ISM UNIVERSITY OF MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS

Eglė Poškienė

LINE MANAGERS‘ CARING FOR EMPLOYEES IN HRM IMPLEMENTATION

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Supervisor:
Prof. Dr. Rūta Kazlauskaitė (ISM University of Management and Economics, Social Sciences, Management – S 003)

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KEY DEFINITIONS

Caregiving organisations - institutions serving their clients via personal relationships between caregivers and care-seekers (Kahn, 1993).

Caring for an employee – a concern about an employee's well-being exerted through interpersonal or individual encounters when an organisational member (employee) cares for another employee as a person.

Concept - a more general, less specified notion capturing qualities that describe or explain a phenomenon of theoretical interest, which is a precursor to a construct (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013).

Construct - an abstract, theoretical formulation about the phenomenon of interest (Gioia et al., 2013).

Employee well-being - employee experience and functioning at work (Warr, 1987).

HR practice - actions carried out by managers to manage employees and their employment (Beijer, 2014).

HRM implementation - the process of gaining targeted employees' appropriate, committed, and skilful use of an HR practice, aligned with the corporate strategy (Van Mierlo, Bondarouk, & Sanders, 2018).

Intra-organisational caring (also organisational caring) – caring of an organisation or its members for other organisational members as internal organisational stakeholders.

Line managers - persons acting in the lower echelons of the management hierarchy with an immediate responsibility for their subordinates' work and performance (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

Managerial caring - managers' actions in meeting employee needs through regular informal and personalised interactions.

Personal caring (also interpersonal or individual caring) - labelled by Noddings (2002) as *caring for*, which refers to interpersonal or individual mostly face-to-face encounters when one person cares for well-being of a unique another person.

Phenomenon – an occurrence as perceived through the senses or known intellectually, the cause or explanation of which is in question (The Oxford English Dictionary of Current English, as provided in Von Krogh, Rossi-Lamastra, & Haefliger, 2012).

Professional caring - acts of care associated with particular vocations and related to respective professional norms, ethics, identities and competences (Smylie, Murphy, & Louis, 2016).

INTRODUCTION

> *"Care energizes all human work activity and may be employed by leaders, managers, and strategists across all organisations and cultures to maximize human potential, integrate care with the wealth creation process, and create healthy, sustainable organisations" (Kawamura, 2013, p.100).*

This study investigates how lower-echelon management, line managers in particular, engage in caring activities in regard to employees when implementing HR practices. *Managerial caring* is understood as managers' actions in meeting employee needs through regular informal and personalised interactions (Carmeli, Jones, & Binyamin, 2016; Gabriel, 2015; Kahn, 1993; Kroth & Keeler, 2009). In this thesis, the research interest lies in managers' personal caring for employees (hereafter caring for employees), as internal organisational stakeholders, versus professional caring (Smylie et al., 2016).

The relevance of the study. For the past few decades, the focus of the mainstream Human Resource Management (hereafter HRM) rested on the enhancement of employee and organisational performance, under which employees were viewed as a source of competitive advantage. Recently, however, scholars (e.g. Mariappanadar, 2012; Van Buren, Greenwood, & Sheehan, 2011) have raised a concern that HR practices lead to employee exploitation through organisational actions aimed at maximising productivity, which in turn has negative effects on employees, such as burnout and exhaustion, sick leave, absenteeism, presenteeism, etc.

Caring for employees is more of a rhetoric than reality in many organisations (Delios, 2010; George, 2014; Simpson, Clegg, & Freeder, 2013; Smylie et al., 2016), even in those that are engaged in corporate social responsibility activities, which are often considered as another managerial tool aimed at maximising profits and driven primarily by organisational goals, such as for instance employee retention and the image of an attractive and responsible employer (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005; Héjj, 2019; Jabbour & Santos, 2008). Although employees are the ones who implement corporate social responsibility and sustainability initiatives of their organisations, these initiatives focus more on environmental issues and external organisational stakeholders than employees themselves (Pfeffer, 2010). Taking care of employees is

critical not just because it is a matter of ethics and responsibility (e.g. Faldetta, 2016; Guest, 2017), but because it, in turn, enhances employee and organisational performance (Edgar, Geare, Saunders, Beacker, & Faanunu, 2017; Kowalski & Loretto, 2017; Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). Moreover, taking care for employees as service providers, along with customer care, has been emphasised (Chuang & Liao, 2010; Kahn, 1993; Liedtka, 1996) in work relationship literature, as service quality is highly dependent on how employees are taken care of (Clarke & Hill, 2012).

Taking care of employee concerns and needs is not always designed in HR practices; therefore, it becomes a line manager's responsibility to take care of these aspects during HR practice implementation. Although line managers are usually not involved in making decisions as to which and what HR practices the organisation should introduce (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013), they are responsible for their implementation at the operational level (Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, & Looise, 2013; Gilbert, De Winne, & Sels, 2011). Line managers play an important role in caring for employees, as they are actively involved in day-to-day people management with a bottom-line impact (López-Cotarelo, 2018). Effective HRM implementation requires taking employee talent, preferences and expectations into account and then aligning them with organisational needs (Gilbert, De Winne, & Sels, 2015; Knies & Leisink, 2014b; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010) since employee responses to HRM are regarded as key indicators of effective HRM implementation (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Line managers are best placed to do this as organisations place the responsibility for the "care and feeding" of their employees in the hands of line managers by devolving HRM implementation to them (Perry & Kulik, 2008, p. 262).

Attention to caring as a phenomenon and a concept is growing in business, social policy and research (Delios, 2010; Fine, 2007; Gabriel, 2015; Kawamura, 2013; Rynes, Bartunek, Dutton, & Margolis, 2012; Setter & Zsolnai, 2019; Sewell & Barker, 2006). While caring and acting in the interest of others are important moral values and responsibility in most societies (Bear, 2019; Grant, 2014; Setter & Zsolnai, 2019), caring manifestations often tend to be viewed as soft and naive (Fuqua & Newman, 2002; Gabriel, 2015), are not typical and not widely supported at work in nowadays rule-based organisational hierarchies, depersonalised processes and existing business climates (Grant, 2014; Liedtka, 1996; Smylie et al., 2016; Weber, 2014). For a business to serve people values, rather than people serving business, we need to build organisations that „dare to care" for employees by fostering mutual love and

helping, a sense of community where caring is inspired by a deep understanding of human conditions and vulnerability, and rooted in the DNA of the organisation (Bouckaert, 2019; Delios, 2010; Héjj, 2019).

