (Fu et al., 2017) or individual (Conway, Fu, Monks, Alfes, & Bailey, 2016), answering the call for multi-level research in HRM (Jiang et al., 2012; Ostroff & Bowen, 2000; Wright & Nishii, 2013). In the professional service context, teams constitute the core work unit and their effectiveness is critical to the productive client relationships on which professional firms depend. Although researchers have addressed the impact of ownership (von Nordenflycht, 2007), the function of particular promotion models on performance (Gilson & Mnookin, 1989; Malos & Campion, 1995; Morris & Pinnington, 1998) and team composition (Gardner et al., 2012), knowledge sharing in teams (Haas & Hansen, 2007), knowledge management (Fu, 2015), and the role of strategic HRM in professional service firms (Fu et al., 2017; Mcclean & Collins, 2011), the role of line managers' implementation of HRM has largely been ignored. The present study thus contributes distinct insights into how global consulting teams can be effectively managed.

Implications for Practice

Line managers are important for motivating effective job performance by team members and enhancing their team's viability. Our findings suggest they can do so by consistently implementing HRM practices, such as informing all members about training and development opportunities and promoting their effective participation within the team. Line managers also need to be responsive to individual differences in contributions, particularly in terms of recognizing and supporting high performers. Leaders have considerable influence over follower behaviors. Although some aspects of leadership style can be difficult to change, practices associated with effective HRM may be more readily implemented. Line managers seeking to improve their impact on subordinates may find it relatively easy to inform them about training and career opportunities or invite their participation at

meetings. HR professionals and senior executives can help improve the effectiveness of their lower level managers by helping them to better support and execute HRM practices. Line managers are often recruited or promoted based on their professional background rather than their HR-related skills. Training and support for line managers can be important for effective HRM execution.

Considering individual differences in contributions to the HRM implementation process appears key to enhancing individual job performance. Still, managers can face difficulties treating subordinates in a standard and consistent fashion while responding to important individual differences. Fairness demands use of a common set of principles in dealing with all subordinates while doing so in a fashion that also respects their differential contributions. In their study of paradoxes, Zhang et al. (2015) observed that line managers who engage in holistic thinking and who are able to adopt seemingly inconsistent principles in an integrative fashion are better able to manage people. This can mean ensuring all employees are aware of the HR-related benefits the employer offers, while providing customized resources in the form of idiosyncratic deals (Rousseau, 2005) to high performers or those who make special contributions to the team.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, context can influence how individuals react to inequitable treatment (Konow, 2001). Equity theory developed by Adams (1963, 1965) originally focused on individual comparisons with a focal person. Subsequent equity research investigated how individuals use co-workers or other groups as comparators (Hysom & Fişek, 2011). From both perspectives, equity theory asserts that individuals will adjust their inputs based on *perceived* inequity. However, in professional service contexts like ours, the observed effects on outputs might vary and outcomes of inequitable treatment can be more complex. For example, a team member who feels inequitably treated might still work hard to gain experience, but plan to leave when a better job offer comes along. In contexts like the present study, short term effects of perceived inequity might be less apparent than in other settings.

Second, future research might address several design limitations. Although the N is comparable with existing team-level studies (e.g. Gardner et al., 2012) and similar studies have been conducted in a single firm (e.g. Bos-Nehles et al., 2013), generalizability would be strengthened with a larger N and a more diverse sample of firms. Further, we used a partial time-lagged design, collecting Time 1 independent variables and Time 2 archival job performance data two months later. However, our second dependent variable (team viability) was measured at Time 1 and from the same source as our independent variables. We advise a time lag between independent variables and all outcomes in future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

We suggest some new approaches for future research. First, a question raised by our findings pertains to the conditions under which individual responsiveness might contribute to team viability, since our study observed no significant effect. This null effect is likely due to our small sample size of 60 consulting teams. Our analyses employed two team-level independent variables and one individual-level independent variable as well as five control variables. In post-hoc analyses, when we entered the predictors one at a time, significant effects of degree and consistency on team viability resulted. In order to test the whole model as we did in this study, we encourage future research to use a larger sample size in order to increase statistical power and systematically examine the direct and interaction effect between degree, consistency and individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation on team viability and other team-level outcomes. This should provide a better understanding of the role line managers play in promoting team performance by implementing HRM practices.

Another key question is whether and how process interacts with the content of HRM implementation. Importantly, consistency and individual responsiveness might be better suited to specific facets of HRM implementation. For example, development might be important for all employees, but flexibility only warranted for high performers. Second, we found no effect of line manager HRM implementation on our team outcome, viability. Our small sample size might be a

factor as described above, but there is a need to look more deeply into the impact of line manager HRM implementation on team outcomes. One question is whether the appropriate properties of team viability were measured. We assessed team viability by measuring member attachment to the team and willingness to stay together, however, Aubé and Rousseau (2005) propose another component of team viability, that is, member adaptability to internal and external changes, a dimension that could be factored into future research.

