What works for whom in which circumstances in successful HRM implementation? A realist synthesis

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ABSTRACT

High-quality HR practices do not always yield positive outcomes due to implementation shortcomings, which has led to the shift in focus from the content of HR practices to their process of implementation. Despite this shift, there remains a lack of systematic understanding of how and why implementation of HR practices succeeds or fails. To address this gap, a comprehensive review of effective implementation mechanisms, influencing contextual factors, and resulting outcomes is needed. Consequently, this study adopts a realist synthesis approach following the RAMESES publication standards to identify and synthesise existing evidence from empirical studies of HRM implementation. Reviewing 62 articles, we extracted and proposed four realist programme theories based on the process mechanisms attributed to actors of line managers, employees, senior managers, and HR departments. These realist programme theories explain how the process mechanisms bring about different outcomes in different contexts, hence, they enhance the understanding of 'what works for whom in which circumstances?' regarding HRM implementation.

1. Introduction

In addressing the HRM black box (i.e., relating HRM to firm performance), the focus has traditionally been on the content of HR practices (Boselie et al., 2005; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005), mainly considering high-performance work systems as HR practices that positively impact organisational outcomes (Combs et al., 2006; Jiang et al., 2012). However, well-designed HR practices do not necessarily result in positive individual and organisational outcomes (Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Since the mere quality of HR practices is not enough to achieve such outcomes, there has been a shift from focusing on the content of HRM to the process of HRM (Katou et al., 2014; Sanders et al., 2014), broadly understood as "the general manner and activities through which HRM content is *implemented* and leads to HRM outcomes" (Steffensen et al., 2019, p.2390). Despite the growth in the number of studies focusing on HRM implementation in recent years

(Hewett et al., 2024; Pak et al., 2024; Pak & Heidarian Ghaleh, 2024; Suhail et al., 2024) and a dedicated special issue to the topic (Bondarouk et al., 2018; Bondarouk et al., 2016), we still lack a systematic understanding of what influences success or failure when implementing HR practices (Trullen et al., 2020). This is the motivation of the present research.

We define HRM implementation as a "dynamic process that starts with the decision to introduce a new (or significantly change an existing) HRM policy or practice […], during which relevant HRM actors […] engage with it […] until the policy or practice becomes routinised" (Trullen et al., 2020, p.150). Based on this definition, we make several assumptions. First, we understand that the adoption of HR practices (Bondarouk et al., 2017; Bui, 2019) and their implementation are linked. Adoption precedes formulation and execution (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Mirfakhar et al., 2023), and different aspects of adoption (e.g. the type of practice introduced or the reasons for introducing it) may

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influence the implementation process and its effectiveness. Second, we adopt a multi-actor lens acknowledging that different agents in HRM, ranging from HR professionals (e.g., Meijerink & Bondarouk, 2018; Trullen et al., 2016) as the process owners, to line managers (e.g., Adame-Sánchez et al., 2016; Bos-Nehles et al., 2013) as the main implementers (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013), senior managers (e.g., Mirfakhar et al., 2023; Tourky et al., 2020), and even employees (e.g., Budjanovcanin, 2018; Shah et al., 2017) can shape implementation.

Finally, we also adopt a contextual —and hence contingent-perspective on implementation, in the sense that we acknowledge that implementation processes will be affected by contextual factors at multiple levels of analysis. Even though organisational and team level factors such as work climate may be the most frequent influences, macro-economic, political, and institutional influences can also play a role in different aspects of HRM implementation (Mirfakhar et al., 2018). For instance, recruitment and selection decisions are strongly influenced by political networks (rather than candidate skills) in some countries (Malik et al., 2022; Mirfakhar et al., 2023), and individual pay-for-performance is more used in nations with weaker labour regulation and more masculine cultures (Gooderham et al., 2018). In addition, macro level factors may also influence the role of different actors in HRM implementation. For example, Brewster et al. (2015) showed that the delegation of HRM responsibilities to line managers was less likely in liberal market economies, where trade unions were more antagonistic and managers had less knowledge of employment legislation.

While there have been reviews of the antecedents of effective HRM implementation (Mirfakhar et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2024) and a few studies that have looked at contextual factors at macro, mezzo, and micro levels (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Sikora & Ferris, 2014), still missing is a comprehensive review of the *mechanisms* through which effective implementation can be achieved and the elements of the *context* that influence the activation of such mechanisms. In addition to the mechanisms of effective HRM implementation and their influencing contextual factors, studying the *outcomes* of implementation of HR practices would portray what can be expected from effective implementation of HR practices. Systematic reviews focusing specifically on this chain of mechanisms are still lacking (Trullen et al., 2020), thus the exploration of the mechanisms ensuring effective implementation of HR practices remains an unachieved objective of HRM research and practice. Therefore, in this study, we explore 'what works for whom in which circumstances?' regarding HRM implementation. To answer this question, we synthesise and organise evidence from empirical studies of HRM implementation based on a realist synthesis.

Realist synthesis is a theory-driven, qualitative, evidence-based literature review (Pawson et al., 2005) that can help us identify the underlying *Mechanisms* associated with HRM implementation in the literature (i.e., what made the implementation of HR practices work or not work?), the *Contexts* under which the mechanisms operated (i.e., what were the conditions that influenced the operation of these mechanisms?), and the *Outcomes* produced (i.e., what were the observed patterns of outcomes) (Pawson et al., 2005). These form Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) configurations (where Context + Mechanisms = Outcomes). Utilising CMO configurations, this approach synthesises empirical evidence into realist programme theories. Realist programme theories hypothesise how and why HR implementation works, addressing the links between the mechanisms triggered by the HRM implementation, the contexts under which HRM implementation has occurred, and the outcomes eventually produced (Pawson et al., 2005).

The present realist synthesis aims to identify and synthesise empirical evidence from the HRM implementation literature into realist programme theories. To achieve this aim, its objectives are to: identify empirical studies on HRM implementation; explore the research aims and methodologies of these studies; extract themes about strategies, interventions, contexts, actors, process mechanisms, and outcomes; and propose realist programme theories. Given the aim and objectives, the

overall research question of this realist synthesis is '*Which realist programme theories can be proposed based on the empirical evidence from the HRM implementation literature?*'.

The contribution of this study is three-fold: Firstly, it proposes antecedent-outcome configurations in HRM implementation in the form of realist programme theories which can facilitate effective HRM implementation. Secondly, since HRM implementation is a multi-actor process, realist programme theories are separately provided for each actor involved, also depicting the links between the perceptions and behaviours of each actor in the implementation process. Thirdly, these realist programme theories help develop, implement, and evaluate future HRM implementation endeavours as they enhance the understanding of what works for whom in which circumstances. Realist programme theories are useful in extending current contingency perspectives on HRM implementation (Intindola et al., 2017; Trullen et al., 2024). Two distinctive aspects of the present study are its multi-actor focus and the prominent role of context. While a multi-actor framework was advanced by Bos-Nehles et al. (2021) in connecting the HRM implementation and HRM system strength literatures, this is the first time that multiple actors are considered simultaneously in reviewing empirical findings on HRM implementation. Secondly, while Mirfakhar et al. (2018) already adopted a multi-level framework in looking at context in their own review of antecedents of effective HRM implementation, we go one step further and link these contextual influences to the different actors' perceptions and implementation behaviours.

Next, we review the realist synthesis method and provide details about the sampled papers and their analysis. The following section presents the results for each different actor. We end with a discussion of the results, limitations of the study, and future research lines.

2. Methodology

A realist synthesis is concerned with developing and refining realist programme theories (Pawson et al., 2005). This review approach focuses on linking contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes in a process of systematically and iteratively synthesising empirical evidence from the relevant literature (Wong et al., 2013). This realist synthesis entails six steps (Pawson, 2006): (1) identifying a review question; (2) formulating an initial realist programme theory; (3) searching for primary studies; (4) selecting the studies and appraising their quality; (5) extracting, analysing, and synthesising relevant data; and, (6) refining the initial realist programme theory. We addressed the first step in the introduction, we report the next steps below. We report our study according to the RAMESES publication standards (Wong et al., 2013). The RAMESES publication standards comprise 19 guidelines covering the abstract, introduction, methods, results, and discussion sections of realist syntheses. These standards were developed to enhance the transparency, consistency, and rigour of reporting realist syntheses (Wong et al., 2013).

2.1. Formulating the initial realist programme theory

The first and second authors formulated an initial realist programme theory. This process involved a scoping literature search in combination with discussing insights to formulate the initial realist programme theory. These authors started with searching for literature reviews on HRM implementation (i.e., Mirfakhar et al., 2018; Trullen et al., 2020). They read and discussed these reviews to identify the main mechanisms of HRM implementations and to determine the search terms. Given the various mechanisms of HRM implementations, it was decided not to limit the search to any specific mechanism to ensure a comprehensive search. As such, the initial realist programme theory was formulated, at an abstract level, as: 'HRM implementation works through different mechanisms which bring about various outcomes in different contexts'.

2.2. Searching for primary studies

A systematic literature search was conducted to refine the initial realist programme theory. While systematic literature search is not usually used in realist syntheses, it was conducted to limit the search process. The search was performed in Scopus, Business Source Complete, ProQuest/ Social Science Database, PsycArticles and PsycINFO, and Web of Science/ Social Science Citation Index in June 2024. Two search terms of 'human resource management' and 'implementation' were used; free text words (truncated as required) in combination with Boolean operators "OR" and "AND" were used. We applied two exclusion criteria: non-English language papers and studies pre-2000 (since HRM implementation can be considered as a relatively new concept in the HRM literature) were excluded during our search in the databases. Appendix A shows the search queries in the databases and Fig. 1 displays the search process in a flow diagram.

2.3. Selecting studies and appraising their quality

The systematic search resulted in 14,201 articles. We removed 2603 duplicates. The remaining 11,598 articles were title and abstract screened independently by the first two authors. Only empirical studies on HRM implementation were included. After title screening, 10,999 articles were excluded, resulting in 599 articles. After abstract screening, 226 more articles were removed, resulting in 373 articles. By following RAMESES publication standards, the full-text screening of the remained 373 articles entailed two stages: first, applying inclusion criteria and, second, appraising quality.

In the first stage, we applied four inclusion criteria: (1) study focus: we included empirical articles that reported any mechanism of HRM implementation; (2) study design: we accepted any study design including longitudinal, cross-sectional, and one-time single case studies; (3) type of data: we included studies which used qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods; and, (4) we included articles from journals with quality ratings of 4*, 4, and 3 according to Association of Business School (ABS) academic journal quality guide 2021. After applying inclusion criteria, the first two authors agreed to exclude 299 articles and retained 74 articles.