On a large scale, financial crises, natural disasters, diseases and man-made catastrophes lead to global organisational and individual suffering and losses. To mitigate them, an increasing interdependency among organisations and individuals is needed which requires focusing social norms towards cooperation, altruism and caring (Kanungo & Conger, 1993; Rynes et al., 2012). Caring organisations cope better in crisis and change (Simpson et al., 2013; Wilson & Ferch, 2005), and are more competitive. The current context of the global pandemic is a good example of that. Thus organisations need to care for their employees to gain resilience, responsiveness and flexibility.

Several positive outcomes of caring for employees and their performance in a workplace have been suggested in prior research (Carmeli et al., 2016; Inagaki & Orehek, 2017; Kroth & Keeler, 2009; Rynes et al., 2012) such as, for instance, knowledge creation and innovative solutions (Von Krogh, 1998), positive self-image or self-worth (McAllister & Bigley, 2002). Moreover, caring behaviours of organisations mitigate the harm (e.g. poor health, job stress) inflicted to employees by performance-enhancing HR practices (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011; Mariappanadar & Kramar, 2014) and build on long-term potential of organisations (e.g. measured by stock market performance) (Weber, 2014). Studying caring for employees contributes to humanistic management research, which is also growing in importance (Adler & Hansen, 2012; Pirson, 2019; Tsui, 2013). All this stimulates an other-interest and care for others, as opposed to self-interest, which is based on relationships and relatedness, and underlines the relevance of studying caring in management and drawing implications for research and practice on the institutionalization of caring for employees.

Caring theorists (Kahn, 1993; Liedtka, 1999) believe that organisations *per se* cannot offer caregiving to their employees; caregiving can be provided to them by their immediate managers. One way line managers may do that is through HRM implementation. Therefore, this thesis aims to understand caring on the individual level, i.e. personal caring, in exploring how line managers implement HR practices to take care of employees. In doing so, the thesis focuses on the concept of caring as applied in management research (Kahn, 1993; Kawamura, 2013; Kroth & Keeler, 2009). In it, *managerial caring is specifically aimed at fostering employee well-being*

and development of a “holding environment” at work (Kahn, 2001) that is free from conflicts between getting the work done optimally and caring for the health and well-being of the staff (Gittell & Douglass, 2012; Mariappanadar & Kramar, 2014).

The current state of research and remaining gaps. One of the key HRM research interests lies in the study of the relationship between HR practices and organisational performance, labelled “HR black box” (Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005). This strand of research, referred to as strategic HRM, offers plenty of moderating as well as mediating variables of this relationship (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012). It also suggests that HRM practice content and process (methods by which HR practices are communicated and create shared meanings about their content) (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) have an impact on employee attitudes and behaviour (Katou, Budhwar, & Patel, 2014). This thesis seeks to better understand the process of HRM implementation.

In the HRM implementation process, a substantial difference between HR practices as intended by HRM policy and actually implemented HR practices (Wright & Nishii, 2013) is often observed (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Line managers can choose to implement practices as intended, or they may use their discretion and deviate from intended HRM practices and adjust them (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Thus HRM implementation may take various *scenarios* that line managers adopt towards HRM policy (Bos-Nehles, Bondarouk, & Labrenz, 2017). These scenarios have been studied in multinational companies (e.g. Kostova & Roth, 2002) where implementation of HR practices brings other difficulties than in smaller domestic companies that do not need to deal with cross-cultural and cross-national issues (Mirfakhar, Trullen, & Valverde, 2018). To my knowledge, no studies of the HRM implementation scenarios have been conducted in the latter. Nor has the way of how HR practices may be shaped by line managers aiming to care for employee well-being been studied.

Prior research has identified a number of reasons behind line managers’ deviation from intended HRM policy in HR implementation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gilbert et al., 2015; Makhecha, Srinivasan, Prabhu, & Mukherji, 2018; Mirfakhar et al., 2018); however, we still lack knowledge about the role of relationship-oriented or leadership-related variables (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Jiang, 2013; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010), such as leader-member exchange or manager caring, in HRM implementation.

To date, caring for employees in the implementation of HR practices has received scant research attention and has mainly focused on manager support for the use of some specific HR practices by employees (Straub, Vinkenburg, van Kleef, & Hofmans, 2018), or manager caring for employees in the implementation of a few distinct HR practices (Crawshaw & Game, 2015; Daverth, Hyde, & Cassell, 2016; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). In this research employee accounts of career management effectiveness were found to parallel behavioural components of managers' caring, such as acceptance, accessibility, awareness and collaboration (Crawshaw & Game, 2015). This research has also shown that employee experiences of an HR practice may be shaped by whether they feel that their supervisor takes care of their well-being or not (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010).

Employee well-being has recently received growing research interest (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019; Van de Voorde & Boxall, 2014), but it is still largely ignored in dominant HRM models and HRM implementation literature (Crawshaw & Game, 2015; Gilbert et al., 2015; Guest, 2017; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Research has also led to calls for studies on specific managerial behaviours that influence employee well-being (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; Kerns, 2018).

Research of caring in management on an individual level takes its roots from professional caring in human-service occupations, such as healthcare (Swanson, 1991; Watson, 2008), social services and ministry, and education (Noddings, 2005), where the aims of caring are shaped by occupational orientations and domains of work that distinguish professional caring from personal (Smylie et al., 2016). In those professions the importance of professional caring, as anchored in clients' problems and responses to them, is based on caring as an integral part of services provided for external organisational stakeholders, i.e. clients, patients, pupils, which calls for further research on caring towards internal stakeholders.

