

# Line Management Responsibility in HRM: An Empirical Study

**M. Srimannarayana**

---

*This study makes an attempt to assess the level of responsibility of line managers in HR activities. The information is collected from 176 line managers. Its analysis indicate that line managers have moderate responsibility for HRM. However their level of responsibility appears to be more in performance management and training and development related activities and less in compensation related activities. The study identifies significant difference in certain HR activities of line managers based on the nature of business, ownership of the organisations, the length of services and functional area of line managers.*

*M. Srimannarayana* is Professor, Xavier Labour Relations Institute (XLRI), Jamshedpur 8310 001, Email: sriman@xlri.ac.in

## HR Responsibilities & HR Managers

The devolution of HR responsibilities from HR managers to line managers is both growing and a global trend (Larsen & Brewster 2003). Historically, HR activities have always been a part of the line manager's job. In small businesses, the owner-manager looks after all HR activities. As the business expands, the owner may employ an HR professional or establish an HR department that provides expert advice and support for undertaking various HR activities. Brewster and Larsen (2000) identify that development of cost-centre or profit-centre based approaches for managing organisations, comprehensive approach to people management, growing influence of service industry, real time decision making, and changes in the philosophy and structure of organisations are responsible for the assignment of HR issues to the line.

## Earlier Literature

Pigors and Myers (1973) indicate that personnel administration is a line responsibility and staff a function. It is a basic management responsibility, per-

meating all levels and types of management in all organisations. Beer et. al (1985) prescribe a general manager's perspective for HRM with four HRM policy choices such as employee influence, HR flow, reward system and work system. Brewster and Larsen (1992), Hoogn-doorn and Brewster (1992), Brewster and Soderstrom (1994) present evidence that HR role is increasingly assigned to line managers and that the extent of such assignment varies from country to country. At a minimum, line managers conduct performance reviews, promotion decisions, and communicate terminations (McGovern et.al 1997). Jackson and Schuler (2000) treat managing human resources as a responsibility shared by line managers, HR professionals and employees. They propose partnership roles and responsibilities among these stakeholders for managing human resources. Line managers have responsibility for HRM in their respective work floors and HR professionals have to help line managers and coordinate HR function across the organisation.

**Line managers have responsibility for HRM in their respective work floors and HR professionals have to help line managers and coordinate HR function across the organisation.**

Earlier research indicates positive as well as negative consequences of line managers' responsibility in HRM. Budhwar (2000) observes that devolution enables HR problems to be solved at a lower organizational level, creates

more responsible line managers, and improved efficiency of employees. On the other hand, Bond and Wise (2003) believe that HR responsibility of line managers can result in devoting less time by line managers to HR issues than HR specialist would. This may result in people management that is fragmented, inconsistent and generally less effective than HR specialists could deliver. Renwick (2003) finds that line managers are eager to take additional HR responsibilities, but are inadequately completing some HR work and try to reduce decision making time by by-passing procedures. He also presents mixed evidence for whether line managers treat employees fairly and consistently. Perry and Kulik (2008) find a positive impact of devolution of HR to line managers on people management effectiveness.

### **Present Study**

Research studies are conducted in Europe (Brewster & Larsen 1992, Brewster & Soderstrom 1994, Brewster & Larsen 2000, Larsen & Brewster 2003) and the USA (Perry & Kulik 2008) to examine the role of line managers in HRM in those countries. Some of the research papers mentioned above presents variations in line management responsibility for HRM. There is no similar study in India to examine the line management involvement in HRM. This has prompted to design and carry out the present study to:

1. Assess the extent of responsibility of line managers in various HRM activities.

2. Examine the variations in line managers' involvement in various HRM activities.
3. Find out the differences in their involvement based on the nature of business, ownership of organisations, length of line managers' service and functional areas.

