The Process of Implementing HRM Practices: a Case Study in the Dutch Federal Government

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Abstract

Yearly, organisations create and implemented new HRM practices. To make those HRM practices work in an effective way, their implementation is of great importance. The goal of this paper is to uncover the mechanisms in which new HRM practices develop in federal governmental organisations. We do so by studying the way in which the HRM practice itself develops over time. Results were obtained during a longitudinal ethnographic case study at a Dutch ministry which lasted more than one year, during which we investigated the implementation of HRM practices for increasing the influx of impaired workers. We have observed seven phases of HRM practice development throughout the implementation process. Our findings show that at the moment of the 'go live' of the HRM practice to employees, the HRM practice has not finished developing yet. Instead, a process of adaptation and negotiation starts, during which a dynamic back-and-forth goes on between policy makers, HRM professionals, and managers. Their interpretations, opinions and forms of power evolve, thereby influencing the HRM practice. As a result, in its process towards maturity, organisational actors continuously shape and reshape the HRM practice.

Keywords: *HRM implementation; HRM process; structuration theory; inclusive HRM*

Introduction

HRM implementation has increasingly become the topic of interest of HRM scholars. Most of their efforts focus on topics like HRM as a process (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte, De Winne, & Sels, 2012; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Sanders & Yang, 2016), gaps between intended, actual and perceived HRM (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Makhecha, Srinivasan, Prabhu, & Mukherji, 2016; Wright & Nishii, 2013), the role of line managers (Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, & Looise, 2013; Gilbert, De Winne, & Sels, 2011; Vermeeren, 2014), and employee perceptions of HRM (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008). This has provided valuable insights in what happens between the “moment” of taking the decision to create a new HRM practice, and its supposed effect on organisational performance. For instance, we now know that employees are not merely simple receivers of HRM practices, but that the manner of communicating and administering HRM to them, and their idea of the underlying reason for novel HRM practices, influences their view on it, and – hence – their reaction (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii et al., 2008). This has led to an end of seeing employees as ‘robots’ who will respond without any second thought to HRM instruments.

Insights from scholars have also taught us that administering HRM practices has primarily become the task of line managers (Guest, 1987; Valverde, Ryan, & Soler, 2006), and that often gaps arise between the way HRM is intended, and the way it is actually administered (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Makhecha et al., 2016; Piening, Baluch, & Ridder, 2014; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Furthermore, results show that those gaps can come into existence due to personal factors of line managers, like the capacity to implement HRM practices as intended, competencies to do

so, and support provided by their organisation throughout the process (Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, Kok, & Looise, 2006).

Even though all of these insights have increased our understanding of the HRM implementation process, it is not difficult to notice that HRM practices are taken as technical artefacts that do not change over time. However, theoretical insights from practice theorists like Wittgenstein (2010), Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Giddens (1979, 1984) suggest that practices – also *HRM* practices – do change over time. Practice theorists have come up with the concept of mutual constitution. With this, they refer to the recursive relationship between two phenomena, like structure and agency. Feldman and Orlikowski (2011: 1242), inspired by the concept of ‘mutual constitution’ explain that *“The notion of mutual constitution implies...that social regularities are always “in the making”; that is, they are ongoing accomplishments (re)produced and possibly transformed in every instance of action”*. Hence, structures – in the shape of practices – are *“constantly recreated by the same means whereby they express themselves”* (Gherardi, 2009: 31).

Above insights from Feldman and Orlikowski and Gherardi imply that practices are not static, but rather dynamic due to their constant recreation by actors who influence them, and whose behaviour they influence at the same time. As a result, at the moment a manager (does not) pass(s) an HRM practice to employees, the HRM practice has not finished developing yet. Instead, a process of negotiation and adaptation starts, during which the HRM practice evolves itself into an incorporated, fully working and fully structured organisational tool (Van Mierlo, Bondarouk, & Sanders, Forthcoming).

The goal of this paper is to identify phases and characteristics of the implementation process of HRM practices. Our study is embedded in a case study executed in a Dutch ministry during a period in which the policy was created to hire more impaired workers.

Theorising a dynamic implementation of HRM practices

In this study, the outlines of structuration theory (1984) serves as a lens through which we study the evolution of the HRM practice. Following structuration theory, social systems are produced and reproduced over time and space through an interplay between structure and action. Structure consists of rules and resources, and constrains our day-to-day behaviour by demarcating behavioural boundaries. However, within those boundaries a certain behavioural freedom exists, allowing actors can also act outside of the structure's behavioural boundaries. Therefore, all actors have a degree of agency; the ability to determine their own actions. Consequently, structure constrains *and* enables behaviour.