There have also been several attempts to conceptualise personal caring for employees (also called individual or interpersonal caring) in management research (Gilligan, 1982; Kahn, 1993; Kawamura, 2013; Kroth & Keeler, 2009; Noddings, 1984), where caring for employees is studied as an aspect of interpersonal relationships (Smylie et al., 2016; Weber, 2014). This, however, is primarily done in research in educational establishments (Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016; Van der Vyver, Van der Westhuizen, & Meyer, 2014) and public service (Hasu & Lehtonen, 2014), and in the so-called caregiving institutions that serve their clients via personal relationships

between caregivers and care-seekers (Kahn, 1993), which can be regarded as extreme cases of caring environments where caring is especially manifest and visible (Martela, 2012). Such institutions comprise hospitals, nursing homes, and social service agencies (e.g. Kahn, 1993; Martela, 2012). The existing literature shows that personal caring is context-specific, which means that caring actions are as unique as is the uniqueness of each cared-for (Gittell & Douglass, 2012; Weber, 2014). It is also noteworthy that most of this research on the construct of caring for employees has been conceptual to date. Therefore, more empirical research on caring for employees in business is needed as it may reveal different aspects of caring.

To date, scholars have suggested many different definitions of caring as a construct. For instance, Kroth & Keeler (2009, p. 521) see *managerial caring* "as a process wherein a manager exhibits inviting, advancing, capacitating, and connecting behaviours toward an employee or employees". Although researchers of caring by and large agree that caring is an informal process of relating, there is no agreed-upon definition of what personal caring is (Weber, 2014; Swanson, 1991). There is also a lack of a common understanding of the *manifestations* of caring, i.e. what managers' caring for employees pertains: abilities of a manager, managerial practices, managerial behaviours or something else. All this leads to difficulties in describing and determining managers' caring and its manifestation and calls for further research on the meaning and manifestations of caring for employees at work.

The understanding of the concept of caring for employees in organisational studies is further complicated by its often implicit usage, i.e. referring to a manager's caring for employees without the use of the very concept, or the term of caring (e.g. Delios, 2010). Such approaches abound in organisational scholarship and include *servant leadership* (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008), *spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003), compassion* (Lilius et al., 2008), *perceived supervisor support* (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002), *leader-member exchange* (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), to mention just a few. Therefore, to bring in more clarity in the understanding of the meaning of the concept of caring for employees and its manifestations, an in-depth analysis of both the construct of caring and of related (or associated) constructs is needed. Respectively in this dissertation, a distinction is made between the construct of caring and care-related constructs that refer to caring in a more or less implicit manner, both of which are discussed and compared in more detail in the literature review.

Research aim and methodology. The **aim of this thesis** is to investigate the manifestation of line managers' caring for their employees in HR practice implementation. Manifestations of caring are understood here as any means and/or forms of managers' caring. To address the above research gaps, i.e. the lack of the understanding of line managers' caring for their employees and its likely interfaces with HRM implementation in the business setting, this thesis aims to answer the following **research question** - *how do line managers engage in caring for their employees in HRM implementation.*

Respectively the following **research objectives** have been raised:

1. To investigate the existing theoretical assumptions about line managers' caring for employees in HRM implementation;
2. To conduct the theoretical analysis of managers' caring and related constructs used in management research;
3. To explore empirically how line managers' caring for employees manifests in HRM implementation;
4. To provide theoretical implications to research and recommendations to business organisations on line management caring in HRM implementation.

To reach the empirical objective of this research an exploratory instrumental multi-case study was performed in twelve retail units. 36 semi-structured interviews have been conducted in two organisations in Lithuania. This study includes 36 research participants from 3 job positions: 2 heads of HR departments, 12 line managers and 22 employees. For the selection of individual participants, such as line managers and employees, I have used a nonprobability purposive convenience sampling (Saunders, 2012), which enabled to select informants with different characteristics and thus gain differing views in respect to caring and HRM implementation.

The empirical study adopts a combination of pragmatic and interpretive philosophical positions. Within both perspectives objective knowledge is unattainable, while under pragmatism results of scientific inquiry are measured by its practical considerations (Creswell, 2009; Van de Ven, 2007; Wicks & Freeman, 1998). In this empirical study I attempt to understand line managers' caring, HRM implementation,

and HR practices in context using several perspectives for interpretations through my subjective understanding of research participants' perceptions or finding out how they have come to attach a certain meaning to the phenomena of interest (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000; Myers, 2009; Wicks & Freeman, 1998).

Research context. This thesis investigates retail line managers whose role has been acknowledged as demanding significant HRM skills (Evans, 2017) in service sector organisations, which as a rule put a lot of pressure on productivity and quality (Arnold, Flaherty, Voss, & Mowen, 2009). Caring enacted by line managers on the work-floor may conflict with the dominant managerial patterns of acceleration and short-termism as certain forms of pressure (Bouckaert, 2019; Delios, 2010; Gabriel, 2015; Hasu & Lehtonen, 2014; Liedtka, 1996; McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1997), which stimulates a need to explore how caring is implemented within such conditions. The retail sector was chosen for this research as, on the one hand, it employs one of the largest segments of the national workforce, while, on the other hand, it is notorious for often precarious work arrangements, the prevalence of less-experienced and younger workforce, limited investment in wages and employee development, and work requiring emotional labour for customer service (Boyd, Hayward, Tuckey, Dollard, & Dormann, 2014; Edgar et al., 2017; Van de Voorde & Boxall, 2014), all of which may put employee well-being at threat and raise specific challenges for line managers, including a greater need for caring for employees.

Scientific novelty and contribution. This study has extended the current research understanding of the manifestations of managers' caring in several ways. Studying HRM implementation from the perspective of line managers' caring for their employees provided a better understanding of the link between HRM and well-being through the HRM implementation process by clarifying how line managers combine their instrumental role as HRM implementers with taking employee interests into account.

Thus, the results of this dissertation make theoretical contributions to two research domains: caring for employees and HRM implementation.