In the second stage, we assessed the quality of the 74 articles. According to the RAMESES publication standards, realist quality appraisal
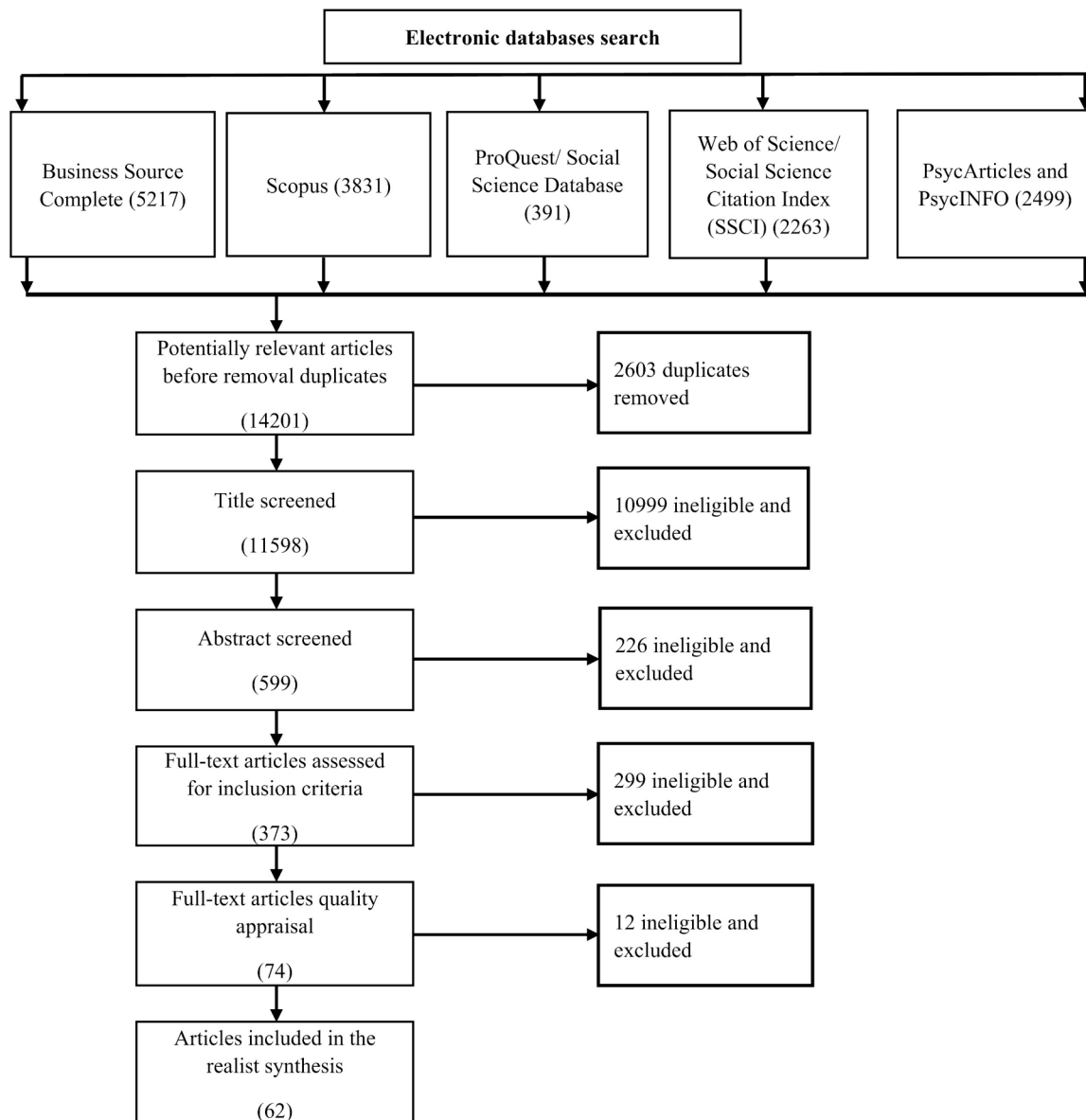

Fig. 1. The search process in a flow diagram.

is done through assessing the relevance and rigour of the evidence that can be used in the realist synthesis (Wong et al., 2013). First, relevance was assessed by examining whether the included articles contain data that can be used to refine the initial realist programme theory. Studies with rich data on how HRM implementation influence outcomes were classified as 'thick' and were prioritised for the synthesis. Studies with limited such data but containing evidence like contextual factors were categorised as 'thin' and were used to better refine the initial realist programme theory. Second, rigour was assessed by examining whether the methods to collect and analyse data were credible and trustworthy. The first two authors independently assessed the relevance and rigour of the 74 articles and excluded 12 articles for insufficient relevance. Both authors agreed on the final inclusion of 62 articles.

2.4. Extracting, analysing, and synthesising relevant data

Building on the evolution of CMO configurations, particularly the development of ICAMO (Intervention-Context-Actor-Mechanism-Outcome) and SCMO (Strategy-Context-Mechanism-Outcome) models (Abejirinde et al., 2018; De Weger et al., 2020), the first two authors conducted a comprehensive data extraction on HRM implementation strategies, actors, interventions, process mechanisms, contextual factors, and outcomes. Their analysis focused on how process mechanisms and interventions functioned, emphasising the roles of key actors—line managers, employees, senior managers, and the HR department—in implementing HRM practices. The data were synthesised by identifying which actors were responsible for delivering HR practices, how each process mechanism operated, the contextual factors influencing these mechanisms, and the resulting outcomes. Additionally, they reported on HR implementation strategies and specific interventions (i.e., the HR practices central to the implementation process). This approach provides a holistic view of HRM implementation. Table 1 illustrates the conceptualisation of strategies, actors, interventions, process mechanisms, contexts and outcomes. In cases where in a study, multiple process mechanisms collectively contributed to outcomes without a clear causal link, the outcomes were attributed to all relevant mechanisms.

The processes of data extraction, analysis, and synthesis were iterative. Regarding data extraction and analysis, the first two authors independently extracted and analysed data and recorded the findings. Regarding data synthesis, the first two authors, together in ten meetings, checked the findings in Excel sheets against all included articles and synthesised the analysed data into four realist programme theories. As such, through ongoing, iterative processes of data extraction, analysis, and synthesis as required by the RAMESES publication standards (Wong et al., 2013), we refined the initial realist programme theory by proposing four empirical realist programme theories.

3. Results

3.1. Document characteristics

The search strategies resulted in 62 relevant HRM implementation studies. Appendix B presents study designs, methods used to collect data, and countries where the data were collected. The included studies employed diverse study designs and data collection methods. In terms of study design, we categorised them as cross-sectional (44 studies), longitudinal (7 studies), and case study (11 studies). For data collection methods, studies utilised quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods (i. e., both quantitative and qualitative methods). Among them, 45 studies employed quantitative methods, primarily through surveys (44 studies) with three of these also incorporating archival data, and one using structured interviews. Sixteen studies utilised qualitative methods, employing interviews (16 studies), with five of them also reviewing relevant documents, two using firm web portals, and one employing focus groups. One study used mixed methods. The studies were conducted in various countries: twelve in the UK, eight in the Netherlands,

Table 1
Definitions of realist concepts.

Concept	Definition/description
Strategies	**Strategies:** The overarching objectives and comprehensive approach to HRM implementation within the organisations (De Weger et al., 2020).
Interventions	**Interventions:** Single HR practice or groups of HR practices focused on in the HRM implementation, helping organisations to achieve a specific objective (Abejirinde et al., 2018; De Weger et al., 2020). They refer to the nature of the HR practices (i.e., 'what to'), for instance, or recruitment and selection, or high-performance HR practice (Hu et al., 2022; Roodbari et al., 2022).
Actors	**Actors:** organisational members who implemented (delivered) HR practices, for instance line managers (Abejirinde et al., 2018).
Mechanisms	**Mechanisms:** What made the implementation of HR practices work? (Pawson et al., 2005; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). They answer the question: What works? **Process Mechanisms:** Actors' (implementers') perceptions–which involves the reception, processing, and interpretation of information related to HRM implementation– and behaviours–which involves the execution of actions to implement HRM–<u>during the HRM implementation</u>, which can explain various outcomes of HR practices (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018; Hu et al., 2022; Roodbari et al., 2022). They refer to the process of implementing HR practices (i.e., 'how to'), for instance, line managers engagement in the implementation of HR practices.
Contexts	**Contexts:** The conditions in which HRM implementation are introduced, that influenced the operation of these mechanisms (Pawson et al., 2005; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The answer the question: For whom and in which circumstances? Following the IGLOO framework (Nielsen et al., 2018), we differentiate four layers of context: Individual: Actors' personal characteristics, attitudes, and behaviours, <u>before the HRM implementation</u>, that influence HRM implementation and effectiveness. Leader: Roles of leaders (senior managers and middle managers) that influence the HRM implementation by their followers. Organisational: Strategies, resources, structures, policies, and culture that directly affect HRM implementation. Overarching: External environment, including economic conditions, industry trends, legal frameworks, and societal norms that shape the context in which HR practices operate. In addition, following Ability, Motivation, Opportunity (AMO) framework, we differentiate three types of contextual factors: Ability: An individual's physiological and cognitive capacities for HRM implementation. Motivation: An individual's willingness and desire to engage in HRM implementation. Opportunity: Environmental factors beyond personal control that influence HRM implementation.
Outcomes	**Outcomes:** The observed patterns of outcomes which are produced by the mechanisms (Pawson et al., 2005; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Following a temporal perspective on outcomes (Kilroy et al., 2023; Roodbari et al., 2022), we differentiate three types of outcomes: Proximal (short-term): Immediate changes in perceptions of organisational members (actors and other stakeholders) towards HRM implementation following its introduction. Intermediate (medium-term): Shifts in organisational members' attitudes towards HR practices and the overall HRM situation within the organisation. Distal (long-term): Long-term changes in organisational members' general motivations, attitudes, behaviours, wellbeing, and overall organisational performance.
Realist Programme Theory	*If* there are specific contextual factors, **then** specific mechanisms produce specific proximal, intermediate, and distal outcomes (Roodbari et al., 2022).

eight in the USA, six in China, four each in Belgium and South Korea, three each in Australia and Spain, and two studies were conducted in Ireland. Furthermore, one study was conducted in each of the following countries: Canada, Finland, Mexico, Germany, Greece, Norway, India, and Iran. Additionally, three studies involved pairs of countries, one involved European countries, one involved 11 countries, and one involved 12 countries.

In Realist Synthesis, findings are known as realist programme theories. In what follows, findings are categorised based on the actors involved in HRM implementation, and for each actor, contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes are presented. Table 2 shows strategies and interventions in each study.

3.2. Main findings

3.2.1. Actors: Line managers

3.2.1.1. Process mechanisms. In our review of HRM implementations, we identified two key components of line managers' involvement: perceptions and behaviours. Line managers' perceptions were crucial, influencing their HRM implementation based on their HRM-related competencies (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013), internalisation of the HR practices (i.e., valuing and committing to the HR practices) (Björkman et al., 2011), HRM philosophy (Krachler, 2023), and motivation to invest in the implementation of HR practices (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2015; Katou et al., 2021; Trullen et al., 2016; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018). Alignment with HR professionals on HR devolution (Op de Beeck et al., 2016) also played a significant role. Practice-wise, their attitudes towards HR practices (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017), perceptions of intended HR practices (Kossek et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2022; Yang & Arthur, 2021), and views on HR as enabling (i.e., perception of HR practices assisting their managerial responsibilities and providing autonomy and flexibility to address local and individual needs) (Kuvaas et al., 2014) were influential, as were their perceptions of HRM tools' usefulness and ease of use, and HRM effectiveness (Bondarouk et al., 2009).