### Questionnaire Design

Based on the literature and research survey, 23 HRM activities were identified in which line managers have some role to play in their organisations. A questionnaire was prepared with these activities that cover almost all HRM activities from human resource planning to employee termination and covered: 1) human resource planning, 2) recruitment, 3) selection, 4) placement, 5) new employee orientation, 6) training needs identification, 7) training nominations, 8) training evaluation, 9) designing performance appraisal, 10) driving appraisal process, 11) evaluating performance, 12) performance counseling, 13) career planning, 14) transfer decisions, 15) promotion decisions, 16) salary decisions, 17) incentives, 18) employee benefits, 19) grievance handling, 20) discipline management, 21) managing absenteeism, 22) managing attrition, and 23) employee terminations. The respondents are expected to rate the level of their responsibility in discharging these HR activities. A five point scale is used to record the responses. One in the scale represents for 'no responsibility', two 'minimum responsibility', three 'moderate responsibility', four 'high responsibility', and five 'complete responsibility' of line managers for that HR activity. In the last section

of the questionnaire respondents answered questions relating to the nature of business the organisations carried out, ownership, and respondent's functional areas and the length of service in the present organisation.

### Sample

The questionnaire has been administered among 250 line managers (a manager who deals with any of the functional areas other than HR is considered as line manager for the purpose of the study). All these managers work in different organisations in which there is a HR department to support, help, and guide line managers in people related issues and coordinate HR function across the organisation. 176 line managers could give usable filled in questionnaires for the purpose of the study. 41.48% of them represent manufacturing organisations; 37.05% are from IT/ITES; and the remaining 20.02% represent service sector. Ownership wise 28.41% of the respondents belong to public sector, 28.98% work in private sector companies other than multinationals, another 23.86% represent Indian multinational companies, and the remaining 18.75% belong to foreign multinational companies located in India. Functional area wise, the respondents are distributed among operations (34.9%), marketing (28.41%), systems (19.32%), and maintenance (18.18%). 43.75% of the respondents have less than five years of work experience in their respective organisations; 38.64% range from five to ten years; and the remaining have ten and above years of experience.

**Table 1: Background Information of the Respondents**

SL. No	Item	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	<i>Nature of business</i>		
	a) Manufacturing	73	41.48
	b) IT/ITES	66	37.05
	c) Service	37	20.02
2	<i>Ownership</i>		
	a) Private sector	51	28.98
	b) Public sector	50	28.41
	c) Indian MNC	42	23.86
	d) Foreign MNC	33	18.75
3	<i>Functional Area</i>		
	a) Operations	60	34.09
	b) Marketing	50	28.41
	c) Systems	34	19.32
	d) Maintenance	32	18.18
4	<i>Length of service</i>		
	a) Less than 5 years	77	43.75
	b) 5 – 10 years	68	38.64
	c) 10 and above years	31	17.61

items may be classified into human resource acquisition, training and development, performance management, internal mobility, employee compensation, and employee relations. This classification covers all major functional areas of HRM, in which line managers have responsibility.

**Employee Acquisition:** Human resource planning, recruitment, selection and placement are included in employee acquisition activities in this study. It is

**Method of Analysis**

Item wise analysis was carried out using percentages, means scores and standard deviations. One-way ANOVA tests are used to find out differences in various responsibility items based on the nature of business, ownership of the organisation, the line managers’ experience and their functional areas. Tukey’s HSD tests (not reported in this paper due to space constraints) are used for multiple comparisons among the items for which one-way ANOVA tests have found significant differences.

**Analysis & findings**

The percentages, means scores, and standard deviations of all 23 items of HRM are presented in Table 2. These

calculated that together the average mean score of all these four items is 2.95 indicating moderate responsibility of line managers in employee acquisition function. When compared with the four items, placement and selection have secured more score, whereas recruitment activity has secured a relatively lesser score. One-fourth of the respondents do not have any responsibility with respect to recruitment of their employees. On the other hand, a single largest group (36.93%) has high responsibility in employee selection.