The key element of structuration theory is a recursive interaction between structure and action: *"the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize"* (Giddens, 1984: 25). In other words: structure influences (constrains and enables) our actions, but is also the result of those actions. Therefore, structure only exists because we act according to it. As a consequence, by acting, people recursively influence the structure that influences their own actions. By acting within the behavioural boundaries of a structure, actors confirm and reinforce it. However, if actors move outside a structure's behavioural boundaries, they have the ability to modify it. As illustrated by Feldman (2000),

already a few instances of deviation from routine behaviour can modify their structure. Looking at practices in this way implies that we *“understand organizational phenomena as dynamic and accomplished in ongoing, everyday actions”* (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011: 1250). However, this does not imply that social structures are constantly changing because over time they can become structured and more stable. This is the case when they are inscribed in the interpretive schemes of actors, perceived as legitimate, and facilities are in place (Taylor, Groleau, Heaton, & Van Every, 2001).

Given the fact that, like structure, HRM practices consist of (behavioural) rules and resources like means and information to execute them, and task descriptions of who does what (Van Mierlo & Bondarouk, 2015), we understand HRM practices as structures. Structuration theory provides a particularly valuable lens for studying the evolution of HRM practices, because the theory is *“inherently dynamic and grounded in human action”* (Halperin & Backhouse, 2007: 6). Furthermore, Barley and Tolbert (Barley & Tolbert, 1997: 94) identify the ability to study how *“how institutions are formed, reproduced, and modified through an interplay of action and structure”* as one of structuration theory’s (Giddens, 1984) strengths. Therefore, it gives us the ability to observe the dynamic process through which HRM practices go in detail.

Methods

Results were obtained during an ethnographic case study at a Dutch ministry (‘the Ministry’) which lasted more than one year, including 33 interviews, walking-the-floor observations, and analysis of over 250 policy documents (see Table 1). The context of the national federal

government offered an extremely dynamic, politically sensitive and complex environment for HRM implementation. These dynamics are due to the size of the organisation, interconnectedness of governmental departments, political processes and sensitivity, and multiple layers of governmental actors.

Insert Table 1 about here

To become acquainted with those dynamics, the first author of this paper was present at the Ministry at least one day per week for a period of one year. During this period, he had full access to the Ministry's facilities and had access (both on site and vpn) to its intranet. Furthermore, he participated in several departmental meetings, workshops and social gatherings which led to more insights concerning departmental and ministerial routines and process. Moreover, it gave the possibility to get to know potential interviewees and/or be introduced to them, and approach them (D'Adderio, 2008).

To start our data analysis, we first analysed documents to become familiar with the new HRM policy and map relevant organisational actors and departments. Our main contact person at the Ministry brought us subsequently in contact with several actors whom we interviewed. After that, we applied a snowballing technique to get in touch with other organisational actors. Our interviews were semi-structured, making use of a topic list which served to make sure that

most topics were discussed. The interviews took place over a period of seven months, and were terminated when they led to no new information. All interviews were recorded and transcribed through transcription software 'Transcribe', after which the transcripts were coded by making use of MaxQDA software.

To analyse our data, we created codes based on the modalities of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984). However, the purpose of our study was not to 'test' structuration theory or to illustrate it, but to use its insights to both give direction to our study, and help us collecting and analysing data from the case study. In total, we created five codes which are explained more in detail in the appendix:

- Code 1: Institutional elements (organisational structures taken for granted by most organisational actors).
- Code 2: Norms (formal (written) behavioural rules and informal (tacitly understood) moral imperatives).
- Code 3: Facilities (authorative resources to be able to influence behaviour, and allocative resources giving the ability to command over objects and materials).
- Code 4: Interpretive schemes (stocks of knowledge (beliefs, assumptions, opinions, and perceptions) used in communication).
- Code 5: Behaviour (the actions of actors, within or outside of behavioural boundaries of the structure).

The case: Influx of impaired workers

During our fieldwork, we investigated the implementation of HRM practices specifically developed for increasing the number of impaired workers within the Ministry. In 2015, the Dutch Participation Act became effective. This law makes it obligatory for all employers in the Netherlands to hire a certain amount of impaired employees. The goal is that between 2015 and 2026, Dutch employers hire 125.000 impaired workers, additional to those who were already working for them before the Participation Act. The Participation Act also describes who does, and who does not qualify as an impaired worker. Broadly spoken, people who are unable to gain minimum wage due to their physical or mental disability, and who are also registered by the Dutch employee insurance agency (UWV), qualify as impaired for the Participation Act. This means that employees who are impaired but earn more than the minimum wage, or those who are not registered, do not count for their employer's proportion.