Contributions to HRM implementation literature:

1. findings of this research indicate that through the forms of caring and HRM implementation scenarios line managers can implement HR practices in a way that allows them to improve or safeguard employee well-being;
2. this research has extended the understanding of line managers' role in HR practice implementation by showing that it entails not only managers' responsibility to implement HR practices at the operational level; HRM implementation is also a means to get to know one's employees better and to provide more opportunities to them: voice their interests, recognise their strengths, encourage their promotion, etc.;
3. this research has broadened the explanation of the reasons behind line managers' deviation from intended practices by showing that line managers might need to shape and modify HR practices to implement them in a way that takes employee needs into consideration. By doing so they are not necessarily deviating from the intended way because of personal interests, but to create more value for their subordinates;
4. this study has complemented the HRM implementation literature by distinguishing some additional scenarios, such as *Communicating, Facilitating,* and *Improving,* not identified in prior research, when HR practices are implemented and modified through augmentations within the discretion of line managers without violating the company's HR policy. Thus, the application of caring can also facilitate the implementation of HR practices through their improvement and by helping employees to understand and trust them;
5. finally, this research has provided insights on the possibilities of encouraging more active line managers' engagement in HRM implementation, which, as shown in prior research, they are sometimes reluctant to do. Caring for employees is what motivates line managers to engage in HRM implementation.

Contributions to the literature on caring as a construct and a phenomenon:

1. the theoretical and empirical analysis showed the breadth of caring as a study area. This allows regarding caring as a phenomenon rather than a distinct construct;

2. findings of this research showed that caring may entail building networks of relationships to influence important others in the organisation to make decisions in favour of an employee, which extends prior theorising about caring under which caring refers to mutual relationships between a caregiver and the cared-for;
3. unlike prior research, under which caring is rather passive, findings of this research have revealed that line managers' caring is proactive, and in addition to emotional and relational resources it refers to the provision of more tangible and specific ones;
4. this research has also shown that managers' caring for employees is as much critical in a high performance-oriented organisational context, such as retail, as it is in non-profit and caregiving organisations.

The structure of the thesis. The thesis starts with the review of literature (chapter 1), which seeks to disclose the existing understanding of the process of HRM implementation, the role of line managers in HRM implementation, the meaning and manifestations of managerial caring, and the input of line managers' caring into HRM implementation. The review starts with the analysis of HRM research (section 1.1.), specifically its state on the HRM-well-being-performance linkage, research on HR practices and HRM implementation, and the role of line managers in it.

Section 1.2. presents the analysis of caring as a distinct construct in organisational studies. The theoretical analysis of caring continues with the study of care-related constructs, such as various types of support (section 1.2.3.2) and approaches to leadership that incorporate caring as a term implicitly (section 1.2.4). Section 1.2.5. includes a summary of the analysis of the concepts of caring and a critical comparison of managerial caring and related constructs. A theoretical analysis of likely interconnections of line manager caring with HRM implementation (section 1.3.) concludes the literature review.

In chapter 2 empirical research objectives are formulated and research methodology presented including research design, research setting, sampling of research participants, research procedure and data analysis. Findings of the empirical study are presented in chapter 3 and discussed in chapter 4, where future research directions are also suggested, and research limitations and managerial implications described. The thesis closes with conclusions (chapter 5).

Publications and presentations of research findings

Peer-reviewed journals:

Poškiene, E., & Kazlauskaitė, R. (2020). Organisational Caring for Employees through Performance Management. *Zarządzanie Zasobami Ludzkimi [Human Resource Management]*, 5, forthcoming.

Poškiene, E., Coudounaris D. N., & Kazlauskaitė, R. (2020) The Relationship between Caring for Employees and the Well-being of the Organisation. *Organizacijų vadyba: sisteminiai tyrimai [Management of Organizations: Systematic Research],* 84, forthcoming.

Poškienė, E., & Norvilė, N. (2016). Lietuvos valstybės tarnautojų atrankos sistemos skaidrumo analizė. *Viešoji Politika ir Administravimas [Public policy and administration]*, 15(4), 657-672.

Scientific conferences:

Poškienė E., & Kazlauskaitė, R. (2019). HR Practice Design Aimed at Employee Well-being. *11th bienal Dutch HRM network HRM conference,* Tilburg, Netherlands, 13-15 November.

Poškienė E. (2015). Vadovavimas rūpinantis – kaip pasiekti verslo tikslus neprarandant entuziazmo?, *6-oji mokslinė praktinė konferencija, Mykolo Riomerio Universitetas ir Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas,* Kaunas, 13 November.

Poškienė E., & Kazlauskaitė, R. (2015). Translating Sustainability Principles into HRM. *European Academy of Management Conference (EURAM),* Warsaw, Poland, 17-20 June, pp.1-35. ISBN 978-8386437-60-0.

Poškienė E. (2014). Sustainability Perspective in the HRM and Organisational Performance linkage. *13th International HRM conference (IHRM),* Krakow, Poland, 24-27 June.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, first, human resource management literature is studied. It is then followed by the analysis of literature on caring.

1.1. Review of HRM and HRM implementation literature

Managing people and the work they do is an inevitable and critical task for organisations; therefore, without Human Resource Management (hereafter HRM) it is impossible to organise activities and attain performance goals of the organisation (Boxall, 2013). HRM involves all management decisions and actions that affect the nature of the relationship between the organisation and its employees – its human resources (Beer et al., 1984). HRM literature distinguishes between HRM strategy, policy and practices, but human resource (HR) practices play the central role in the HRM literature. In the organisation the need for HRM is determined by the business model and strategy, and as a result, HR practices are designed with the organisation's goals in mind, such as maximising performance, reducing employee turnover, etc. (Boxall, 2013; Loon, Otaye-Ebede, & Stewart, 2019). This is in particular reflected in the so called strategic HRM literature, the key focus of which is the link between HRM and organisational performance and where treating people as a key resource is emphasised as a virtue. Due to these reasons HRM research has been criticised for a lack of morality in the organisational approach towards its employees (Armstrong, 2009). The aim of this dissertation is to look into the other side of HRM, i.e. how it could serve people working in organisations too, by adopting an integrated approach not only to the employment and development but also to the well-being of employees. Respectively the literature review in the following section continues with the analysis of the literature that explains the relationship between HRM and employee well-being.

1.1.1. Relationship between HRM and employee well-being

In this section the possible link between HRM and employee well-being is depicted. Literature review in this section also shows how individual employee well-being at work is understood.