**Training & Development:** New employee orientation, assessment of training needs, nominations to training programmes, and training evaluation are included under training and development function in this study. The overall re-

Table 2: Levels of Responsibility of Line Managers on Various HR Activities (%)

Sl. No	Items	No Responsi- bility (1)	Minimum (2)	Moderate (3)	High (4)	Complete (5)	Mean	S D
1	Human Resource Planning	10.23	25.57	36.93	18.75	8.52	2.90	1.09
2	Recruitment	25.00	18.75	30.68	18.75	6.82	2.64	1.23
3	Selection	12.5	14.77	28.41	36.93	7.39	3.12	1.14
4	Placement	11.93	17.61	27.84	31.25	11.36	3.13	1.19
5	Orientation	17.05	17.05	28.41	22.16	15.34	3.02	1.30
6	Training Need Assessment	4.55	13.07	26.14	38.64	17.61	3.52	1.07
7	Training Nomination	5.68	12.5	17.61	41.48	22.73	3.63	1.13
8	Training Evaluation	10.8	19.32	29.55	30.11	10.23	3.10	1.15
9	Designing Performance Appraisal	23.86	16.48	23.86	23.86	11.93	2.84	1.35
10	Driving Appraisal Process	16.48	21.02	28.98	18.18	15.34	2.95	1.29
11	Evaluating Performance	1.7	10.23	19.89	35.23	32.95	3.88	1.04
12	Performance Counseling	5.11	14.2	24.43	35.23	21.02	3.53	1.13
13	Career Planning	11.93	19.32	23.3	28.98	16.48	3.19	1.26
14	Transfer Decision	16.48	15.91	31.82	25.57	10.23	2.97	1.22
15	Promotion Decisions	8.52	15.34	28.98	30.11	17.05	3.32	1.18
16	Salary Decisions	26.7	18.18	32.95	15.91	6.25	2.57	1.22
17	Incentives	34.09	28.98	25.57	7.39	3.98	2.18	1.11
18	Benefits and Services	48.3	26.14	14.77	8.52	2.27	1.9	1.08
19	Grievance Handling	7.39	18.18	39.77	26.7	7.95	3.10	1.03
20	Discipline Management	9.66	17.61	31.25	25.57	15.91	3.20	1.19
21	Managing Absenteeism	7.39	19.89	23.86	30.68	18.18	3.32	1.20
22	Managing Attrition	17.61	26.14	31.82	13.64	10.8	2.74	1.21
23	Termination	25.57	22.16	27.27	15.91	9.09	2.61	1.27

sponsibility level of line managers seems to be moderate with regard to training and development also. They have a high level of responsibility in training needs assessment and nominating employees for various training and development programmes, however.

**The overall responsibility level of line managers seems to be moderate with regard to training and development.**

**Performance Management:** The items included under performance management are: designing performance appraisal system, driving appraisal process, evaluating employee performance, and performance counseling. In this functional area of HRM also, the level of responsibility of line managers appears to be moderate. However, line managers have a high level of responsibility for evaluating their employees' performance and extending performance counseling to them. But the line managers' role is less than moderate in the activities of designing performance appraisal system and driving performance appraisal process. Nearly one-fourth of the respondent line managers have no role to play in designing appraisal system for their employees.

**Internal Mobility:** The items such as career planning, transfer decisions, and promotion decisions are included in this study. The average mean score of all the three items together indicates moderate responsibility of line managers. It has been noticed that their responsibility level is higher in promoting employees

than career planning and transfers. Transfer decisions item has secured relatively lesser score.

**Overall, the line managers have not much role to play in this vital function of HRM**

**Compensation:** Salary decisions, incentive payment and employee benefits and services are included here to find out the level of responsibility of line managers in employee compensation related matters. Overall, the line managers have not much role to play in this vital function of HRM as the mean score of all three items together indicates the minimum responsibility of line managers on compensation issues. More than one-fourth of the line managers have no role to play with respect to salary issues of their employees; about 34% of the respondents have the same position with regard to incentive payments for their employees and nearly 50% of them are in a similar situation as far as employee benefits and services are concerned.