HRM practices related to the influx of impaired workers are particularly interesting for our study because of their inherently dynamic nature. Not only are a lot of organisational actors involved in implementing (designing, administering, checking its progress), but it also affects a lot of their organisational routines. Whereas managers were used to fill their vacancies by uploading the job description to the government's website and inviting candidates, this process is less straightforward in the case of impaired workers. Furthermore, giving preference to a certain group of candidates merely because of their disability, also provokes a lot of mixed responses from actors throughout the entire organisation. As a result, we chose to study these

HRM practices because of their dynamic nature and multi-actor influence throughout the Ministry.

Findings

We have observed seven phases of HRM practice evolution throughout the implementation process. These elements are discussed below. Furthermore, we characterise each phase, and show which elements (institutional elements, interpretive schemes, facilities, norms, behaviour) are most prevalent in that phase, influencing other elements. We also illustrate this with a showing the most important elements per phase (Figure 1). It is important to add that even though we focus on some elements per phase, all elements plays a role during all the phases. The elements were only separated for analytical purposes.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Phase 1: Idea

The first phase of HRM evolution is characterised as the period in which basic concepts concerning the new HRM practice were created. This phase was mostly about getting *formal norms* in place by modifying *institutional elements*.

Policy makers intended to modify existing ministerial institutions related to the recruitment and selection processes within the Ministry. In the existing hiring structure (hence *before* adopting the policy to hire more impaired workers), there used to be little place for impaired workers. The marginal position of impaired workers within the Dutch government was even reinforced by the approach taken by the previous government a few years back, in which all ministries were given the explicit task to focus on their core tasks. Tasks like cleaning, landscaping, repro, and security were outsourced, leading to fewer opportunities for impaired workers. To combat this, in the first phase we observed that policy makers, through the coalition agreement, created new formal norms to start modifying the existing institutional elements of recruitment and selection.

We use the coalition agreement forming a new Dutch federal government (October 2012) as the starting point. During this phase the awareness for the need of an HRM policy change arose, leading to the decision to adopt novel HRM practices aimed at hiring impaired workers. This necessity was born some years earlier and was inspired by a previous policy that all government employers should consist for at least 1% of impaired workers:

“I have decided to initiate...a regulation which entails that the federal government reserves structurally a number of (job experience) vacancies of 1% for groups with a (long) distance to the labour market” (Ter Horst, 2009: 2).

When the new Dutch government was elected, policy makers decided to build on the decision of their predecessor and formalise the sustainable influx of impaired workers. However, they did not specify whom should be regarded as ‘impaired’, nor how to approach it:

“The bill Work to Ability will be replaced with a new Participation Act... The government designs a portion regulation for hiring impaired workers by large employers. We will take care that nobody will fall between two stools. While the amount of sheltered-jobs decreases, the amount of regular jobs for impaired workers increases” (Dutch Federal Government, 2012: 34).

The modified Participation Act describes the obligation for Dutch employers to hire impaired workers and was the result of long discussions between the newly formed government and its social partners, which are broadly defined all Dutch employers in the private sector affiliated to a labour union. The few details that were already described were that organisations of more than 25 employees, needed to consist for at least 5 per cent of impaired workers. Hence, basically only the final goal (more impaired employees in organisations in the Netherlands) was described in the first phase.

Phase 2: Conception

During the second phase preparations for the ‘go live’ were taken, and the phase was characterised by creating more specific goals. Therefore, this phase was mainly about getting

formal norms in place to start influencing the interpretive schemes of organisational actors (awareness and understanding of the HRM practice).

After the decision of the federal government to focus on the influx of impaired workers, the second step was to work out the details of who and how. These details were described in the newly adopted Job Agreement Act (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2016). Discussed in the Job Agreement Act are details like the amount of extra jobs for impaired workers, who qualifies as 'impaired' and who does not, but also the amount of hours that create one job:

“125.000 additional jobs for people with a labour disability in 2026 compared to the baseline measurement on 1 January 2013, of which 100.000 in the private sector and 25.000 in the public sector. A job counts as 25,5 paid hours per week”

The intended amount of 25.000 additional jobs for the public sector was subsequently subdivided into portions over the ten Dutch ministries and the High Councils of State (Team Inclusief, 2015: 3). Also in this phase decision makers started designing an infrastructure aimed at creating awareness, understanding and support in hiring impaired workers:

“The primary assignment is to support and facilitate the ministries as much as possible so they can achieve their proportion. Because of my involvement in prior programmes I knew that we needed a toolbox – even though I did not know about its contents. Also, we needed to create a newsletter, so I started asking for input in sessions and workshops with representatives of all ministries and services”
(Policy Maker 1).