Behaviour-wise, line managers interpreted, relayed, and even created relatively clear and constant HR signals (in the presence of mixed signals) from top managers to employees (Townsend, Wilkinson, Allan, & Bamber, 2012), adapted HR practices to fit organisation's needs, objectives, and structures (Makhecha et al., 2018; Vossaert et al., 2022), and implemented HR practices (Brewster et al., 2015; Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Evans, 2017; Gilbert et al., 2011; Katou et al., 2021; Kilroy et al., 2023; Krachler, 2023; Kulik & Perry, 2008; Makhecha et al., 2018; Perry & Kulik, 2008; Sikora et al., 2015; Vermeeren, 2014; Yang & Arthur, 2021) as intended (Hewett et al., 2024; Pak, 2022). They also provided support during HRM implementation (Kuvaas et al., 2014; Perry & Kulik, 2008; Stirpe et al., 2013; Straub et al., 2018; Woodrow & Guest, 2014), involving employees by incorporating their suggestions (Trullen et al., 2016), being transparent and enthusiastic about the use of the HR practices, and considering individual's job profile (Straub et al., 2018). Referring to the Ability, Motivation, Opportunity (*AMO*) framework, line managers utilised their abilities in terms of listening in non-defensive ways and having confidence (Trullen et al., 2016; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018), and took opportunities in terms of deploying their skills and motivation and fulfilling their HR activities on top of the other demands to implement HR practices (Gilbert et al., 2015; Salvador-Gómez et al., 2023; Trullen et al., 2016; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018). Moreover, line managers (Gilbert et al., 2015; Trullen et al., 2016; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018) prioritised specific HR roles including employee champion (i.e. indicating concern for employee well-being) and strategic partner (i.e. working to achieve strategic goals) to influence HRM implementation (Shipton et al., 2016). Finally, they enacted transformational leadership (Vermeeren, 2014) and established high-quality leader-member exchange (LMX)

relationships with their employees when implementing HR practices (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018).

3.2.1.2. Contexts. Our review identified essential individual and organisational level pre-conditions for line managers' involvement in HRM implementation. Referring to the *AMO* framework, at the individual level, line managers need specific *abilities* to effectively engage in HRM implementation. These include HR competency (Hewett et al., 2024; Makhecha et al., 2018; Sikora et al., 2015; Woodrow & Guest, 2014), political skills (Sikora et al., 2015), relational coordination (Makhecha et al., 2018), transformational leadership (Vermeeren, 2014), confidence (Woodrow & Guest, 2014), and flexibility to change their attributes (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017). Additionally, they should have substantial experience with HR practices (Kossek et al., 2016), adequate tenure in their current position, and broad work experience both within and outside of HRM (Björkman et al., 2011). Line managers should also have *motivation* to implement HR practices, ensuring that their efforts align with organisational goals rather than personal motives (Makhecha et al., 2018). They should perceive the introduced HR practice as useful (Yang & Arthur, 2021), aligned with their values and abilities (Pak, 2022), and the received HR training to be of high quality (Kuvaas et al., 2014).

At the organisational level, providing the right *opportunities* is crucial. Organisations should ensure a manageable span of control for line managers (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Gilbert et al., 2015) with low HR-related autonomy—when their competence is low— (Hewett et al., 2024), supportive working conditions including reasonable workload, manageable role conflict, and clear organisational strategies and supportive HR professionals to minimise role ambiguity (Evans, 2017). Alignment in perceptions is vital; there should be agreement between HR departments and line managers on HR devolution (Op de Beeck et al., 2016), and between line managers and employees on power distance, long-term orientation, and collectivism (Wang et al., 2022). Organisations should have a higher number of (high-performance) HR practices (to trigger line managers' implementation perceptions) and devolve more HR tasks to line managers (to motivate them to implement HR practices) (Gilbert et al., 2015; Sikora et al., 2015). HRM devolution is more likely when line managers work with higher-educated employees (Vermeeren, 2014), and in smaller, less unionised organisations and in coordinated market economies, rather than in liberal market economies (Brewster et al., 2015). Organisations should have an embracing culture (Kossek et al., 2016), a high climate for HR implementation (Pak, 2022), process accountability (Hewett et al., 2024), and strong top-down HR practices (Vossaert et al., 2022). Strategic HRM capabilities within the HR department (Björkman et al., 2011), robust internal monitoring mechanisms (Makhecha et al., 2018), and HRM system strength (Gilbert et al., 2015; Katou et al., 2021) characterised by the organisational support (Kossek et al., 2016; Makhecha et al., 2018; Woodrow & Guest, 2014) and clear communications by the HR department (Makhecha et al., 2018), are also important.

More specifically, the HR department plays a crucial role in enabling line managers by providing right *opportunities*. The HR department should enhance line managers' *ability* by providing support materials, HR support services, and training (Perry & Kulik, 2008; Trullen et al., 2016). To boost *motivation*, the HR department should frame HR practices appealingly, select line managers based on their HR orientation, involve them in the development of HR practices, recognise good HR work (Trullen et al., 2016), and provide HRM support and capacity (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018; Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Perry & Kulik, 2008). To enhance *opportunities*, the HR department should hire external consultants, seek CEO support for HR practices, exploit windows of opportunity, ensure the fit between HR practices and the organisational context (Trullen et al., 2016), provide HR opportunity-enhancing initiatives (Salvador-Gómez et al., 2023), and offer clear HR policies and procedures (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013).

Table 2
Strategies and Interventions (i.e., HR practices focused on in the included HRM implementation studies).

Studies	Strategies	Interventions	Studies	Strategies	Interventions	Studies	Strategies	Interventions
Alfes et al. (2013)	To implement HR practices through effective partnership that HRM practitioners and line managers to evoke positive employee attitudes and improve performance	Selection process, training opportunities, rewards systems, career management, development opportunities, and feedback mechanisms	Brewster, Brookes and Gollan (2015)	To delegate HRM responsibilities to line managers	Industrial relations, pay and benefits, training and development, recruitment and selection, and workforce expansion/reduction	Dewettinck and Vroonen (2017)	To involve line managers in implementing performance management practices	Performance management
Arthur, Herdman and Yang (2016)	To adopt and implement HRM practices to improve firm-level performance based on top management's beliefs and values	High-performance work systems	Budjanovcanin (2018)	To implement agile working practices, with the aim of providing employees with more flexibility in terms of when, where, and how they work	Agile working practices	Evans (2017)	To give autonomy to line mangers to effectively carry out HRM responsibilities	Recruitment and selection, performance management and appraisals, training and development, staff scheduling, and workload allocation
Baluch, Salge and Piening (2013)	To leverage employees' perceptions of HR systems to enhance hospital performance	Involvement and communication, supervisor support, performance appraisal, and personnel development	Chang (2005)	To implement a commitment HR bundle to foster long-term employee commitment	Commitment HR bundle	Farndale and Kelliher (2013)	To involve line managers in implementing performance appraisal	Performance appraisal
Björkman et al. (2011)	To internalise HR practices by line management in MNC subsidiaries	Performance management, compensation and rewards, and training and development	Chen et al. (2022)	To implement a job redesign that merges the responsibilities of different professional groups to enhance service delivery efficiency and client care	Job redesign	Frear, Cao and Zhao (2012)	To adopt Western-style HR practices in Chinese foreign-invested enterprises	Western style HR practices – staffing and compensation
Bondarouk, Ruël and van der Heijden (2009)	To implement e-HRM (electronic Human Resource Management) to improve HRM efficiency and effectiveness in a public sector organisation	E-HRM application (e-Career Development)	Cooke (2006)	To establish an HR shared services centre to centralise the delivery of HR functions, aiming for greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness	Automating HR administrative tasks	Friede et al. (2008)	To successfully create and sustain reduced-load work arrangements	Reduced-load work.
Bos-Nehles and Meijerink (2018)	To implement HR practices through social exchange relationships between line managers, HRM professionals, and employees]	Staffing, training, performance management, compensation and benefits, job design, and participation	Currie and Procter (2001)	To develop a partnership between HR and middle managers in an NHS hospital trust, where middle managers are actively involved in shaping and implementing HR strategies	Competence-based job descriptions and local pay	Gilbert, De Winne and Sels (2011)	To enhance employees' affective commitment by empowering line managers to enact HR practices and relying on the HR department's service quality	Personnel planning, recruitment, selection and introduction, well-being and security, training, career management, performance appraisal, reward management, and administration
Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk and Kees Looise (2013)	To improve HRM implementation effectiveness of line managers by improving line managers' ability to implement HR practices, their opportunities, and their motivation in facilitating	Personnel administration, recruitment and selection, career development, evaluation and rewarding, and people management	Dany, Guedri and Hatt (2008)	To integrate HRM with business strategy while balancing the influence between HRM specialists and line managers	Pay and benefits, recruitment and selection, training and development, industrial relations, and workforce expansion/reduction	Gilbert, De Winne and Sels (2015)	To enhance HRM implementation effectiveness through strong HRM processes while leveraging line managers' ability, motivation, and opportunity (AMO)	High commitment work system

Table 2 (*continued*)

Studies	Strategies	Interventions	Studies	Strategies	Interventions	Studies	Strategies	Interventions
Guthrie et al. (2011)	HRM duties (AMO) To use of high-performance work systems to improve managerial perceptions of the HR department's strategic value	High-Performance Work Systems	Kossek et al. (2016)	To support reduced-load work arrangements with the aim of helping employees manage rising work demands while balancing family or personal responsibilities	Reduced-load work	Mirfakhar, Trullen and Valverde (2023)	To identify CEOs influence on HRM implementation at various stages, from adoption to formulation and execution	Recruitment and selection and performance management
Hewett et al. (2024)	To improve HR implementation by line managers through accountability	Staffing, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation, employee involvement, and communication	Krachler (2023)	To enhance HRM implementation by improving frontline HRM relationality	High-performance work practices	Ng and Sears (2020)	To implement workplace diversity practices, incorporating CEO beliefs and moral values	Diversity practices
Hu et al. (2022)	To enhance employee job crafting through the implementation of HRM systems	Rigorous selection, extensive training, compensation management, internal labour markets, competitive mobility and regulatory enforcement, results-oriented performance appraisal, information sharing, and participative management	Kulik and Perry (2008)	To devolve HR responsibilities to line managers, aiming to improve the HR unit's strategic role and its internal reputation within the organisation	People-management activities: pay and benefits, performance management, promotion decisions, and termination decisions	Nishii, Lepak and Schneider (2008)	To enhance organisational performance by ensuring that employees view HR practices as being implemented for positive reasons	Staffing, training, benefits, pay, and performance appraisals
Katou, Budhwar and Patel (2021)	To improve organisational performance through the HRM system by leveraging HR strength, line manager HR implementation, and employee HR attributions	Staffing, training, appraisal, compensation, and participation and communication	Kuvaas, Dysvik and Buch (2014)	To improve the perception of enabling HR practices among line managers to enhance employee outcomes	Enabling HR practices and HR training	Op de Beeck, Wynen and Hondeghem (2016)	To create an HR-line partnership by sharing HRM responsibilities between HR professionals and line managers	Organisational support for HRM responsibilities, red tape and administrative burden, HR tools and information
Kehoe and Wright (2013)	To use of high-performance human resource practices to positively influence employee attitudes and behaviours	Ability-enhancing practices, Motivation-enhancing practices, Opportunity-enhancing practices	Makhecha et al. (2018)	To identify and mange Intended-Actual-Experienced gaps across HR practices to enhance long-term performance and employee retention.	Hiring, induction, training, incentive, appraisal, reward and recognition, employee engagement, employee involvement, and communication practices	Pak (2022)	To implement high-performance work systems with a focus on understanding variability within organisations	Training and development, performance appraisal, rewards, empowerment
Kilroy et al. (2023)	To leverage frontline managers to implement HR policies effectively and enhance employee performance outcomes	Control-based enactment, commitment-based enactment, involvement-based enactment	McClean and Collins (2019)	To integrate high-commitment HR practices with charismatic CEO leadership to improve firm performance and reduce employee turnover	High Commitment HR Practices	Pan et al. (2022)	To adopt artificial intelligence (AI) in employee recruitment	Recruitment including attracting candidates, contacting candidates, and selecting candidates