**Employee Relations:** Items such as grievance handling, discipline management, managing absenteeism, managing attrition and employee termination are included under employee relations. The responsibility level of line managers seems to be moderate on employee relations issues. However, they have relatively more responsibility in managing absenteeism, discipline, and handling grievance of their employees when compared to managing attrition and employee terminations.

**All line managers, irrespective of the organisations they belong to, their length of service and their functional areas, have moderate responsibility in HRM activities.**

**Comparative Analysis:** As presented in Table 3, the overall mean scores indicate not much difference in line managers' responsibilities in HRM. It seems that all line managers, irrespective of the organisations they belong to, their length of service and their functional areas, have moderate responsibility in HRM activities. However, line managers in IT and ITES business appear to be slightly more associated with HR activities fol-

lowed by manufacturing and service organisations. Ownership wise, on the whole, it seems that line managers of multinational companies, both Indian and foreign, are slightly better associated with HR activities than the others. With respect to length of service, it has been noticed that line managers with 5-10 years of service are slightly better associated with HR activities than their counterparts. It seems that line managers working in systems area are better involved in HR as compared to other line managers in the functional areas of operations, marketing and maintenance.

**Nature of Business:** One-way ANOVA test results (Table 4) show that out of 23 HR responsibility items, significant differences are found in three items such as orientation, promotion decisions, and employee benefits and services based on the nature of business. The results of Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons indicate that the involvement of line managers in new employee orientation programmes and promotion decisions is relatively more in IT/ITES organisations as compared to manufacturing and service organisations. However the responsibility of line managers belonging to manufacturing sector appears to be relatively more with respect to employee benefits and services as compared to others.

**Ownership:** As presented in Table 5, one-way ANOVA test results indicate that there is a significant difference in the responsibilities of line managers with respect to five items out of 23 items based on the ownership of the organi-

**Table 3: Overall Mean Scores**

SL. No	Item	Mean Scores
<b>1 Nature of business</b>		
a)	IT/ITES	3.05
b)	Manufacturing	3.01
c)	Service	2.94
<b>2 Ownership</b>		
a)	Indian MNC	3.11
b)	Foreign MNC	3.10
c)	Private sector	2.99
d)	Public sector	2.88
<b>3 Functional Area</b>		
a)	Systems	3.28
b)	Maintenance	3.10
c)	Operations	2.90
d)	Marketing	2.90
<b>4 Length of service</b>		
a)	Less than 5 years	3.00
b)	5 – 10 years	3.05
c)	10 and above years	2.93

**Table 4: One-way ANOVA Test Results on the Responsibility Items by Nature of Business<sup>§</sup>**

Responsibility Items	Mean Score (SD)			F-Statistic
	Manufacturing (N=73)	Service (N=37)	IT & ITES (N=66)	
Orientation	3.03 (1.18)	2.59 (1.54)	3.24 (1.25)	3.003*
Promotion Decisions	3.33 (1.27)	2.84 (1.07)	3.58 (1.05)	4.876*
Benefits and services	2.08 (1.09)	2.00 (1.31)	1.65 (0.89)	2.992*

\* Significant @ .05 level

§ Only those items for which F-Statistic is significant are shown

sations. They are: performance counseling, career planning, salary decisions, grievance handling, and employee termination. Based on the results of Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons, it has been observed that the line managers working in Indian multinational companies take more responsibility with respect to performance counseling and career planning of their employees as compared to other types of ownership. This is followed by private sector. However, the line managers in foreign multinational companies are more associated with salary decisions as compared to

others. Further, line managers in Indian multinational companies are more involved in their employee grievance redressal as compared to line managers in private sector. With respect to employee terminations, the line managers in foreign multinational companies have more responsibility than their counterparts.