Therefore, in the second phase of HRM evolution, policy makers were mostly busy communicating details of the new Participation Act and Job Agreement Act and how this practically needed to be done.

Phase 3: Go live

During the third phase – the ‘go live’ phase – policy makers made use of their allocative facilities (mainly instruments and support) to stimulate organisational actors to change their behaviour (routinized recruitment and selection processes) and start hiring impaired workers.

First attempts were made to stimulate organisational actors to start hiring impaired workers. We characterise this as the phase in which first needs played a major role. The activities we observed mostly during this phase were creating awareness and understanding of the new HRM practice, thereby influencing getting allocative and authoritative resources in place so that organisational actors were actually able to hire impaired workers. However, some frustrations regarding the design of the Participation Act and Job Agreement Act arose:

“Landscaping, catering, tasks of which you would say: there are opportunities for impaired workers, we insource them. But insourcing does not count, so that illustrates a big issue. It also raised questions from us to policy makers: ‘Why do you make it so complicated?’, ‘Why doesn’t a job of 10 hours count as one job?’”
(Coordinator 6).

Also in this phase, the ‘toolbox’ described by policy maker 1 in the previous phase began to take shape: (i) instruments to hire impaired workers were created, like a job-carving / job-creation approach available for all governmental departments, (ii) newsletters were sent on a monthly basis to give information on the why and how and give best-practices of successful hiring processes of impaired workers. Nevertheless, not all facilities had already been allocated in a coherent and effective way:

“They offer this job-carving/job-creation method, but through the governmental platform it costs €7000, while the city council offers it for free. They do the same complete trajectory, and that costs us nothing. So we had them do it. Nowadays, the government also does it for free, but when we needed it, they didn’t”
(Coordinator 1).

Therefore we see that the evolution of the HRM policy at this stage was still quite generic and involved some design issues that will influence the actual hiring process described in the next phase.

Phase 4: First struggles

In the fourth phase *interpretive schemes*, triggered in phase 2, played a particularly big role in determining the *behaviour* of organisational actors. This resulted in either actively looking for opportunities for accommodating and hiring impaired workers, or reasons not to.

Policy makers had hoped to see a positive response from managers regarding the influx of impaired workers. Indeed, we saw that some actors started looking for impaired workers enthusiastically, but we can characterise it mainly as a phase in which managers and coordinators responded impulsively to the new HRM policy, and made use of an ad-hoc approach: *“Oh I found a nice cv here. Does this person fit somewhere?”* (Coordinator 2). A manager explains: *“We started without a plan. We just selected some people, created some functions, no plan, nothing written down. Based on those experiences we have continued”* (Manager 1). An HRM professional has a similar experience: *“We simply picked up some CVs which we got through a contact person at the municipality. And then we just invited a couple of candidates”* (HRM professional 1).

Even though these examples show that some organisational actors started hiring impaired workers, these were exceptions. Often heard responses were that people agree with the need for more labour opportunities for impaired workers, but that they did not think the ministerial environment would be a fitting place for them:

"I say: leave those people in their protected environment, they shouldn't be placed here. Also because it asks for a lot of effort from our side. And you want to do your civic duty, but it asks so much of their supervisors. So does this really benefit [the impaired workers]?" (Manager 2).

A coordinator explains some typical struggles from organisational actors who are less enthusiastic about the policy:

"There are also a lot of people who look at the impaired workers with a lot of scepticism. They think the law is bad, they think impaired workers do not fit in our open-plan office, they think it costs a lot of money, and they think – and I agree with them – that having people bring our coffee and tea contrasts with the self-service policy that we have had for the last couple of years, which states that you have to get your own cup of coffee, print your own documents, and receive your own visitors" (Coordinator 4).

Therefore, in this phase a lot of different responses came from organisational actors within the Ministry concerning the implementation of the policy to hire impaired workers. Even though some organisational actors were indeed actively looking for and hiring impaired workers, this involved merely a small portion of the Ministry. Mainly, actors were struggling with questions

like whom to hire, where to find them and showed mixed feelings regarding the desire to actually hire employees who – possibly – would be less productive and need more guidance than others.