Table 2 (*continued*)

Studies	Strategies	Interventions	Studies	Strategies	Interventions	Studies	Strategies	Interventions
Kim and Ryu (2011)	To enhance the social capital of the HR department to improve its effectiveness	cross-functional mobility, relational practices, cognitive alignment	Meijerink, Bondarouk and Lepak (2016)	To position employees as active consumers of HRM services, emphasising that employees play a role in coproducing and consuming HRM services	Training and staffing services	Perry and Kulik (2008)	To improve people management effectiveness by the devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers, allowing them to take on a more active role in people management tasks	People management
Piening, Baluch and Ridder (2014)	To understand and address the intended-implemented gap in HRM practices, focusing on how employees perceive HR practices versus what is intended by the organisation	Features of HR systems: the visibility of HR practices, consistency of HRM messages, continuity of usage of HR practices, and fairness of HR practices	Stirpe, Trullen and Bonache (2013)	To gain greater acceptance for HR innovations by employees, which is essential for the success of these innovations	HR innovations	Vossaert et al. (2022)	To identify and address interactions between top-down HR practices and individualised HR arrangements	Compensation and benefits, job and work design, training and development, recruiting and selection, employee relations, communication, performance management and appraisal, and promotions
Ren, Jiang and Tang (2022)	To leverage green human resource management to improve both environmental and financial performance	Green HRM system	Straub et al. (2018)	To address high voluntary turnover rates and complaints of a lack of flexibility, especially among women, by implementing a work-life intervention	Work-life intervention	Wang et al. (2022)	To enhance the consistency between managers' and employees' perceptions of HR practices	Selective staffing, extensive training, results-oriented appraisal, internal promotion, performance-based compensation, job security, clear job description, and work involvement
Salvador-Gómez et al. (2023)	To enhance HRM implementation effectiveness by addressing the interactions between HR managers, line managers, and employees	Recruitment, hiring, promotions, remuneration and on-the-job training	Townsend et al. (2012)	To address the complex challenges hospitals face with competing demands	High performance HR practices	Woodhams and Lupton (2006)	To enhance the impact of HR qualified professionals on the adoption of gender-based equal opportunities practices in SMEs	Gender-based equal opportunities policies and practices
Sanders and Yang (2016)	To identify and address how employees interpret and attribute meaning to HRM practices to explain the relationship between HRM and organisational performance	High commitment HRM	Trullen et al. (2016)	To enhance the effectiveness of HR practice implementation by the HR department contributing to improving line managers' AMO	Training, knowledge management initiative, feedback, teaming, competency development centre, career conversations, leadership, HR shared services, people management model, disability employment initiative	Woodrow and Guest (2014)	To address workplace bullying through the implementation of HR policies	Workplace anti-bullying policy
Shipton et al. (2016)	To understand and address the sense-giving role of line managers in the healthcare sector and its impact on	High commitment HRM	Van De Voorde and Beijer (2015)	To implement high-performance work systems (HPWS) to improve employee performance and	High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS)	Yang and Arthur (2021)	To implement commitment HR practices, specifically focusing on line managers' attributions	Commitment HR practices

Table 2 (*continued*)

Studies	Strategies	Interventions	Studies	Strategies	Interventions	Studies	Strategies	Interventions
	employee commitment			well-being. Through their attributions			about these HR practices	
Sikora, Ferris and Van Iddekinge (2015)	To implement high-performance work practices, specifically focusing on line managers' perceptions of their HPWP implementation	High performance work practices	Van Waeyenberg and Decramer (2018)	To improve the effectiveness of performance management systems by enhancing line mangers AMO	Performance management	Zhang, Wang and Jia (2022)	To implement socially responsible HRM practices aimed at improving employee well-being	Socially responsible HRM practices
Stanton et al. (2010)	To enhance the strength of the HR system by translating HRM messages across management hierarchies in Australian public hospitals	HRM with strategic focus	Vermeeren (2014)	To delegate HRM responsibilities to line managers and examining how variability in the implementation of HR impacts performance	High performance HR practices			

3.2.1.3. Outcomes. Our review revealed that line managers' involvement contributed to various proximal, intermediate, and distal outcomes. As proximal outcomes, line managers' involvement influenced their own perceptions of HRM implementation effectiveness (Bondarouk et al., 2009) and their employees' perceptions of line managers' support in HRM implementation (Kuvaas et al., 2014) and HRM implementation effectiveness (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Gilbert et al., 2015; Perry & Kulik, 2008; Trullen et al., 2016).

As intermediate outcomes, line managers' involvement contributes to organisational members' attitudes towards HR practices and the overall HRM situation within the organisation. It enhanced the culture related to the HR practice (Straub et al., 2018). It also influenced employees' acceptance of HR practices (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018; Stirpe et al., 2013; Vermeeren, 2014; Wang et al., 2022) and satisfaction with such practices (Salvador-Gómez et al., 2023; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018). Additionally, it led to greater HR unit involvement in organisational operations and strategic planning, improving the internal

reputation of the HR unit (Kulik & Perry, 2008), and a stronger situation for HRM in the organisation (Townsend et al., 2012; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018).

As distal outcomes, line managers' involvement resulted in significant long-term benefits. It increased employees' intrinsic motivation (Kuvaas et al., 2014), engagement (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Straub et al., 2018), participative decision-making (Sikora et al., 2015), and discretionary effort (Hewett et al., 2024). It also reduced professional differences and improved boundary-spanning coordination (Krachler, 2023). Employees showed greater commitment (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2011; Kilroy et al., 2023; Kuvaas et al., 2014; Shipton et al., 2016), and reported higher job satisfaction (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Woodrow & Guest, 2014) and lower turnover intentions (Kuvaas et al., 2014; Sikora et al., 2015; Straub et al., 2018; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Additionally, it boosted employees' organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Kilroy et al., 2023; Yang & Arthur, 2021), job performance (Sikora et al., 2015), team performance (Pak, 2022),
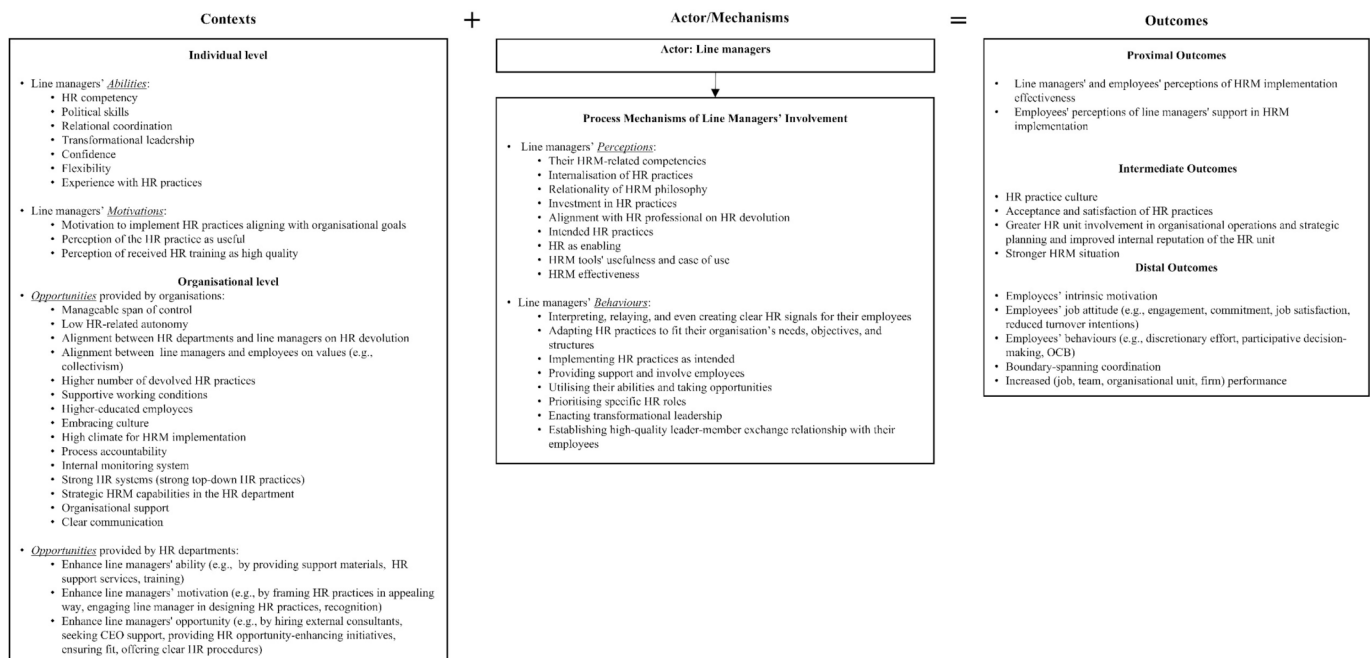

Fig. 2. The realist programme theory based on line managers' involvement.

organisational unit performance (Vermeeren, 2014), and overall firm performance (return on equity) (Vossaert et al., 2022).

Fig. 2 shows the realist programme theory based on line managers' involvement.

As shown in Fig. 2, the realist programme theory for line managers' involvement is: *If* line managers have the necessary abilities (e.g., HR competency), motivations (e.g., seeing HR practices as useful), organisational support (e.g., high climate for HRM implementation), and HR department support (e.g., supportive materials) (*contextual factors*); *then* line managers (*actors*) involvement in HRM implementation, through their perceptions (e.g., of alignment with HR professional on HR devolution) and behaviours (e.g., interpreting and adapting HR practices) (*mechanisms*), improves their own and their employees' perceptions of HRM implementation effectiveness (*proximal outcomes*); improves attitudes towards HR practices and the overall HRM situation (e.g., acceptance and satisfaction with HR practices) (*intermediate outcomes*); and, ultimately, improves employees' intrinsic motivations, attitudes (e.g., engagement), behaviours (e.g., OCB), and performance (e.g., job performance) (*distal outcomes*).

3.2.2. Actors: Employees

3.2.2.1. Process mechanisms.
Employees' involvement was a crucial mechanism in HRM implementation, comprising perceptions and behaviours. Regarding perceptions, employees' motivation to engage in HRM implementation was driven by observing successful policies elsewhere and the desire to affect organisational change for wider benefit (Budjanovcanin, 2018). Their expectations of HRM (Piening et al., 2014) in terms of its value and effectiveness (Baluch, Salge, & Piening, 2013; Bondarouk et al., 2009; Chang, 2005; Meijerink, Bondarouk, & Lepak, 2016), perceptions of justice in HR practice (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013), and usefulness and ease of use of HRM tools (Bondarouk et al., 2009) were pivotal. Additionally, employees' attributions of HR practices—-whether for well-being or performance/cost reduction (Katou et al., 2021; Nishii et al., 2008; Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015)—significantly influenced HRM implementation. Overall, employees' perceptions of intended HR practices (McClean & Collins, 2019), management's HRM intentions (Sanders & Yang, 2016), implemented HR practices (Alfes et al., 2013; Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Makhecha et al., 2018), and the congruence between intended and implemented HRM (Piening et al., 2014) were key mechanisms. Behaviour-wise, employees participated in the design, adaptation, and quality assurance of the HR practices (Budjanovcanin, 2018; Chen et al., 2022). They also adopted perspective-taking to understand others' preferences and needs when implementing HR practices (Zhang et al., 2022).