For the past few decades the focus of HRM rested on the enhancement of employee and organisational performance, under which, following the resource-based

view, employees were viewed as a source of competitive advantage. Recently, however, some HRM scholars (e.g. Mariappanadar, 2012; Van Buren et al., 2011) have raised a concern that strategic HRM leads to employee exploitation through organisational actions aimed at productivity maximising, which in turn has negative effects on individuals, such as burnout and exhaustion, sick leave, absenteeism, presenteeism, etc. Similarly, strategic HRM researchers (Jensen, Patel, & Messersmith, 2013; Marescaux, De Winne, & Sels, 2012; Paauwe, 2009; Wright & Nishii, 2013) have noted that HRM-performance studies have by and large ignored the employee perspective, as theoretical frameworks used in this strand of research were mostly situated at the firm level and thus neglected the underlying mechanisms by which HRM affects individual performance.

While generally, organisations understand the importance of investing into employee well-being, research on caring for employee well-being has just recently received growing interest (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019; Van de Voorde & Boxall, 2014), and studies on employee well-being are still quite scarce in the HRM-performance and HRM implementation research (Gilbert et al., 2015; Guest, 2017; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Although research was interested in certain psychological aspects of well-being, particularly work satisfaction (Boselie et al., 2005), it has not holistically explored the impact of single HR practices on employee health and well-being (Van De Voorde, Paauwe, & Van Veldhoven, 2012).

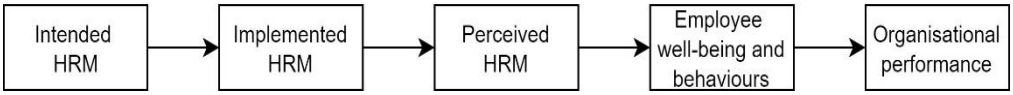
Employee well-being refers to employee experience and functioning at work (Warr, 1987). This general definition of employee work related well-being is a base for this study. Work-specific well-being implies more job-specific domains in comparison to context-free well-being. Grant, Christianson, and Price (2007) differentiate between three dimensions of employee well-being at work: happiness, health and relationships. The conceptualisations of Warr (1987, 1990) and Grant et al. (2007) refer to a person's subjective affective judgement regarding events and environment in a person's life. This affective well-being has been demonstrated to be the most important aspect of work-related well-being (Taris & Schaufeli, 2014) and is composed of two dimensions: anxiety – contentment and depression – enthusiasm (Warr, 1990). Respectively well-being may refer to negative (e.g. negative affect and strain) or positive indicators (e.g. positive affect and engagement).

The broadest conceptualisation of work-specific well-being has been suggested by Van Horn, Taris, Schaufeli, and Schreurs (2004). They have extended the well-

being concept, which mainly referred to the affective well-being (represented by job satisfaction, organisational commitment, emotional exhaustion/fatigue) by including other well-being dimensions, such as professional (aspiration and competence at work, autonomy), social (depersonalisation towards colleagues, quality of social functioning at work), cognitive (the capacity to take up new information at work, ability to concentrate at work) and psychosomatic (health complaints such as headaches, stomach aches and symptoms of possible cardiovascular issues) (Taris & Schaufeli, 2014). Thus, well-being may be regarded a multidimensional construct with complex interactions between separate well-being dimensions, which are included into the notion of well-being and could be to some degree a matter of a researcher (Taris & Schaufeli, 2014).

Employee well-being has been recently added to HRM-performance linkage models under employee outcomes. For instance, Van de Voorde and Boxall (2014) proposed an HRM-performance model (Figure 1) that depicts the primacy of employee well-being along with organisational performance outcomes in the HRM and performance relationship.

Figure 1. Process model of the HRM-well-being-performance relationship



Source: Van de Voorde and Boxall (2014).

It is considered vital to take care of employees and their well-being (Guest, 2017) because it leads to positive employee outcomes, such as commitment and satisfaction, and in turn affects their productivity and organisational performance (Edgar et al., 2017; Kowalski & Loretto, 2017; Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019; Shore et al., 2006). Satisfied and happy employees are believed to be more productive (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001). How well-being is related to performance is debated in research; however, the mutual gains perspective has gained the most empirical support so far (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). According to it, HR practices foster employee well-being, which ultimately results in improved operational and financial performance of an organisation, or, in its less positive interpretation, employees (in terms of their well-being) and organisations (in terms of their performance) both benefit from HRM (Van De Voorde et al., 2012).

In line with the mutual losses model, employee well-being is on the contrary argued to be diminished by HR practices which lead to increased work intensification and strain and in turn also undermines organisational performance (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). Finally, the third perspective, the conflicting outcomes view, assumes that HR practices diminish well-being, which, in turn, results in increased performance. In this model a positive effect on performance is achieved at the expense of employee well-being (Van De Voorde et al., 2012).

A question, however, arises as to whether employee well-being is important only because it affects organisational performance. Caring literature and positive organisational scholarship, as depicted in section 1.2.3.1, see well-being as an important in itself (e.g. Cameron & Dutton, 2003; Faldetta, 2016; Van der Vyver et al., 2014). Similarly some HRM researchers (e.g. Beer, Boselie, & Brewster, 2015; Paauwe, 2009) suggest that strategic HRM literature should adopt *value-laden or ethical HRM* that treat organisational performance based on the long-term needs of all relevant stakeholders (including employees) rather than pure economic performance. Likewise the mutual gains perspective in strategic HRM (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001; Yang & Hung, 2017) sustainable HRM (Mariappanadar & Kramar, 2014) claim that HRM can make employees both "happy" and "productive", but high productivity should not be gained at the cost of employee well-being. Although HRM theory provides multiple explanations of the relationship between HR practices and employee well-being, overall arguments about the impact of HRM on well-being are based on the often implicit assumption that *HR practices ultimately affect well-being by structuring and affecting employee experiences at work* (Peccei, Van de Voorde, & Van Veldhoven, 2013). Work psychology also emphasises the need to better understand employee experiences and well-being (Van de Voorde & Boxall, 2014), and line managers' caring might be an important factor developing or strengthening the relationship between HRM and well-being, which requires further research attention (Beer et al., 2015; Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019).