Phase 5: Playground

In this phase organisational actors like coordinators and policy makers, who tried to influence the interpretive schemes (understanding and views on the HRM practice) and informal norms (values, perceptions of formal norms) of organisational actors with their behaviour. Their goal was to get organisational actors to adopt a similar approach in future recruitment and selection processes of impaired workers, and also to make organisational actors interact more with impaired workers, thereby making them get used to working with impaired workers:

“Forty years back there were no sheltered workshops, impaired workers simply participated in the employment process. Then at some point people decided they should be together, so those became the sheltered workshops. We more or less took them away from the society, so nowadays people don’t know how to work with impaired workers, they don’t know how to interact with them. Now we have some ministries in which it has become a real thing, support grows, and people become enthusiastic to participate” (Policy maker 1).

Also in this phase of HRM practice development, we saw initiatives getting a more centralised and standardised character. However, most initiatives were try-outs of ‘what works’.

Coordinators took up bigger roles, partially shifting the hiring process from line managers towards themselves. This happened in the shape of pilots involving groups of impaired workers:

“I am now busy setting up three pilots for people cleaning up personnel files. We have to balance out what they will be doing, so we will start really simple, the most simple tasks, the minimal. Then we look at the level, who can do more, who can do less. But we also just leave them to it, so no pressure in the first couple of months, just let them get into the rhythm of working again. So in the first months they cannot do anything wrong, everything may go wrong. For us it is also new, so we also have to get used and be able to supervise them correctly. Also the supervisors have to learn” (Manager 3).

An HRM professional adds:

“Those floor assistants is just a pilot to see if they want to amplify that to other floor and ministries. But the people cleaning up personnel files, that is really meaningful work, work that needs to be done. So then it is beneficial to everyone, and those people feel useful as well” (HRM professional 2).

Therefore, instead of individual impaired workers being hired by individual managers going through a process of creating or identifying a vacancy, looking for potential candidates and finally

selection one, groups of impaired workers were placed by coordinators inside the Ministry's departments. Examples of this are pilots of employees who serve coffee and tea, cleaning up personnel archives, and receiving outside guests and bringing them to their destination within the Ministry's facilities. Another example is the yearly initiative during which impaired workers are invited to work for a day in the Ministry, as security guard, steward of the minister, or digitalising documents, with the goal to become acquainted to working in a ministerial setting, and for organisational actors to get used to impaired workers.

Phase 6: Pushing boundaries

The sixth phase showed a lot of dynamics. Mainly, we saw organisational actors like managers who were limited by formal norms (regulations) in their ability and willingness to hire impaired workers, hence influencing their behaviour. By making use of their authoritative facilities and allocative facilities like funding, they found ways to cope with this. However, by doing so they moved outside of the structure's behavioural boundaries.

The overall goal of the policy is to create a permanent influx of impaired workers into the Ministry. However, several regulations created frustrations for organisational actors who had to do the actual hiring. Firstly, only impaired workers who are registered with the employee insurance centre (a Dutch governmental labour institution, in Dutch: UWV) count as 'impaired' for the portion of 25.000 impaired workers. Secondly, only people whose disability restrains them from gaining at least the monthly minimum wage are registered as 'impaired'. As a consequence, employees who are registered as 'impaired', will stop contributing to the portion of 25.000 once

they earn more than the monthly minimum wage. Therefore, managers within the Ministry feared that, after going through an extensive process of looking for a qualified impaired worker, their new impaired worker would stop being labelled as 'impaired' after a couple of years due to the height of his or her salary.

The response of managers to this was to make use of certain exceptions in the Job Agreement Act by contracting impaired workers through job posting constructions. In that approach the impaired worker does not have a contract with the Ministry, but with his or her official employer (often a sheltered workshop) and is posted at the Ministry. This way, the impaired worker contributes to the portion of the Ministry, but does not lose the status of 'impaired' even though they earn more than minimum wage. It also gives managers the possibility to end the job posting on a short-term, whereas this is much more lengthy and complex for employees with regular contracts. The job posting construction was also being used for other reasons. One of those was that this way managers could outsource most of the managerial tasks concerning the impaired worker:

"I have them posted through [organisation] to make sure that all the fuss around it, like how do you supervise those people, how is it arranged with subsidies, what happens if someone drops out, those kinds of things. It is very awkward if the employer has to arrange all that" (Manager 4).