3.2.2.2. Contexts.
Our review identified essential individual, leader, and organisational pre-conditions for employees' involvement in HRM implementation. Applying the *AMO* framework, at the individual level, employees should have the *abilities* of HRM competencies (knowledge, skills, and abilities) to enhance their perception of HRM service value (Makhecha et al., 2018) and power sources (referent, information, and coercive) to influence HRM implementation (Budjanovcanin, 2018). *Motivation*-wise, employees should have high levels of substantive attributions—seeing HR practices as genuinely supportive—and low levels of symbolic attributions—viewing HR practices as self-serving—as these moderate relationship between HR practices and perspective-taking of employees (Zhang et al., 2022). For *opportunities* provided at the leader level, line managers should possess internally oriented characteristics, such as the desire and competence to perform HR responsibilities, and externally oriented characteristics, including support and adherence to policies and procedures (Katou et al., 2021). High CEO charismatic leadership is also vital for successful HRM implementation (McClean & Collins, 2019). For required *opportunities* at the organisational level, there should be high communication of HR

practices (Makhecha et al., 2018), agreement among HR decision-makers about HR practices (Piening et al., 2014), and opportunities to adapt the HRM implementation based on employees' professional identity (Chen et al., 2022). A broad range of HR practices, along with financial, structural, and personnel resources, is necessary to form HR capabilities (Piening et al., 2014). Lastly, a climate of employee trust in senior management is essential (Farndale & Kelliher, 2013).

3.2.2.3. Outcomes.
Our review revealed that employees' involvement contributed to various proximal and distal outcomes. As a proximal outcome, employees' involvement influenced their perceptions of HRM implementation (Bondarouk et al., 2009). As distal outcomes, employees' involvement affected their perceptions of procedural justice within their organisation (Chang, 2005). It enhanced their work engagement (Alfes et al., 2013), commitment (Chang, 2005; Farndale & Kelliher, 2013; Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Nishii et al., 2008; Sanders & Yang, 2016; Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015), job efficacy (Baluch et al., 2013), and well-being (Nishii et al., 2008; Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015; Zhang et al., 2022). It also boosted employees' innovative work behaviour (Alfes et al., 2013; Sanders & Yang, 2016), their OCB (Kehoe & Wright, 2013), and unit-level OCBs like helping and conscientiousness (Nishii et al., 2008). Additionally, it reduced employees' turnover intentions (Kehoe & Wright, 2013; McClean & Collins, 2019) and absenteeism (Kehoe & Wright, 2013), improved task performance (Alfes et al., 2013), increased customer satisfaction (Baluch et al., 2013; Nishii et al., 2008), and enhanced organisational performance (Katou et al., 2021; McClean & Collins, 2019). However, there were some negative outcomes. Higher levels of employees' HR performance attributions of HR practices led to increased job strain (Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015), and perceptions that HR practices were exploitative which negatively impacted commitment and satisfaction (Nishii et al., 2008).

Fig. 3 depicts the realist programme theory based on employees' involvement.

As shown in Fig. 3, the realist programme theory for employees' involvement is: *If* employees possess the necessary abilities (e.g., power sources), motivations (e.g., high substantive attributions), and are supported by leaders (e.g., line managers with internally and externally oriented characteristics) and organisational factors (e.g., high communication of HR practices) (*contextual factors*); *then* employees (*actors*) involvement in HRM implementation, through their perceptions (e.g., of congruence between intended and implemented HRM) and behaviours (e.g., participation in design, adaptation, and quality assurance of HR practices) (*mechanisms*), improves their perceptions of HRM implementation (*proximal outcomes*); and, ultimately, improves their attitudes towards the organisation (e.g., commitment), behaviours (e.g., innovative work behaviours), wellbeing, and organisational performance (e.g., customer satisfaction) (*distal outcomes*).

3.2.3. Actors: Senior managers

3.2.3.1. Process mechanisms.
Senior managers' involvement in HRM implementation includes perceptions and behaviours. Perception-wise, senior managers' beliefs about HR practices, such as diversity and green HRM (Ng & Sears, 2020; Ren et al., 2022) and their HR cause-effect beliefs regarding financial payoffs from HR investments (Arthur, Herdman, & Yang, 2016) affected HRM implementation. Behaviour-wise, senior managers generally exhibit pro-HR behaviours (Ng & Sears, 2020) and provide support for implementing HR practices (Stirpe et al., 2013). Their behaviours vary across the three stages of HRM implementation: (1) adoption stage: where senior managers initiate, authorise, disregard, reject or discontinue the implementation HR practices (Mirfakhar et al., 2023) –an example could be their adoption of Western-style HR practices (Frear et al., 2012)–; (2) formulation stage: where senior managers endorse HR initiatives, provide resources, and provide or request input; and (3) execution stage: where senior
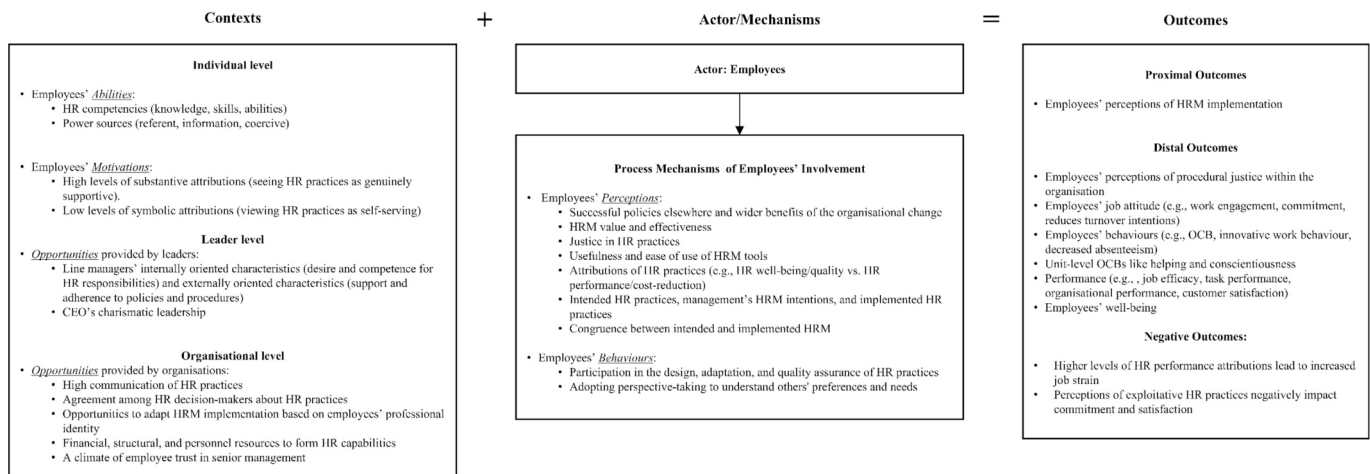
Fig. 3. The realist programme theory based on employees' involvement.

managers dismiss vs. legitimise, incentivise vs. disincentivise, role model, control, and allow vs. prevent the implementation HR practices (Mirfakhar et al., 2023). Senior managers also indirectly influence HRM implementation by empowering HR departments via determining strategic role of HR department –structural position of HR department, HR manager profile, direct communication between CEO and HR department– (Mirfakhar et al., 2023), and creating a distinctive HR system. This involves providing HR legitimacy, leadership, resources, ensuring role agreement, and operationalising HR strategy through consistent messaging and guidance to lower-level managers (Stanton et al., 2010).

3.2.3.2. Contexts. Our analysis identified individual, organisational, and overarching pre-conditions which facilitate senior manager' involvement in HRM implementation. Applying the *AMO* framework, at the individual level, senior managers need specific *abilities*, such as a college education, in particular, in business management and social science (Frear et al., 2012). *Motivation*-wise, they should have high employee-centred value-based beliefs (Arthur et al., 2016), high HRM beliefs (Mirfakhar et al., 2023), and high moral values (Ng & Sears, 2020). At the organisational level, organisational support from supervisors and line managers is crucial, providing the *opportunity* for senior managers to be involved in HRM implementation (Stirpe et al., 2013). At the overarching level, external conditions, such as environmental challenges, can also play a reinforcing *opportunity* role. For instance, high external pollution severity strengthens the relationship between senior managers' environmental beliefs and implementation of green HRM

practices (Ren et al., 2022).

3.2.3.3. Outcomes. Our analysis revealed that senior managers' involvement led to various proximal, intermediate, and distal outcomes. As proximal outcomes, senior managers' involvement positively influenced employees' perceptions of implemented HR practices (Arthur et al., 2016), their perceptions of senior management support for implementation of HR practices (Stirpe et al., 2013), and HR managers' perceptions of senior managers' commitment to HR practices and their implementations (Ng & Sears, 2020). In terms of intermediate outcomes, it increased employees' acceptance of HR practices (Stirpe et al., 2013), the intensity of HR practices reported by the firm (Arthur et al., 2016), and the strength of the HR system (Stanton et al., 2010). As distal outcomes, it boosted employees' environmental commitment which in turn enhanced both the environmental and financial performance of organisations (Ren et al., 2022).

The realist programme theory based on senior managers' involvement is shown in Fig. 4.

As shown in Fig. 4, the realist programme theory for senior managers' involvement is: **If** senior managers possess the relevant abilities (e.g., academic education in business management and social science), motivations (e.g., high HRM beliefs), are supported by organisational factors (e.g., organisational support from supervisors and line managers), and the external environment is challenging (*contextual factors*); **then** senior managers (*actors*) involvement in HRM implementation, through their perceptions (e.g., HR cause-effect beliefs regarding financial payoffs from HR investments) and behaviours (e.g., exhibiting
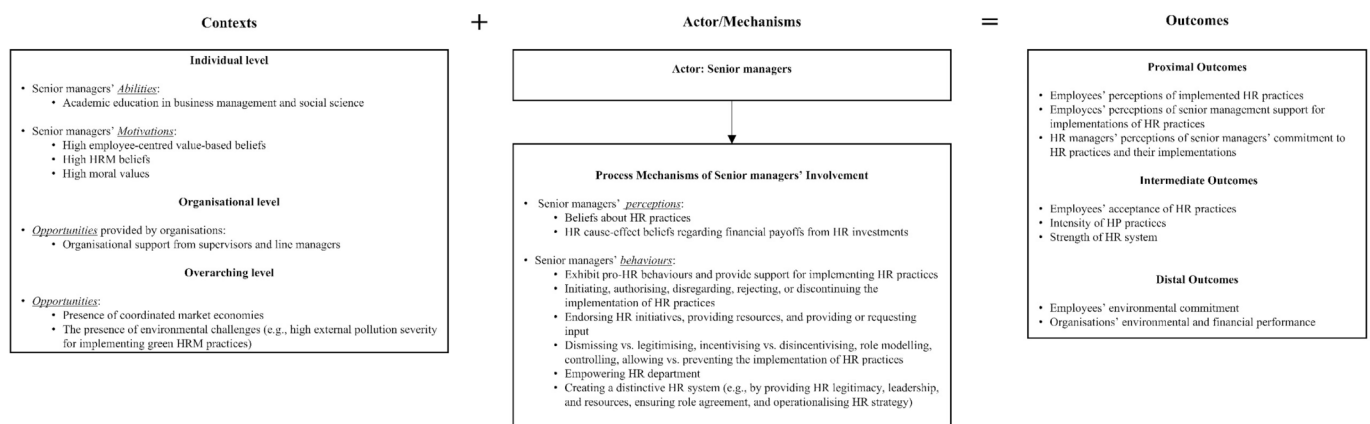

Fig. 4. The realist programme theory based on senior managers' involvement.

pro-HR behaviours) (*mechanisms*), improve employees' perceptions of implemented HR practices, senior management support for HR practices, and HR managers' perceptions of senior managers' commitment to HRM implementation (*proximal outcomes*); improves attitudes towards HR practices and the overall HRM situation (e.g., the strength of the HR system) (*intermediate outcomes*); and, ultimately, improves employees' attitudes towards the organisation (e.g., commitment) and organisational performance (e.g., environmental and financial performance) (*distal outcomes*).