Thus, building on the concept of caring this thesis aims to contribute to the literature of strategic HRM on the link between HRM and well-being by answering the following research question: *how do line managers engage in caring for employees in HRM implementation*. To answer this research question, deeper knowledge about the concept of caring is needed, which is analysed in section 1.2.

1.1.2. HR practices as tools to manage employees

HR practices have gained importance in HRM research since they are believed to lead to a number of outcomes at both the individual and organisational levels that ultimately affect overall organisational performance (Beijer, Peccei, Van Veldhoven, & Paauwe, 2019). Following Beijer (2014), HR practices may be defined as the actions carried out by managers to manage employees and their employment. HR practices are associated with the employee role behaviour that is needed to perform a specific task (Schuler & Jackson, 1987). Organisations apply a wide variety of HR practices, which can be grouped into as many as 36 functional categories (Langevin-Heavey et al., 2013). Some HR practices are assumed to be more useful than others and are called the “best” practices, because they are believed to have a positive impact on performance in all organisations and thus are suggested to be applied universally (Huselid, 1995; Osterman, 1994). Other researchers disagree on the number and universal applicability of the „best” HR practices that firms can adopt to improve their performance (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Paauwe, Wright, & Guest, 2013). Thus, the choice of HR practices for the study is primarily the matter of the researcher given the specifics of the organisation and the study, as it is done in this thesis too.

A distinction has been made between two groups of practices: 1) work practices (aimed at the management of the work domain), for instance autonomous jobs, self-managing teams, quality circles, etc.; and 2) employment practices (used for the management of people and their employment relationships), which include all the practices used to recruit, deploy, motivate, consult, negotiate with, develop and retain employees (Boxall & Macky, 2009). This dissertation by and large focuses on the employment practices. HR practices that will be broader investigated in the empirical part of this thesis are discussed in more detail.

Recruitment and selection of staff are concerned with placing individuals into jobs and relate to individuals from outside of the organisation in case of external recruitment. In this respect recruitment and selection differ from other HR practices and activities, which deal with individuals after they are employed in the organisation (Barrick, Feild, & Gatewood, 2011). Respectively employment may refer to either an initial position for a new employee (in case of external recruitment) or a new position for a current employee (in case of internal recruitment).

Recruitment comprises such organisational activities as choosing recruiting sources, developing recruitment ads, deciding on recruitment budget, etc. that influence an individual's decision to apply for a position and accept the job offer. Selection is the process of collecting and evaluating information about an individual in order to extend an offer of employment (Barrick et al., 2011).

Performance appraisal refers to a formal process through which employees are typically evaluated by their immediate manager who assesses their performance along a given set of criteria (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). The HR practice of performance appraisal is among the most extensively studied in HRM research (Langevin-Heavey et al., 2013). It is often aligned with a range of other HR practices and activities, such as performance feedback, training, rewards, career planning, goal setting and coordination with the strategic goals of organisations (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Tweedie, Wild, Rhodes, & Martinov-Bennie, 2019). In practice this set of activities is often refered to as performance appraisal. In academia this broader set of HR practices is refered to as performance management and focuses on the improvement of individual performance with the ultimate goal of improving organisational performance (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017).

Another group of HR practices is related to employee succession planning (Dries, 2013). It includes such HR practices as talent management, career paths or development, career planning (Langevin-Heavey et al., 2013), internal recruitment and competence assessment. *Talent management* as an HR practice has arisen from organisational interests (i.e. to manage talent scarcity) (Dries, 2013) and has been criticised in literature for not covering all employees in the organisation (workforce differentiation and exclusiveness) (Swailes, 2013).

Career development activities, for instance promotional opportunities, external training, secondment, special assignments, or education leading to qualifications, are used by organisations to provide developmental opportunities to employees (Baruch & Peiperl, 2000). Career management, planning, and development are essential to develop a skilled and flexible workforce and to manage employee retention since employee turnover is more likely when organisations do not develop career of employees (Crawshaw & Game, 2014; Sturges et al. 2005). Career management may also be seen as a form of managerial control (Tweedie et al., 2019). While employees expect their careers to be managed by the organisation, the latter put greater emphasis on the self-management of career, which is also based on the assumption that careers

are made outside organisational boundaries rather than internally (Arthur, 2014; Sturges, Conway, & Liefooghe, 2010).

Work scheduling, as an HR practice, refers to work planning activities and is closely related to staffing practices (staffing levels, staff composition) (Langevin-Heavey et al., 2013). Work scheduling is aimed at coordinating both the work and its performance by employees. It pertains to the organisation's control over how an employee performs their work, and for employees this is one of the work conditions that can be more favourable or not in terms of perceived job autonomy and fairness (James, McKechnie, & Swanberg, 2011; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Swanberg, James, Werner, & McKechnie (2008).

Studies have found that it is sets (also called systems) of HR practices that impact organisational performance, especially when they are used in "bundles", because bundles of HR practices, integrated and reinforced with each other, create mutually reinforcing effects that facilitate expected employee outcomes (Mac Duffie, 1995). However, research has failed to consider whether it is the combination of HR practices (HRM system) that affect employee outcomes, or individual single practices (Paauwe et al., 2013; Wall & Wood, 2005). The research has thus called for studies on single HR practices (Osterman, 1994; Van De Voorde et al., 2012). This thesis focuses on the study of single HR practices (opposite to a composite bundle) as experienced by organisational members to develop an understanding of the implementation of each single HR practice selected for this study.

HRM systems (and respectively HR practices) may vary among organisations depending on organisational goals and respective HRM strategy and *employee orientation*. Respectively HR practices may be oriented more towards employees or organisation (Van De Voorde et al., 2012; Villajos, Tordera, Peiró, & Van Veldhoven, 2019). Research on HRM has focused on the presence of HR practices and has, by and large, ignored *employee orientation* and *HR practice design.* Practice design is the structure (rules and resources) of an HR practice that guides the behaviour of HRM implementation actors (Van Mierlo et al., 2018). Practice design, however, plays an important role in the alignment of employee and employer needs. When HR practices are designed with a mere focus on organisational goals, employee needs get neglected, while employee-supportive practices are intended to promote and protect their well-being (Villajos et al., 2019).