A coordinator explains:

“Since it is a lot of work which kept on increasing, we outsourced the recruitment and selection. Our contact person places new vacancies, talks with the manager, and makes sure a candidate is found and placed... Now we are in the phase of all sorts of practical stuff like subsidies, testing how labour-impaired they are, that is quite tricky. And who does what? Who initiates it? Is that the task of the HRM advisor? Well, this organisation arranges everything for you. Then you know exactly what it will cost as well. Otherwise, we have to arrange all of that ourselves” (Coordinator 5).

Another reaction that several managers had after learning that impaired workers who earn more than the monthly minimum wage do not count for the portion of 25.000, was that they actively started looking for employees who could earn less than the minimum wage. However, this was a complex strategy, since per definition employers are not allowed to offer a salary that is below the minimum wage. As a consequence, they offered work to impaired workers for only a couple of hours per week, as long as the total income did not reach the *monthly* minimum wage. Hence, even though their hourly salary was in accordance with the minimum wage, the amount of hours worked was so low, that their monthly salary was lower than the monthly minimum wage, thus making those impaired workers indeed count as such.

In the summer of 2016, the Minister of State responsible for the Participation Act and the influx of impaired workers published quantitative results over 2015. The results were not

measured on the level of the particular ministry, but of all organisations in the public sector. The outcome was positive: the goal to hire 3.000 new impaired workers in 2015 was exceeded by 2.453 employees. Surprisingly, even though most impaired workers were active at the Ministry in a job posting construction, she reacted positively to the results: *“A possible explanation can be that employers need to get used to impaired workers, or that employers see job postings as a good way to give obtain first experiences...Hence, in my opinion a job positing is not per definition a not-sustainable job”* (Klijnsma, 2016: 3).

To summarise, even though organisational actors were limited in their hiring process of impaired workers, and felt threatened in their flexibility for doing so, they found ways to maintain a certain level of flexibility. This was even the case if hiring impaired workers through job positing constructions if this meant paying them a (substantially) higher salary, as long as this gave them more control over the type and duration of the contract. This approach was clearly an example of organisational actors pushing the boundaries of the new HRM policy.

Phase 7: Maturity?

In our study, we saw that the behaviour of organisational actors like managers in the previous phase, has influenced formal norms (written behavioural rules) of the HRM practice, possibly leading to a modified institutional elements (stable behaviour over time and space).

In the last phase of the implementation of new HRM practices, we saw that the behaviour of organisational actors responsible for hiring impaired workers in the previous phase(s), leads

to adaptations to the design of the HRM practice itself. Therefore, we have characterised this phase as 'policy adaptation'.

In the previous phase, several points of concern led to managers making use of job postings, and/or outsourcing operational tasks like recruitment and selection, management, and administrative tasks as well. One of those concerns was the fear that after a long and costly process of recruiting an impaired worker, he or she would drop out due to health issues or mental problems. After all, the fact that an employee is labelled as 'impaired', creates the idea with some managers that the risk of absenteeism or dropping out might be quite high as well: *"In the beginning I was told that 20% would drop out in the first weeks"* (Manager 2). To counter this, the employee insurance agency created an insurance policy which pays the salary of impaired workers in case of illness. Thus, the objective of this insurance policy was to stimulate employers to hire impaired workers on a fixed-term, instead of through job postings.

A second way in which the behaviour of those actors responsible for the influx of impaired workers has influenced the eventual design of the policy is also related to the job postings. In October 2017, the Netherlands obtained a new national government. One of their decisions stated in the coalition agreement was that impaired workers earning more than the monthly minimum wage do no longer lose their status of 'impaired worker':

“Jobs of impaired workers who have come to earn more than the minimum wage, will continue to count (the ‘t+2’ regulation). This avoids that employers are discouraged to invest in their people” (VVD, CDA, D66 & ChristenUnie, 2017, p. 26).

As a consequence, the massive usage of job postings – going against the goal of the policy to create *sustainable* jobs for impaired workers, has stimulated policy makers to modify the policy, so that more sustainable jobs would be created for impaired workers. However, strangely enough, policy makers have also created an organisation that actually enhances job postings: the newly design Governmental Participation Organisation (GPO) consists of a database of impaired workers whom governmental employers can hire through job postings (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2017). Therewith, the employers are able to outsource all sorts of operational tasks like recruitment and selection, supervision, training, and administration of impaired workers. However, it also institutionalises the previously created practice of job postings. However, the difference with job postings as described earlier is that impaired workers contracted through the GPO are anyway employed by the Ministry, whereas this was not the case with earlier job postings. In those cases, impaired workers were often still employed through sheltered workshops – relatively closed-off from the rest of the society.