3.2.4. Actors: HR departments

3.2.4.1. Process mechanisms. In the reviewed articles, HR department involvement was a crucial mechanism in HRM implementation through different behaviours. HR department built credibility by developing competency and trustworthiness (Stirpe et al., 2013), cultivated social capital encompassing structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions (Kim & Ryu, 2011), and established a strong HR system with effective communication strategies to ensure information flow within the organisation (Stanton et al., 2010) to successfully implement HRM. HR department created formalised written policies and translated them into practices (Woodhams & Lupton, 2006), provided accessible documents (Stanton et al., 2010), and tailored HR practices to align with organisation's needs, objectives, and structures (Guthrie et al., 2011; Makhecha et al., 2018). HR department formed partnerships with middle managers to involve them in strategic changes (Currie & Procter, 2001) and collaborated with line managers on major HRM policies when integrating HRM with business strategy (Dany et al., 2008). This approach aligns with the goal of informing, engaging, and empowering multi-level managers (Stanton et al., 2010). Ultimately, HR department implemented (delivered) HR practices (Friede et al., 2008; Hu et al., 2022; Makhecha et al., 2018; Ng & Sears, 2020), including forming a centralised internal HR shared services centre (Cooke, 2006) and adopting artificial intelligence (Pan et al., 2022).

3.2.4.2. Contexts. Our review identified individual, leader, and organisational pre-conditions, necessary for HR department involvement in HRM implementation. At the individual level, *ability*-wise, HR executives need to possess high competencies and relational coordination skills (Makhecha et al., 2018). Additionally, they must have technological competence, particularly for adopting AI (Pan et al., 2022). *Motivation*-wise, HR executives should be highly motivated and avoid using their instrumental motives in their roles (Makhecha et al., 2018). Their perception of AI should be one of reduced complexity to facilitate its adoption effectively (Pan et al., 2022). At the leader level, senior managers should hold positive beliefs about HR practices, exhibit high moral values, and engage in HR practice-related behaviours (Ng & Sears, 2020).

At the organisational level, there are various *opportunities* created by different stakeholders to support HR department involvement. Organisations should feature robust HRM systems characterised by distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus (Hu et al., 2022). They must provide necessary resources and should operate within centralised decision-making frameworks, maintain strong governance, and ensure adherence to legislation (Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). Additionally, less local competition and strong organisational support are crucial for facilitating HR department involvement (Makhecha et al., 2018). HR department itself should act as a change agent (Kim & Ryu, 2011). This involves clarifying HRM implementation designs in advance and fostering positive workgroup relationships (Friede et al., 2008). HR department should formalise HR practices (Makhecha et al., 2018) and develop broad HR strategies rather than tight prescriptions (Currie & Procter, 2001). Clear communications (Makhecha et al., 2018) and significant investment in the development of middle managers development (Currie & Procter, 2001) are also essential. Respectively, middle managers need autonomy to cross functional boundaries and champion HR department initiatives (Currie & Procter, 2001). Employees should be well-informed about their rights, especially regarding gender-based equal opportunity practices (Woodhams & Lupton, 2006) and possess certain characteristics such as self-regulatory work habits for reduced-load work (Friede et al., 2008). Finally, at the overarching level, there must be regulatory support for AI adoption to ensure smooth integration and implementation (Pan et al., 2022).

3.2.4.3. Outcomes. Our review revealed that HR department involvement contributed to various proximal, intermediate, and distal outcomes. As a proximal outcomes, it improved managers' perceptions of HR department strategic value in HRM implementation (Guthrie et al., 2011). As intermediate outcomes, it increased employees' acceptance of HR practices (Stirpe et al., 2013), enhanced HR effectiveness in supporting line managers and employees (Kim & Ryu, 2011), and enhanced the strength of HR system (Hu et al., 2022; Stanton et al., 2010). As distal outcomes, it positively influenced the relationship between HRM integration and organisational performance (Dany et al., 2008), enhanced employees' task and relational crafting (Hu et al., 2022), and boosted human and social capital of the workforce (Guthrie et al., 2011). However, some negative outcomes were observed. For instance, the centralisation of HR functions through shared services centre led to a loss of face-to-face contact, lack of employees' representation, unclear ownership of HR issues, and negative perceptions of the shared services centre (Cooke, 2006). For line managers, it resulted in increased work intensity, wasted resources, and reduced morale, and for HR staff, it led to weakened relationships with clients (Cooke, 2006).

The realist programme theory based on HR department involvement is provided in Fig. 5.

As shown in Fig. 5, the realist programme theory for HR department involvement is: **If** HR executives possess relevant abilities (e.g., high relational coordination skills), and are motivated to implement HR practices without instrumental motives, and are supported by senior managers (e.g., through engagement in HR practice-related behaviours), organisational factors (e.g., strong governance), and overarching factors (e.g., regulatory support) (*contextual factors*); **then** HR departments (*actors*) involvement in HRM implementation, through their behaviours (e.g., collaborating with line managers) (*mechanisms*), improves managers' perceptions of HR department strategic value in HRM implementation (*proximal outcomes*); improves attitudes towards HR practices and the overall HRM situation (e.g., acceptance of HR practices) (*intermediate outcomes*); and, ultimately, improves employees' behaviours (e.g., task and relational crafting), human and social capital of the workforce, and the relationship between HRM integration and organisational performance (*distal outcomes*).

4. Discussion

While studies on HRM implementation have increased in recent years, systematic literature reviews are still scarce (Trullen et al., 2020), and especially reviews that identify mechanisms of effective implementation (Mirfakhar et al., 2018). This realist synthesis contributes to the literature by systematically synthesising the empirical evidence in the field and proposing such antecedent-outcome configurations in the form of realist programme theories (see Fig. 6).

Since multiple actors are involved in HRM implementation, the realist programme theories were presented for each actor (see Figs. 2 to 5). Line managers are considered as the main implementers of HR practices (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013) and past reviews have also shown that most studies on HRM implementation have focused on line managers (Mirfakhar et al., 2018). In our review, 29 studies (46 % of the included studies) provided evidence on line managers' involvement in HRM implementation. Consequently, more CMO elements were found for line managers. While senior managers, including top management,
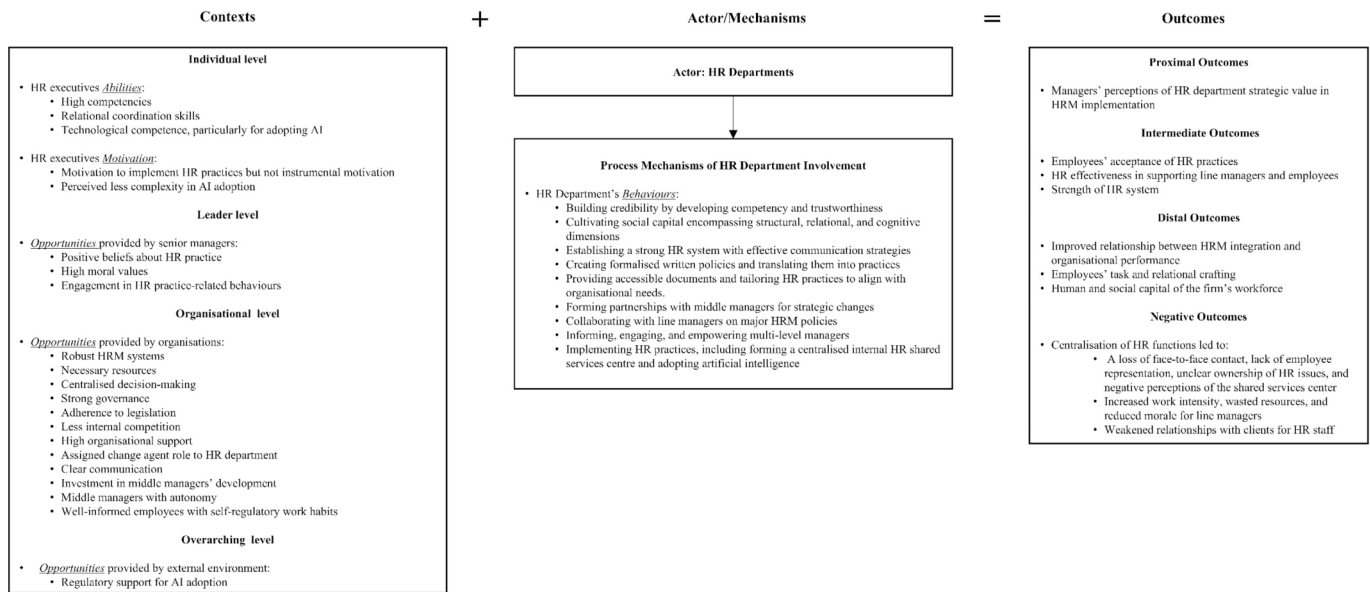
Fig. 5. The realist programme theory based on HR department involvement.
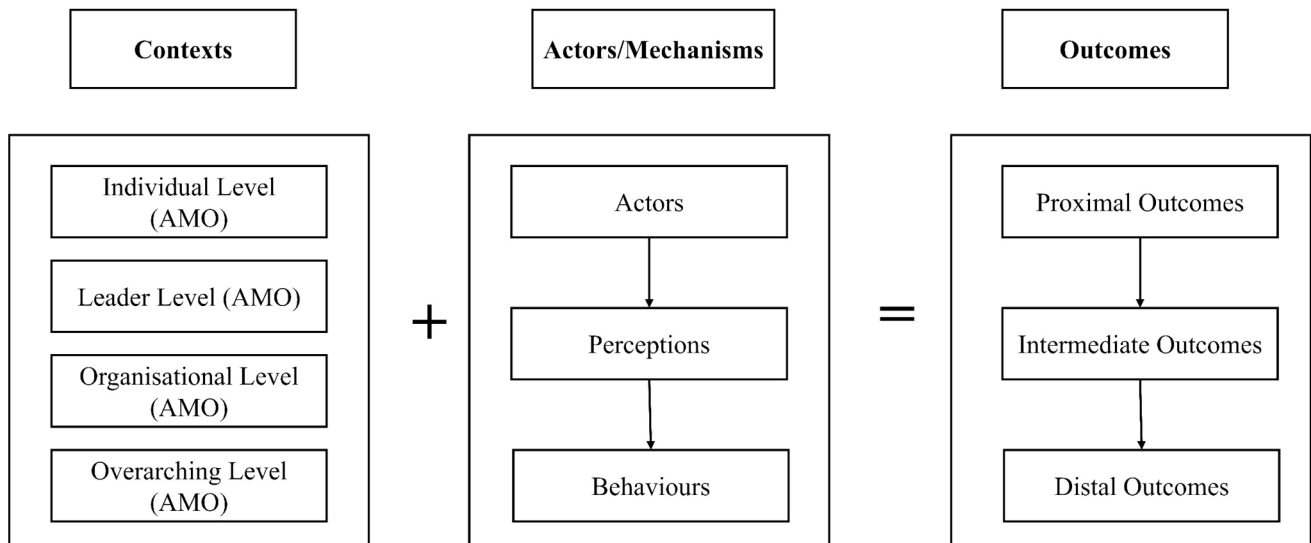

Fig. 6. The proposed antecedent-outcome configurations within realist programme theories.

can have a significant influence on HRM implementation (Mirfakhar et al., 2023; Ng & Sears, 2020), only four studies (6 % of the included studies) explored their mechanisms in influencing HRM implementation. Other actors also played a role in HRM implementation, with 14 studies (23 % of the included studies) focusing on employees and nine studies (15 % of the included studies) focusing on HR departments. Additionally, six studies (10 % of the included studies) examined a combination of roles among different actors.