Employee-supportive HR practices (Salas-Vallina, Pozo, & Fernandez-Guerrero, 2020) reflect organisational caring about employees through HR practices. Such practices are intended to improve employee experiences at work by providing emotional, financial, and instrumental assistance beyond the scope of the standard HR pay, benefit, recognition, and training and development programs (Grant, Dutton, & Rosso, 2008). Among the latter is the provision of a safe working environment, concern for work-life balance, fair treatment and avoidance of bullying and harassment (Marescaux et al., 2012; Salas-Vallina et al., 2020; Woodrow & Guest, 2014).

HR systems may also have multiple goals, e.g. maintaining some degree of orientation to employee well-being while simultaneously maximising performance through pursuing labour productivity (Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern, & Stiles, 1997). Thus building on this research and a differential approach to HR systems, i.e. their multiple goals (Van De Voorde et al., 2012), it is reasonable to propose that all HR practices are focused towards employee well-being to some extent. HR practices that have a higher degree of employee orientation, such as career development, training, direct employee participation, developmental appraisal, mentoring (Marescaux et al., 2012) can simultaneously satisfy both organisational and employee needs. It follows then that organisational caring (also referred to as *employee orientation*) may be regarded as a quality of HR practice design.

This section presented an understanding of HR practices that line managers can be provided by their organisations as tools to achieve organisational goals and to care for employees in their units.

1.1.3. Attainment of organisational goals through HRM implementation

HRM literature distinguishes between intended, implemented and perceived HR practices (Wright & Nishii, 2013). Intended HR practices are designed to be implemented by line managers in line with HRM strategy that help the organisation reach its goals (Beijer, 2014; Wright & Nishii, 2013). Implemented HR practices are the actual practices that are used at the operational level in the organisation (Wright & Nishii, 2013). Finally, perceived HR practices refer to implemented HR practices from the employee perspective (Beijer, 2014). Perceived HR practices have been shown to influence employee attitudes and behaviour through affective/attitudinal (job satisfaction and employee commitment), cognitive (knowledge or skill) and

behavioural employee reactions (Wright & Nishii, 2013). In HRM theory the aim of designing and implementing HR practices is to achieve positive employee reactions that lead to increased individual and in turn organisational performance. Thus, successful HRM implementation may provide added value to the organisation (Dany, Guedri, & Hatt, 2008).

Earlier HRM studies regarded differences between intended and implemented HR practices as dangerous and emphasised the need to reduce this gap (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Khilji & Wang, 2006; Piening, Baluch, & Ridder, 2014). More recent researchers have challenged this unidirectional model and are instead more concerned about the process of HRM implementation (Bondarouk, Trullen, & Valverde, 2018; Van Mierlo et al., 2018) than the gaps between intended, actual, and perceived HRM. According to them HRM implementation is defined as a process of gaining targeted employees' appropriate, committed, and skilful use of an HR practice, aligned with the corporate strategy (Van Mierlo et al., 2018).

In this context, line managers play an important role in HRM implementation (e.g. Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007, Edgar & Geare, 2005), as there may be a *gap* between what is formally required (or intended) by the HRM policy and what is actually implemented by line managers (Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2004; Khilji & Wang, 2006). HRM researchers have acknowledged that the role of line managers, their leadership behaviour, and their interpersonal relationships with employees have all largely been ignored, which calls for further studies in this field (Boselie et al., 2005; Purcell et al., 2009).

HR practices, if implemented successfully, allow organisations to achieve their performance goals through affecting employee reactions. Line managers act as implementers of HR practices. This role of line managers is analysed more broadly in the next section.

1.1.4. Line managers' responsibilities in HRM implementation and implementation scenarios

To start with, the terms used in this dissertation in reference to "line managers" are clarified. The term "line manager" comes from HRM literature, and it is the main term of this thesis. It is substituted by a term "manager" when referring to managers in general. When the nearest manager (supervisor) is meant, the term "immediate manager" is used. In the analysis of organisational behaviour literature in the

conceptualisations of support and leadership literature, the original terms used by the authors are applied in the thesis, respectively “supervisor” (e.g. supervisor support) or “leader”. When citing other authors, the terms used by them are applied.

The terminology regarding the hierarchical levels of management also needs to be clarified. The term *line manager* is used in research to refer to a person who is in charge of managing the work of another person(s) and holds a one level higher position. Line managers act in the lower echelons of the management hierarchy with immediate responsibility for their subordinates’ work and performance (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). They are responsible for aligning their organisation with the demands of the complex and dynamic external environment (Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014). Line managers coordinate between institutional (strategic) and technical (operational) levels of the organisation thus ensuring the organisation’s smooth operation at this interface (Dany et al., 2008; Gilbert et al., 2011; Hales, 2005). In multinational companies, line managers are more often equated with middle managers, when line managers are more autonomous unit managers with first line managers reporting to them, but this is not the case in this study.

The specific role of line managers in HRM is best revealed in people management (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), a type of HRM that is actually implemented by line managers in operational management. Under people management, line managers have two major human resource management responsibilities: *application, or implementation of HR practices* and *leadership behaviour*, both of which are closely interrelated (Knies & Leisink, 2014b) and can significantly, positively or negatively, impact employee well-being and performance. People management argues that line managers play a vital role in HRM implementation: “the role of line managers in people management, enacting HR practices and engaging in leadership behaviour means that they have to be included in any causal chain seeking to explain and measure the relationship between HRM and organisational performance” (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007, p.6). Therefore this section discusses the application, or implementation, of HR practices, as the primary responsibility of line managers, in more detail. The second responsibility of line managers’ in people management, such as their leadership behaviour, will be introduced in section 1.3.