Discussion

During the evolution of HRM practices, a lot of dynamics are going on. We have seen a process in which institutional elements, norms, facilities, interpretive schemes, and behaviour influenced each other recursively and in different phases. All seven phases have been combined in Figure 2, of which the numbers indicate the phase to which they correspond.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Interestingly, formal norms and institutional elements played a major role in both the first and the last phase of HRM evolution. It seems that to change the existing HRM practice, formal norms needed to be in place to create understanding and awareness and start influencing institutions (stable behaviour). Subsequently, facilities and interpretive schemes started to influence behaviour of organisational actors. In the end, this led to organisational actors modifying the formal norms of the HRM practice by their behaviour. Each of the phases is characterised by its own set of dynamics of elements influencing each other.

We have also seen dynamics with the key group of actors per phase and their behaviour. Whereas the first two phases were mostly done by top management and policy makers, or in the case of the Ministry by Ministers and Ministers of State, this differed quite a lot in the subsequent phases. In the third phase, we observed mainly policy makers creating awareness and allocating

resources like tools and information. In the fourth phase, organisational actors like managers whose task it was to hire impaired workers, either started with all sorts of approaches to find impaired workers, or looked for reasons not to. In the fifth phase, coordinators and policy makers responded to the behaviour of managers by trying to create a more centralised approach and taking over the hiring process, which in the sixth phase evolved into managers pushing the boundaries of the policy by making use of all sorts of contracting constructions like job postings to outsource most operational tasks. Eventually, in the seventh phase this led to policy makers at the highest level modifying the overall policy.

It is hard to assess the duration of each of the phases, since this mainly depends on the way in which organisational actors approach the new HRM policy. For instance, in departments of the Ministry in which key actors like HRM professionals or managers showed affinity with impaired workers due to personal experiences with disabled people, like a family member, some of the phases seemed to flow more smoothly than in departments in which people were less committed to impaired workers. Also, the process is not a logical step-by-step flowing from phase 1 to phase 7, but might include going back some phases before advancing to a more evolved HRM policy. However, our findings do show us that there are several key change agents whose behaviour can contribute a lot to the development and implementation of novel HRM policies. In the case of recruitment and selection practices, these change agents are the managers. We have seen a lot of initiatives of HRM professionals and policy makers to smoothen the hiring of impaired workers, but in the end, the hiring has to be largely done by the managers who will be the supervisors of the new employees.

In Table 2, we give an overview of the dynamics of HRM implementation at the Ministry per phase. It demonstrates that HRM implementation is a process in which the HRM practice influences the behaviour of organisational actors. But at the same time, those actors recursively and continuously influence the shape of the HRM practice with their behaviour (particularly in phases 5 and 7). That the HRM practice influences the behaviour of organisational actors, is illustrated by the entire policy to hire 25.000 impaired workers for the public sector. This creates a certain pressure to managers to, throughout recruitment and selection processes, actively look for impaired workers, or look for possible jobs which impaired workers could be doing within their department.

Insert Table 2 about here

We observed the recursive influence of behaviour on the practice in the adjustment in regulations that the policy makers did. Thereby they redesigned the HRM practice to stimulate employers to hire impaired workers through fixed contracting forms, instead of job postings. Therefore, looking back at structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), we have clearly seen all aspects of the theory that we have used (institutional elements, action, interpretive schemes, resources, and norms) playing a role in the HRM implementation process. These findings add to earlier work of Van Mierlo & Bondarouk (2015), in which the authors theorise a continuous recursive cycle

between HRM practices on the one hand, and behaviour of all organisational actors on the other hand.

These findings might raise the question whether there will always be seven phases, and if these will develop in the same way as it has in our paper. The organisation that we studied is located in a very dynamic ministerial context. Therefore, it is save to state that probably organisations active in a similar dynamic context will go through similar HRM implementation processes. However, factors like the length of the implementation and its intensity might differ. We perceive these questions as very interesting for future research, hence we encourage researchers to investigate the dynamics of HRM implementation in other organisations, both in similar and different contexts as the Ministry.