In this realist synthesis, actors' process mechanisms were categorised into actors' perceptions and behaviours. In other words, with sense-making and sense-giving (Mirfakhar et al., 2018), actors try to make sense of the what, why, and how of the change –introduced HR practice– and also shape others' interpretations of it through their behaviours. While actors' perceptions and behaviours can be seen as mechanisms, our realist synthesis shows that through the process of sense-giving, actors' perceptions and behaviours can also be considered as context to other actors' mechanisms. For instance, while CEO's high HR belief is shown as a mechanism influencing HRM implementation positively

(Mirfakhar et al., 2023), CEO's high HR belief is also found as a context which positively influences HR manager's perception of their CEO commitment which consequently enhances HRM implementation (Ng & Sears, 2020). Therefore, actors influence one another (i.e., one's perception and behaviour act as the context for the perception and behaviour –mechanisms– of the other actor) and consequently impact HRM implementation. These findings complement the dynamic nature of HRM implementation introduced by van Mierlo et al. (2018) where they consider HRM implementation as a continuous process in which HRM practices and actors' behaviour recursively and continuously influence one another.

The context of HRM implementation can be analysed at the macro, mezzo, and micro levels (Mirfakhar et al., 2018). While some studies have focused more on the mezzo level (organisational culture, climate, and political considerations; e.g., Sikora & Ferris, 2014), others have concentrated on the micro level taking up the multi-actor perspective (e. g., multi-actor HR involvement shaping the HRM climate; Kou et al., 2022). Taking a more comprehensive approach, in this study, contexts

were categorised into different levels, relating to individuals, leaders, organisation and even the external environment of the organisation, albeit the organisational level was the more frequent one. Overall, organisational culture and support, how HR messages are communicated, and other contextual factors which were related to HRM system strength (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) were among the most frequently cited contextual factors. As mentioned, contextual factors which were at the organisational level were among the most recurrent ones for most actors, except for senior managers for whom most contextual factors were at the individual level. This is in line with the common belief that senior managers play a critical role in the success of HRM implementation (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013) by legitimising the process for the rest of the stakeholders.

Outcomes were grouped based on a spectrum ranging from proximal to distal. Proximal outcomes include immediate changes in perceptions of organisational members (actors and other stakeholders) towards HRM implementation following its introduction (e.g., Bos-Nehles et al., 2013, Trullen et al., 2016). Intermediate outcomes take longer and comprise of shifts in organisational members' (mainly employees') attitudes towards HR practices and the overall HRM situation within the organisation (e.g., Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018, Vermeeren, 2014). Distal outcomes involve long-term changes in organisational members' (mainly employees') general motivation (Kuvaas et al., 2014), attitudes (e.g., Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017, Sanders & Yang, 2016), behaviours (e.g., Alfes et al., 2013, Kilroy et al., 2023), wellbeing (e.g., Nishii et al., 2008, Zhang et al., 2022), and performance (e.g., Sikora et al., 2015, Vossaert et al., 2022). The extracted outcomes, put together, depict a clearer picture of how HRM through effective HRM implementation is related to firm performance hence unlocking the HRM black box (Boselie et al., 2005; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005).

Our synthesis shows similar outcomes across different realist programme theories. This similarity arises for two reasons. First, some HRM implementation studies involved multiple actors working together, making it difficult to attribute specific outcomes to an individual actor. For example, Stanton et al. (2010) found that both senior managers' and HR department involvement enhanced the strength of the HR system. Second, different studies attributed the same outcome to various actors. For instance, employees' perceptions of HRM implementation were linked to line managers' involvement (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2017; Gilbert et al., 2015; Perry & Kulik, 2008; Trullen et al., 2016), employees' involvement (Bondarouk et al., 2009), and senior managers' involvement (Arthur et al., 2016). Despite these overlaps, identifying a general pattern of outcomes across these realist programme theories provides a valuable foundation for future HRM implementation studies.

Making explicit the connection between context, mechanisms, and outcomes results in the development of midrange theories on HRM implementation, which connects with and expands existing contingency perspectives in this area (Intindola et al., 2017; Trullen et al., 2024). A contingency view assumes that the effective implementation of HRM policies depends on whether implementation strategies are aligned with contextual factors at different levels of analysis. We extend this reasoning by adding another layer of complexity, namely, the actor focus. By developing different realist programme theories, we are able to offer evidence-based advice for the different actors involved in HRM implementation (Rousseau, 2006). Hence, our study goes beyond previous systematic literature reviews in the HRM implementation field (e. g., Mirfakhar et al., 2018, Trullen et al., 2020) by addressing what works for whom under which circumstances. With very few exceptions (Bos-Nehles et al., 2021; Salvador-Gómez et al., 2023), work on HRM process to date has not explicitly analysed how different organisational actors influence implementation processes and the way in which their actions are influenced by contextual factors at different levels of analysis.

Collectively, our analysis underscores the significant influence of contextual factors across individual, leader, organisation, and

overarching levels in endowing HRM implementation actors with abilities, motivation, and opportunities. Showing how AMO-related factors may combine at different levels of analysis also adds value, as most AMO-related studies tend to focus on a single level of analysis (Bos-Nehles et al., 2023). By adopting a multi-level and multi-actor framework, we contribute to contextual approaches in HRM implementation (Trullen et al., 2020) and align with recent calls to place dimensions of context front and centre (Farndale et al., 2023; Parry et al., 2021).

4.1. Practical implications

Inspired by the W-H question framework (i.e., Why, What, Who, When, Where, How questions) (Dello Russo et al., 2023), this study holds multiple practical implications, providing more actionable knowledge than previous reviews have done in the past (Mirfakhar et al., 2018; Trullen et al., 2020). The realist programme theories proposed in this study can help organisations, and more specifically HR departments, to plan their HRM implementations better, ensure its effectiveness, and consequently reduce the intended-implemented gap. Since HRM implementation is a multi-actor process (Mirfakhar et al., 2018), the realist programme theories which are proposed for each actor (the who) can be taken into consideration by HR professionals and can be used as guidelines to ensure every actor, considering their contextual factors (context – the when & where), is on board perception-wise and ready to play their role behaviour-wise (mechanisms – the what) to implement the HR practice effectively and reach desired objectives (outcomes – the why). These realist programme theories, provide HR practitioners with a list to ensure all success factors are in place and to detect the ones missing and plan accordingly prior to the implementation to increase their success rate.

4.2. Limitations and future research

Our study is not without limitations. While we have tried to be thorough in using multiple databases and selecting the articles, there might be papers that are not included due to our chosen Boolean combination. Moreover, we might have also incurred in a threat to generalisability, as some papers have studied specific practices, but we have generalised their findings to all HR practices. Furthermore, the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes related to each actor are presented together while each context might be related to specific mechanism as these are extracted from various studies. Additionally, different mechanisms and outcomes are measured, tested, or hypothesised in different contexts, with different measures and samples (including single case studies) and in different relations for answering different research questions which adds to the threat of generalisability.

As most studies have focused on line managers, for future research we suggest focusing on other actors such as senior managers, HR departments, and employees. Conducting studies on senior managers and more specifically on CEOs could be especially relevant as CEO attributes are shown to influence HRM outcomes (Boada-Cuerva et al., 2019), as well as corporate reputation, sustainable growth and financial performance (Duréndez et al., 2023; Mukherjee & Sen, 2022).

In addition, since these different actors interact in the context of HRM implementation and influence each other processes of sense-making (Mirfakhar et al., 2018), studying those interactions in most systemic ways such as using network analysis would shed further light on how HRM implementation effectiveness can be achieved. While occasionally some papers referred to other actors (e.g. consultants in Trullen et al., 2016), the role external actors such as government agents, consultants, or HRM outsourcing providers may play in implementation and is thus also worth exploring. Future studies can also look at implementation teams analysing the role of shared leadership at the team level. The recursive cycles of actors' behaviours influencing one another and together affecting HRM implementation effectiveness can be explored further by conducting longitudinal studies. Moreover, while

this systematic review has shown that it is mostly success factors that are reported in papers, there were occasions where factors had negatively influenced HRM implementation. Here, we would like to encourage scholars to also work on failed cases and to extract the reasons of their failures as we always learn best from failure.

Another relevant aspect to be considered by future research has to do with the need for more multi-level studies that incorporate not only organisational (and its respective more specific units, such as group or individual level of analysis), but also external contextual factors (at the industry or national level of analysis) as shapers of implementation processes. While some literatures like that of HRM devolution have started doing so (Trullen et al., 2024), this is much less common in implementation related studies. In our review we only found three studies that considered the macro level (Brewster et al., 2015; Pan et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2022), despite both Mirfakhar et al. (2018) and Trullen et al. (2020) insist on the need to incorporate such influences. Studying contextual factors is specifically crucial as Brandl and colleagues (2022) have recently argued that the institutional environment of organisations, as a contextual factor, impacts the implementation efforts and hence the intended-implemented gap.

There is also the need for empirical studies to be conducted in different cultural and national contexts, since the large majority of the studies reviewed were carried out in Western countries (80 %). In addition, samples and research designs of the different studies make it difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions on culture influences. Thus, it would be useful, both for academics and practitioners, to know what factors are common in different cultural settings and which ones would not work in a particular culture. Beyond national culture, future research should also explore how institutional influences such as legislation, political or economic systems may influence implementation (Brewster et al., 2015).