**Line managers in Indian multinational companies are more involved in their employee grievance redressal as compared to line managers in private sector.**

**Table 5: One-way ANOVA Test Results on the Responsibility Items by Ownership<sup>§</sup>**

Responsibility Items	Mean Score (SD)				F-Statistic
	Public (N=50)	Private (N=51)	IMNC (N=42)	FMNC (N=33)	
Performance Counseling	3.48 (1.30)	3.24 (1.12)	3.93 (0.92)	3.55 (0.97)	3.058*
Career Planning	2.80 (1.48)	3.12 (1.14)	3.57 (1.27)	3.39 (0.86)	3.341*
Salary Decisions	2.10 (1.25)	2.71 (1.14)	2.62 (1.21)	3.00 (1.12)	4.327*
Grievance Handling	3.10 (1.04)	2.76 (0.99)	3.36 (0.98)	3.27 (1.04)	3.095*
Termination	2.26 (1.34)	2.65 (1.21)	2.62 (1.31)	3.06 (1.12)	2.728*

\* Significant @ .05 level

§ Only those items for which F-Statistic is significant are shown

**Length of Service:** One-way ANOVA test results show a significant difference in one of the items of responsibilities that is orientation (Table 6).

Interestingly, it has been observed that line managers with less than five years of experience have relatively more responsibility in new employee orientation programmes than those with five and above years of experience.

**Table 6: One-way ANOVA Test Results on the Responsibility Items by Length of Service**

Responsibility Items	Mean Score (SD)			F-Statistic
	Less than 5yrs.	5 - 10 yrs.	10yrs. & above	
Orientation	3.23 (1.19)	2.71 (1.23)	3.16 (1.59)	3.279* <sup>s</sup>

\* Significant @ .05 level

<sup>s</sup> Tukey's HSD test is significant for less than 5years visa-a-vis 5 - 10 years of service group

**Functional Areas:** There are variations in six HR responsibility items of line managers based on their respective functional areas (Table 7): recruitment, training evaluation, salary decisions, grievance handling, managing discipline, and managing attrition. Line managers in functional areas of maintenance and systems are more associated with recruitment activities as compared to their counterparts. Salary decisions, grievance handling, managing discipline, and managing attrition, involvement of the line managers in systems area is more than others.

**Table 7: One-way ANOVA Test Results on the Responsibility Items by Functional Area<sup>s</sup>**

Responsibility Items	Mean Score (SD)				F-Statistic
	Operation (N=60)	Marketing (N=50)	Systems (N=34)	Maintenance (N=32)	
Recruitment	2.28(1.19)	2.54(1.05)	2.97(1.34)	3.09(1.28)	4.257*
Training Evaluation	3.02(1.16)	2.70(1.15)	3.82(0.83)	3.09(1.15)	7.256*
Salary Decisions	2.22(1.21)	2.58(1.16)	3.03(1.09)	2.72(1.30)	3.617*
Grievance Handling	2.92(1.06)	2.94(0.98)	3.50(0.99)	3.25(0.98)	3.082*
Discipline Management	3.13(1.10)	2.96(1.32)	3.68(1.04)	3.22(1.21)	2.622*
Managing Attrition	2.38(1.09)	2.86(1.29)	3.12(1.23)	2.81(1.18)	3.134*

\* Significant @ .05 level

<sup>s</sup> Only those items for which F-Statistic is significant are shown

**Discussion**

It seems that line managers have moderate responsibility for all HR functions. This might be because of sharing of responsibility of HRM between HR department and line managers in these