Future research also can enhance the quality of HRM measures. Our measure of line manager HRM implementation combined team and individual level perspectives, using team member satisfaction with line manager HRM implementation to compute both team-level consistency and individual-level responsiveness. This approach raises two concerns.

One concern in our operationalization of HRM implementation is that members might answer satisfaction questions based on socially constructed experiences within the team rather than their own individual experience. Note that the cover letter accompanying the survey did prime respondents to reflect on their own experience with their line manager. However, to test for the effects of our phrasing of items, we created a survey with two sets of questions. One was the original measure used in this study, and the other was framed in terms of an individual focus ("me" or "my"). The latter items were: "selected me to join the team"; "informs and encourages me about training & development opportunities"; "mentors me"; "manages my performance"; "encourages me about job rotation"; and, "promotes my participation within our team". These two sets of questions were tested in a sample of Executive MBA students (N=56). The correlation between the two item totals was .79 ($p < .01$) and all correlations between the same HRM practices were significant at .01 level. Although high correlations between these measures do not indicate they measure the same thing, respondents nonetheless appear to answer both sets of questions largely based on their own experience.

Another concern is that team member satisfaction could be a consequence of how individuals perceived or interpreted line manager HRM implementation rather than a direct indicator of the line manager's actual HRM implementation. We assumed these two concepts overlap, but to check on the

construct validity of our measure, we collected additional data from 55 MBA students on their experience with the six HRM practices as implemented by their line manager and used two different ways of framing the questions. One was this study's original measure (satisfaction level), and the other assessed the extent to which respondents agreed that their line manager had implemented the specific HRM practices stipulated in the original measure. The correlation between the original measure our study uses and the extent of line manager HRM implementation was .92 ($p < .01$) and all correlations between the same HRM practices were significant at .01 level. Although high correlations between these two measures do not mean they are the same, respondents appear to answer both sets of questions similarly. At the same time, we encourage future researchers to use separate measures of individualized and team-level implementation as well as separate assessments of satisfaction and extent of line manager HRM implementation until the effects of using different measures are well understood.

Continuing suggested improvements regarding line manager HRM implementation measures, we note that the construct "actual" HR should refer to what actually is implemented by line managers (Wright & Nishii, 2013). However, asking line managers to report on their own practices or having team members evaluate how their line manager implements HRM as this present study does, involves judgement and potential bias. This dilemma remains a challenge for future researchers to reflect on how best to get an accurate measure of actual HRM as realized by line managers.

Individual responsiveness of line manager HRM implementation is a new and important concept worthy of further examination. Our measure's binary nature, however, might be less optimal than a continuous measure. Development and use of a continuous measure of individual responsiveness can be valuable in future research to assess a broader distribution of perceived responsiveness on the part of line managers.

Since the quality of work relationships is important to account for when team members report their experience with the line manager's HRM implementation, we suggest future studies should control for the relationship quality between an individual team member and the line manager. The

control variable used in this study, "tenure with the line manager," may be appropriate for consulting teams where work is project-based. Once a project is completed, team members (i.e., consultants) become available to be selected for the next project. Mobility exists from project to project and thus tenure with the line manager makes sense here as an indicator of the work relationship between the team member and line manager. Findings provide support for this: Tenure with line manager was correlated with the degree ($r = .22$, $p < .01$), and consistency ($r = .19$, $p < .05$) of line managers HRM implementation as well as team viability ($r = .25$, $p < .01$); and slightly related to team viability ($B = .05$, $p < .05$) in our model tests. We suggest that a more broadly appropriate indicator of work relationship like leader-member exchange might be useful in future studies in other contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study provides evidence of the importance of line managers in HRM, not only in implementing key practices but also in the need for their conscientious application of both consistency across team members and responsiveness to individual differences. Our findings underscore the value to be gained by upskilling line managers in balancing consistency and individual responsiveness in their implementation of HRM practices.

FOOTNOTE

[1] For the interest of readers, we also conducted additional analysis on the three-way interactions among degree, consistency and individual responsiveness of manager HRM implementation (results available upon request). We did not find a three-way interaction for either individual job performance ($B = -.02$, *n.s.*) and team viability ($B = .18$, *n.s.*).