Our findings illustrate the dynamics of HRM system development (Arthur & Boyles, 2007; Renkema, Meijerink, & Bondarouk, 2017; Schuler, 1992): during the process of HRM implementation, HRM starts out with a philosophy of how organisations want to manage their employees. In this case, it was the statement of the Dutch national government to provide more opportunities on the labour market for impaired workers. Next, this crystallised towards HRM policies, stating more concrete goals like who is perceived to be an 'impaired worker', how many do organisations need, and how many hours count as one job. In later phases, organisational actors like HRM professionals and coordinators, but also managers responsible for hiring impaired workers, created HRM practices aimed at actually recruiting and selecting impaired workers. Possibly the final goal of the HRM system, is to create an HRM climate (Bowen & Ostroff,

2004; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016) in which impaired workers are a normal part of the work force of all Dutch organisations.

Conclusion

In this paper, we intended to study the dynamics of novel HRM practices during their implementation, as well as to identify phases and characteristics of the process. Our findings show that in its process towards maturity, organisational actors continuously shape and reshape the HRM practice. We have also shown that each of the seven phases which we identified, can be characterised by different key actors, different characteristics, and a different shape of the HRM practice. This clearly indicates that the process of HRM implementation is indeed very dynamic, and as a result, at the moment of the 'go live' of the HRM practice to employees, the HRM practice has not finished developing yet. Instead, a process of adaptation and negotiation starts, during which a dynamic back-and-forth goes on between policy makers, HRM professionals, and managers. Their interpretations, opinions and forms of power evolve, thereby influencing the HRM practice and the process of HRM implementation.

Appendix: Overview of codes

First-order construct	Second-order construct	Third-order construct
<p>Institutional elements:</p> <p>Organisational structures that are taken for granted by most organisational actors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable behaviour similar across time and space • Unconsciously executed routines • Generally accepted organisational processes • Generally accepted organisational rules 	
<p>Interpretive schemes:</p> <p>Stocks of knowledge (beliefs, assumptions, opinions and perceptions) used in communication about the HRM practices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internalisation of one's role in the HRM practice • Usefulness of the HRM practice • Design of the HRM practice • The reason the HRM practice was designed and its goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of the HRM practice's existence (part of internalisation) • Understanding of the HRM practice (part of internalisation) • Views on the usefulness of the HRM practice • Views on the design of the HRM practice • Ideas on the goals of the HRM practice
<p>Facilities:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritative facilities (the capacity to give commands to other actors) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchical positions of organisational actors

<p>Authoritative or allocative means which can be transformed into power</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority in practice • Ability to enforce complying with the rules
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocative facilities (over objects and materials) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Tools • Information
<p>Norms: Formal and informal norms enacted through sanctions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal norms (written behavioural rules) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Codes of conduct • Rights • Obligations • Sanctions (defining behavioural boundaries)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal norms (tacitly understood moral imperatives) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of formal norms (internalisation) • Behaviour seen as acceptable • Values • Traditions • Routines

<p>Behaviour:</p> <p>Actors' actions, either within or (partly) outside the behavioural boundaries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routinizing (behaviour within the behavioural boundaries of the HRM practice) • Deviant (behaviour that crosses the behavioural boundaries) 	
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Figures

Figure 1: Overview of HRM implementation phases and their most important elements

Figure 2: The dynamics of HRM evolution.

Legend to the figure: the numbers indicate the phase(s) in which elements influence each other.

Table 1: Data sources

Data sources	
Key informants	Policy makers, coordinators, middle- and line managers, advisors
Document analysis	Policy documents, emails, documents, meeting notes, promotional leaflets
Number of people interviewed	33 (28 hours)
Observations	Walking-the-floor notes

Table 2: Overview of phases and their characteristics

	Phase 1: Idea	Phase 2: Conception	Phase 3: Go live	Phase 4: First struggles	Phase 5: Playground	Phase 6: Pushing boundaries	Phase 7: Maturity?
Practice characteristics	Basic concepts	More specific goals	First needs	Ad-hoc / impulsive	Centralisation / standardisation	Recalcitrant behaviour	Policy-adaptation
Key actors	Top management & policy makers	Top management & policy makers	Policy makers	Managers	Policy makers Coordinators	Managers	Top management
Main element(s)	Formal norms	Formal norms	Allocative facilities	Interpretive schemes	Behaviour	Formal norms & Facilities	Behaviour
Element(s) influenced by main element(s)	Institutional elements	Interpretive schemes	Behaviour	Behaviour	Informal norms & interpretive schemes	Behaviour	Formal norms & Institutional elements?

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