organisations. All respondents' organisations have a separate HR depart-

**It seems that line managers have moderate responsibility for all HR functions.**

ment in place that conducts and coordinates HR activities. However, one way or the other, line managers are involved in HR activities. In some of the HR activities, namely, employee performance evaluation, performance counseling, training needs assessment, and nominating to training programmes, line managers have a high role to play. This will help the organisations in its human resource development efforts. However, with regard to employee compensation issues such as salary decisions, incentive payments and employee benefits and services, the role of line managers is not significant. This might be because of organisational policies and practices. Generally pay scales are decided and revised through collective bargaining process in the unionized organisations. Individual bargaining takes place for salary fixation in non-union situations during final selection process. HR department plays a critical role in this issue to bring equity, both internal and external, in employee compensation. Incentives might be decided in collective bargaining agreement or as per company policies and practices. Employee benefits and services are extended to employees as agreed in collective bargaining or company policies that are in conformity with the prevailing legal framework. HR department, being a centralized agency for coordinating HR function across the organisation, administer employee benefits and services. Thus line managers are relieved from these HR activities that help them to focus on their respective operation activities and HR issues of their employees at the operations level.

**With regard to employee compensation issues such as salary decisions, incentive payments and employee benefits and services, the role of line managers is not significant.**

### **Conclusions & Implications**

Line managers have higher responsibility with respect to performance management, and training and development and lower responsibility in employee compensation systems. There are significant differences in the role of line managers based on the nature of business undertaken by their organisations in the areas of performance counseling, career planning, salary decisions, grievance handling, and employee termination. Based on the ownership of the organisations; there are significant differences in line managers' role in performance counseling, career planning, salary decisions, grievance handling, and employee termination. Based on the length of the service of the respondents, however, the difference in the HR role of line managers is found only in new employee orientation. Functional area wise, the differences are observed in the responsibilities of recruitment, training evaluation, salary decisions, grievance handling, and managing discipline and attrition. On the whole, it seems that line managers have moderate responsibility for HRM. This indicates sharing of HR responsibility with HR department. It may be concluded that there is a partnership relationship between HR depart

ment and line managers in discharging people management function. This enables line managers to solve HR problems at the operations level with the help of HR department.

## References

- Beer, M., Spector, B., Lawrence, P., Mills, D., & Walton, R. (1985), *Human Resources Management: A General Manager's Perspective*, New York, Free Press.
- Bond, S. & Wise, S. (2003), "Family Leaves Policies and Devolution to the Line," *Personnel Review*, 32: 58-72.
- Brewster, C. & Larsen, H.H. (1992), "Human Resource Management in Europe: Evidence from Ten Countries", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 3 (3): 409-34.
- Brewster, C. & Larsen, H.H. (2000), "Responsibility in Human Resource Management: The Role of the Line," in Brewster, C. & Larsen, H.H. (Eds), *Human Resource Management in Northern Europe: Trends, Dilemmas and Strategy*, Oxford, Blackwells.
- Brewster, C. & Soderstrom, M. (1994), "Human Resources and Line Management", in Brewster, C., Hegewisch, A. (Eds), *Policy and Practice in European Human Resource Management*, London, Routledge.
- Budhwar, P.S. (2000), "Evaluating Levels of Strategic Integration and Devolvement of Human Resource Management in UK," *Personnel Review*, 29: 141-57.
- Hoogendoorn, J. & Brewster, C. (1992), "Human Resource Aspects: Decentralization and Devolution," *Personnel Review*, 21 (1): 4-11.
- Jackson, S. & Schuler, R.S. (2000), *Managing Human Resources: A Partnership Perspective*, Ohio: South-Western College Publishing.
- Larsen, H. H. & Brewster, C. (2003), "Line Management Responsibility for HRM: What is Happening in Europe?" *Employee Relations*, 25 (3): 228-44.
- McGovern, P., Gratton, L., Hope-Hailey, V., Stiles, P. & truss, C. (1997), "Human Resource Management on the Line?" *Human Resource Management Journal*, 7: 12-29.
- Perry, E. L. & Kulik, C. T. (2008), "The Devolution of HR to the Line: Implications for Perceptions of People Management Effectiveness", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(2): 262-73.
- Pigors, P. & Myers, C. A. (1973), *Personnel Administration: A point of View and a Method*, Tokyo: McGraw-Hill, 24-39.
- Renwick, D (2003), "Line Manager Involvement in HRM: An Inside View," *Employee Relations*, 25 (3): 262-80.