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TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Study Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Between team level												
1. Team viability	4.03	.48										
2. Line manager implementation of HRM (degree)	4.09	.64	.42**									
3. Line manager implementation of HRM (consistency)	-.60	.43	.34**	.58**								
4. Team size	8.24	3.50	.00	-.02	-.06							
5. Female workers (%)	.26	.18	.03	.00	.00	-.04						
Between individual level												
6. Individual job performance (objective)	2.75	.78	.18*	.08	.04	.06	.00					
7. Individual job performance (subjective)	3.12	.64	.34**	.24**	.09	-.09	-.11	.40**				
8. Line manager implementation of HRM (individual responsiveness)	.78	.42	.19**	.37**	.27**	.03	-.16*	.19**	.28**			
9. Gender	.27	.45	-.05	-.10	-.03	.01	.39**	-.09	-.14	-.17*		
10. Education	1.76	.57	-.04	-.18*	-.06	-.04	-.20*	.03	.19*	.11	-.09	
11. Work tenure with the line manager	10.57	10.72	.25**	.22**	.19*	-.01	.03	.03	.19*	.03	-.11	.01

Note: The Level 2 variables were disaggregated before calculating within-level correlations. N= 160-171 at individual level; = 57-59 at team level.

*p <.05

** p <.01 (two-tailed tests).

TABLE 2 Results of Hierarchical Linear Modeling for Individual Job Performance and Team Viability

	Individual job performance (objective)			Team viability		
	Model 1.1	Model 1.2	Model 1.3	Model 2.1	Model 2.2	Model 2.3
Level 2 (team level)						
Team size	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	-.02 (.05)
Female workers (%)	.02 (.33)	.16 (.34)	.16 (.08)	3.74 (8.19)	2.71 (9.22)	4.38 (7.97)
Line manager implementation of HRM (degree)		-.08 (.15)	-.09 (.16)		-.40 (.83)	-.49 (2.71)
Line manager implementation of HRM (consistency)		.07* (.03)	.06† (.04)		-.06 (.04)	.35 (.99)
Level 1 (individual level)						
Gender	-.16 (.14)	-.15 (.14)	-.13 (.14)	-.3.68 (9.72)	-2.12 (10.93)	-2.19 (10.51)
Education	.13 (.11)	.15 (.11)	.16 (.11)	.74 (1.32)	1.17 (1.15)	1.99 (3.49)
Work tenure with the manager	-.00 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	.05* (.02)	.05* (.02)	.03 (.08)
Line manager implementation of HRM (individual responsiveness)		.29*(.14)	.38* (.14)		2.05 (3.01)	2.92 (10.15)
Cross-level interactions (Two-way interaction)						
Consistency * individual responsiveness of line manager implementation of HRM			.11* (.05)			-.43 (1.36)
Residual variance (σ^2)	.98	.48	.47	.66	.13	.13
R^2	.02	.05	.06	.34	.38	.50

Note: Unstandardized coefficients (stand errors) were reported.

*p <.05, $^{\dagger}p$ <.10 (two-tailed tests).

Figure 1

Proposed Research Model with Hypotheses

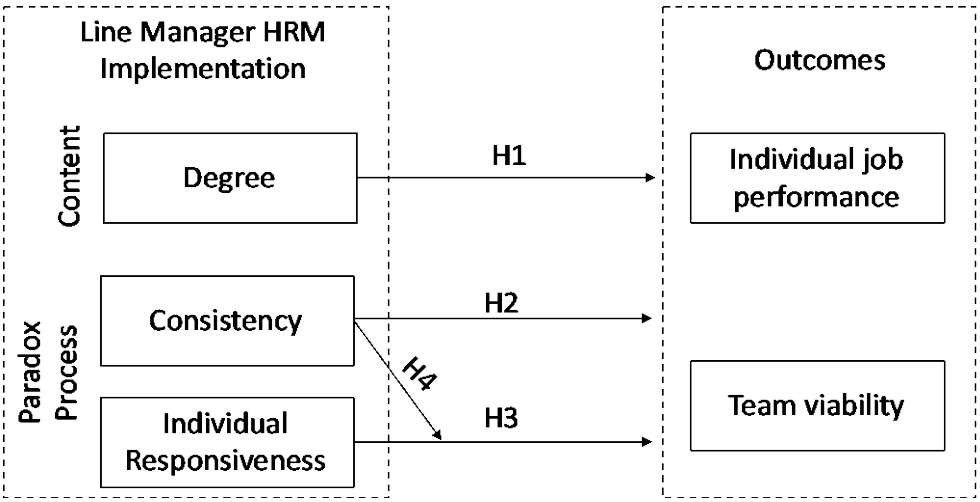

Figure 2

Two-way Interaction between Consistency and Individual Responsiveness of Line Manager HRM Implementation on Individual Job Performance