Still in connection with macro level influences, current implementation research ignores larger trends in society such as the COVID pandemic or the rise of AI that necessarily impact HRM implementation. Starting with the former, much could be learnt about the effects that the pandemic has had on the world of work, including rising workforce inequalities and health risks (Butterick & Charlwood, 2021; Caligiuri et al., 2020), and how these trends affect the implementation of HRM practices in terms of what practices become more important and how they are experienced by employees. In terms of AI, there are many questions unanswered. For example, recently there have been calls to explore the role of AI as an assistant to HR professionals (Aguinis et al., 2024). There have also been discussions around the ethical implications of AI use in recruitment and selection (Pan & Froese, 2023) as well as how performance management systems can be effectively designed and implemented in teams where employees and robots work side-by-side (Arslan et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion

This realist synthesis explored the effectiveness of HRM implementation by identifying and synthesising various mechanisms, contextual factors, and outcomes into four realist programme theories. These realist programme theories serve as a foundation for future testing and refinement. We believe these realist programme theories contribute to existing knowledge and provide valuable insights for researchers and practitioners in designing, implementing, and evaluating future HRM implementations. We recommend that future research employs mixed methods to comprehensively address how different mechanisms within specific contexts lead to particular outcomes in HRM implementations.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Hamid Roodbari: Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Atieh S. Mirfakhar:** Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Jordi Trullen:** Writing – review & editing. **Mireia Valverde:** Writing – review & editing. **Chidiebere Ogbonnaya:** Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A

Applied Search Terms in the Databases.
Potentially relevant articles before removal duplicates: 14,201.
Scopus (June 1, 2024).
TITLE-ABS-KEY (human AND resource AND management OR hrm OR hr OR human AND resource AND implement*) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2024) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2023) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2015) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2014) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2013) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2012) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2011) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2010) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2009) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2008) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2007) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2006) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2005) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2004) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2003) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2002) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2001) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2000)) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE, "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "BUSI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, "j")).
Limits: (Journal Article English; Year: 2000–2024; Subject area: Business, Management and Accounting).
Results: 3,831.
Business Source Complete (June 1, 2024).
AB ((human resource management OR HRM OR HR OR human resource) AND (implement)) OR TI ((human resource management OR HRM OR HR OR human resource) AND (implement*)) OR SU ((human resource management OR HRM OR HR OR human resource) AND (implement*)).*
Limiters *− Publication Date: 20000101–20240601; Publication Type: Academic Journal; Language: English.*
Expanders *− Apply equivalent subjects.*
Search modes *− Boolean/Phrase.*
Results: 5,217.
ProQuest/ Social Science Database (June 1, 2024).
ti(human resource management OR HRM OR HR OR human resource AND implement*) AND ab(human resource management OR HRM OR HR OR human resource AND implement*).
Additional limits − Date: From 01 January 2000 to 01 June 2024; Source type: Scholarly Journals; Document type: Article; Language: English;

Databases: Social Science Database; Sociology Collection; Periodicals Archive Online;

Results: 391.

PsycArticles and PsycINFO (June 1, 2024).

1. ((human resource management or HRM or HR or human resource) and implement*).ti.
2. limit 1 to english language [Limit not valid in Journals@Ovid; records were retained]
3. limit 2 to yr="2000 − 2024″
4. ((human resource management or HRM or HR or human resource) and implement*).ab.
5. limit 4 to english language [Limit not valid in Journals@Ovid; records were retained]
6. limit 5 to yr="2000 − 2024″
7. ((human resource management or HRM or HR or human resource) and implement*).kw.
8. limit 7 to english language [Limit not valid in Journals@Ovid; records were retained]
9. limit 8 to yr="2000 − 2024″
10. 3 or 6 or 9

Results: 2,499.

Web of Science/ Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) (June 1, 2024).

(TI=(human resource management OR HRM OR HR OR human resource AND implement*) AND AK=(human resource management OR HRM OR HR OR human resource AND implement*) AND AB=(human resource management OR HRM OR HR OR human resource AND implement*)) *AND* **LANGUAGE:** (English) *AND* **DOCUMENT TYPES:** (Article).

Indexes = SSCI Timespan = 2000–2024.

Results: 2,263.

Appendix B

The details of the reviewed studies.

Authors and publication year	Country	Research design	Data collection methods
[1]:Alfes et al. (2013)	The UK	A cross sectional research design in two case study organisations operating in the UK	Surveys
[2]:Arthur, Herdman and Yang (2016)	The USA	Multilevel data collection from two sources (top-level managers and employees), in 120 hotel franchisees	Surveys
[3]:Baluch, Salge and Piening (2013)	The UK	Multi-source data (the NHS National Staff Survey, the NHS Acute Inpatient Survey and archival data) from 167 acute hospital trusts in the English National Health Service	Surveys and archival data
[4]:Björkman et al. (2011)	Finland	Multilevel data collection from two sources (general managers and HR managers)	Structured Interviews
[5]:Bondarouk, Ruël and van der Heijden (2009)	The Netherlands	A qualitative study conducted at a public sector organisation	Interviews
[6]:Bos-Nehles and Meijerink (2018)	The Netherlands	Multilevel data collection from two sources (line managers and employees), in two approaches (surveys and archival data) and in two phases	Surveys and the firm's archival data
[7]:Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk and Kees Looise (2013)	The Netherlands	Multilevel data collection from two sources (line managers and employees)	Surveys
[8]:Brewster, Brookes and Gollan (2015)	11 countries (United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway).	Data collected by the Cranet network. This is the largest repeated survey of the human resource management functions worldwide	Surveys
[9]:Budjanovcanin (2018)	The UK	Cross sectional	Interviews
[10]:Chang (2005)	South Korea	Multilevel: information regarding company HR practices was collected from HR managers, and data on employee perceptions and attitudes were measured from each individual employee, from 37 companies	Surveys
[11]: Chen et al. (2022)	The UK	A qualitative case study	Semi-structured interviews, observation of team meetings, training sessions, conference, consultation meeting, documentary evidence
[12]:Cooke (2006)	The UK	Case study	Interviews
[13]:Currie and Procter (2001)	The UK	Case study	Interviews and review of documentation
[14]:Dany, Guedri and Hatt (2008)	12 countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, New Zealand, Spain, Slovenia, the UK and the USA)	Single data collection from 3,442 valid public and private companies	Surveys

(*continued*)

Authors and publication year	Country	Research design	Data collection methods
[15]:Dewettinck and Vroonen (2017)	Belgium	Two quantitative studies	Surveys
[16]:Evans (2017)	The UK	Multiple case studies	Interviews
[17]:Farndale and Kelliher (2013)	The UK	Single data collection from employees across 22 business units	Survey
[18]:Frear, Cao and Zhao (2012)	China	Cross sectional	Surveys
[19]:Friede et al. (2008)	The USA and Canada	Cross sectional	Interviews
[20]:Gilbert, De Winne and Sels (2011)	Belgium and Luxembourg	Single data collection from employees in three companies	Surveys
[21]:Gilbert, De Winne and Sels (2015)	Belgium and Luxembourg	Multi-level model with data from 125 line managers and 899 employees	Surveys
[22]:Guthrie et al. (2011)	Ireland	Cross sectional	Surveys
[23]:Hewett et al. (2024)	The UK, The USA, and Europe	Two field studies: A three-wave longitudinal study (with 225 managers) and a multilevel study with data from 227 dyads	Surveys
[24]:Hu et al. (2022)	China	A two-wave study including 87 managers and 342 employees of nine Chinese firms	Surveys
[25]:Katou, Budhwar and Patel (2021)	Greece	Multilevel data collection from three sources (senior managers, line managers, and employees) in 158 Greek private organisations	Survey
[26]:Kehoe and Wright (2013)	The USA	Data were collected in a large food service organisation from employees working in each of 56 self-contained business units	Surveys
[27]:Kilroy et al. (2023)	Mexico and Ireland	Data were collected from 613 employees in two manufacturing plants in two countries	Surveys
[28]:Kim and Ryu (2011)	South Korea	Cross sectional	Surveys
[29]:Kossek et al. (2016)	The USA and Canada	Cross sectional	Interviews
[30]:Krachler (2023)	The UK and The USA	Multiple case studies	Semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation of team meetings, care coordination trainings, and governance and policy meetings; and documents, such as CC policy program standards, policy reports, and training documents.
[31]:Kulik and Perry (2008)	The USA	Data were collected from 174 HR decision-makers from different organisations	Surveys
[32]:Kuvaas, Dysvik and Buch (2014)	Norway	Multilevel data collection from two sources (line managers and employees), in four different Norwegian organisations	Surveys
[33]:Makhecha et al. (2018)	India	A qualitative research design involving a single case study with multiple embedded sub-cases	Interviews, study of firm documentary evidence and web portal
[34]:McClean and Collins (2019)	The USA	Multilevel: information regarding firm-level dependent variables (turnover and firm performance) was collected from CEOs, and data on HR practices and leadership behaviours was collected from line employees)	Surveys
[35]:Meijerink, Bondarouk and Lepak (2016)	Netherlands	Data were collected from 2,002 employees in 19 companies	Surveys
[36]:Mirfakhar, Trullen and Valverde (2023)	Iran	Cross sectional	Interviews
[37]:Ng and Sears (2020)	Canada	Multiple sources (i.e., survey data from chief executive officer (CEOs) and HR managers)	Surveys
[38]:Nishii, Lepak and Schneider (2008)	The USA	Multilevel data collection from two sources (department managers and employees)	Surveys
[39]:Op de Beeck, Wynen and Hondeghem (2016)	Belgium	Multilevel data collection from two sources (line managers and HR professionals), in two organisations of the Belgian federal government	Surveys
[40]:Pak (2022)	South Korea	A two-wave, multi-source study (team managers and team members) with data from 586 responses from 112 teams from 42 organisations	Surveys
[41]:Pan et al. (2022)	China	Field study methodology surveying HR managers and senior managers familiar with HR and IT usage in their companies	Surveys
[42]:Perry and Kulik (2008)	The USA	Cross sectional	Surveys
[43]:Piening, Baluch and Ridder (2014)	Germany	A multiple-case study of German health and social services organisations	Interviews
[44]:Ren, Jiang and Tang (2022)	China	Multiple sources (i.e., survey data from chief executive officer (CEOs), chief financial officers (CFOs), HR managers and employees, and archival data from government statistics)	Surveys and archival data

(*continued*)

Authors and publication year	Country	Research design	Data collection methods
[45]:Salvador-Gómez et al. (2023)	Spain	Multilevel data from the HR manager, the line manager and employees in each of the 100 Spanish companies.	Surveys
[46]:Sanders and Yang (2016)	Australia	Multiple study (experimental study (n = 354), and a cross-level field study (n = 639 employees	Surveys
[47]:Shipton et al. (2016)	Netherlands	Multilevel data collection from two sources (line managers and employees)	Surveys
[48]:Sikora, Ferris and Van Iddekinge (2015)	The USA	Multilevel data collection from two sources (line managers and employees)	Surveys
[49]:Stanton et al. (2010)	Australia	Multiple case studies	Interviews, focus groups, and study of documentation
[50]:Stirpe, Trullen and Bonache (2013)	Spain	Field study methodology surveying employees from nine firms located in Spain	Surveys
[51]:Straub et al. (2018)	The Netherlands	A three-wave longitudinal study	Surveys
[52]:Townsend et al. (2012)	Australia	A single case study	Interviews
[53]:Trullen et al. (2016)	Spain	A comparative case study approach	Interviews
[54]:Van De Voorde and Beijer (2015)	The Netherlands	Multilevel data collection from two sources (line managers and employees)	Surveys
[55]:Van Waeyenberg and Decramer (2018)	Belgium	Multilevel data collection from two sources (line managers and employees)	Surveys
[56]:Vermeeren (2014)	The Netherlands	Multilevel data collection from two sources (line managers and employees)	Surveys
[57]:Vossaert et al. (2022)	Belgium	A three-wave longitudinal study with data from 870 employees nested in 36 firms,	Surveys
[58]:Wang et al. (2022)	China	Multilevel data from 380 employees matched to 32 department managers in 23 Chinese state-owned enterprises	Surveys
[59]:Woodhams and Lupton (2006)	The UK	European Social Fund sponsored study of equal opportunities policy and practice in small to medium-sized enterprises in the UK	Interviews
[60]:Woodrow and Guest (2014)	The UK	A case study methodology utilising multiple sources of data	Existing literature, staff intranet, organisational grievance files relating to incidents of bullying, hospital's approach with the best HR practices, interviews, and national surveys
[61]:Yang and Arthur (2021)	South Korea	Multilevel data collection from two sources (line managers and employees), using surveys and in two phases	Surveys
[62]:Zhang, Wang and Jia (2022)	China	Multiphase and multilevel data from 474 employees in 50 companies	Surveys

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