The application, or implementation of HR practices, has its roots in the HR devolution literature (e.g. Perry & Kulik, 2008). HR practices are as a rule designed by the HR department or upper level management, who devolve their implementation to

line managers who can deal with day-to-day HR issues on the work-floor more efficiently (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Line managers rarely participate in the decision making on HR practice design and introduction. Instead, they act as the primary implementers of HR practices (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). HRM implementation first and foremost refers to the assurance of the quality and effectiveness of HR practices (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Line managers are the first ones who evaluate the design and quality of practices before their implementation. Line managers can choose whether to implement practices as intended by senior executives or/and HR managers, i.e. to conform to them and accept as a bureaucratic ritual, or to modify them, i.e. to treat them more seriously (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Although HR practice implementation may be monitored and influenced by senior executives or/and HR managers (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013), and instruments to facilitate the implementation may be provided, line managers have discretionary room (Knies & Leisink, 2014b) for the implementation on the ground (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013).

In the implementation of HR practices a distinction is made between 1) general HR practices that are applied to all employees within their team, and 2) tailor-made arrangements, which are characterised as voluntary "deals" that employees make with their immediate manager and which contribute to their functioning in the organisation (Knies & Leisink, 2014b). As such tailor-made arrangements are negotiated on a micro-level between individual employees and their managers (Knies, 2011), they can be used to take care of employee well-being by offering specific services to an individual (i-deals) (Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006) or a group. The concept of tailor-made arrangements pertains closer to a manager's caring for employees than the concept of HR practices, as it taps to specific employee needs. However, tailor-made arrangements have not gained appropriate attention in the HRM implementation literature, which has been mostly concerned about HR practice application. Thus they need to be investigated in more detail.

As indicated above, prior research has also shown that line managers may tailor HRM implementation on a day-to-day basis, and intended HR practices are not always implemented as designed (e.g. Khilji & Wang, 2006). HRM implementation may follow one of the six multifaceted *implementation scenarios*, in which line managers may ignore, imitate, internalise, integrate, deviate from, or initiate HR practices during their implementation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017):

- *ignoring* means disregarding an HR practice and thus do not implementing it at all (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017);
- *imitation* is a feigned acceptance in which line managers ceremonially adopt an HR practice (Kostova & Roth, 2002) without perceiving it as valuable;
- *internalisation* is defined as a state in which line managers attach meaning and value to a practice such that it becomes part of the organisational identity (Kostova & Roth, 2002);
- *integration* is an alignment of an HR practice with the corporate strategy and other HR practices (Björkman & Lervik, 2007);
- *deviation* is an adjustment of an HR practice, which could be seen as a combination of internalisation and ignoring, when managers appreciate value and meaning in a practice, but might perceive it as not leading to the desired outcomes;
- *initiation* is a way to improve existing HR practices and extract more value for line manager's team by creating a new HR practice when line managers perceive internalised HR practices to be insufficient (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017).

These scenarios have been largely studied in multinational companies (e.g. Kostova & Roth, 2002) where implementing HR practices brings other difficulties than in smaller companies not dealing with cross-cultural and cross-national issues (Mirfakhar et al., 2018). To my knowledge, no studies of the HR implementation scenarios have been conducted in the latter. Nor has the way of how HR practices may be shaped by line managers aiming to care for employee well-being been studied. It is thus important in this thesis to explore which HRM implementation scenarios line manager follow by taking care of their subordinate well-being.

Line managers may modify HR practices for several reasons, such as perceived value, simplicity, and formality of intended practices (Conway & Monks, 2010; Kostova & Roth, 2002; Mirfakhar et al., 2018), daily operational pressures and role tensions (Conway & Monks, 2010; Evans, 2015; Makhecha et al., 2018), short-term business targets and unit structures (Makhecha et al., 2018), context specifics (Almond, 2011), and the availability of opportunities to implement HRM (Jiang, 2013). HRM implementation may also be affected by line managers' abilities (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gilbert et al., 2015; Jiang, 2013) and individual characteristics, such as educational level and age (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). Having the discretionary room in

the implementation line managers can exert their caring for employees which is discussed in section 1.3.

Although recent research has provided more knowledge about the factors influencing effective HRM implementation (e.g. Mirfakhar et al., 2018), we still lack knowledge about the role of relationship-oriented factors, such as leader-member exchange or leadership-related variables (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Jiang, 2013) in HRM implementation. This thesis seeks to contribute to it by exploring the role of line managers' caring in HRM implementation. To understand it, the concept of caring is applied, which, as discussed in section 1.2. below, is relationship oriented. It is proposed that caring for team members is line managers' sincere responsibility that they assume. The role of line managers' as caregivers in HRM implementation is analysed more broadly in section 1.3.

Since this thesis builds on the concept of caring by answering the research question as to *how line managers engage in caring for employees in HRM implementation,* a deeper understanding of the concept of caring is needed. Hence, the literature review continues with the analysis of research on caring.

1.2. Review of literature on caring

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of caring, this section will overview major approaches to caring offered in nowadays scientific literature, including those exploring caring as a concept both explicitly and implicitly. So, first I will present origins of research of caring and key terminology (section 1.2.1.). Second, I will discuss management literature that explores caring for employees in organisations explicitly as a specific and distinct construct (sections 1.2.2., 1.2.2.1., 1.2.2.2). Later I will discuss literature on caring as it is understood in management, leadership, organisational behaviour and psychology in the implicit manner through care-related concepts and constructs (sections 1.2.3. and 1.2.4).

1.2.1. Origins of research on caring and key terminology

Caring takes its roots in philosophy (Aristotle, Plato and Stoics) and spiritual traditions (Curzer, 2007; Held, 2006; Kovacs, 2019; Rynes et al., 2012). In Latin, care is referred to as *caritas* or *cura*. The word *caritas* means "to cherish, to appreciate, and to give special attention" (as provided by Van der Vyver et al., 2014, p. 62). It also

refers to selfless love or love directed at others that is not self-centered, an unlimited loving kindness towards all others (Van der Vyver et al., 2014), whereas *cura*, according to Fine (2007), among its many meanings, can refer to the upliftment and realisation of a person's potential. In the English language in its general sense *care* means (a) "the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something", and (b) "serious attention or consideration applied to doing something correctly or to avoid damage or risk" (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com).

Research of caring also comes from the field of caring professions (Boykin, Schoenhofer, & Schoenhofer, 2001), also called human service occupations, nursing in particular, since caring has been most widely studied in research on nursing as the primary "caring profession" (Swanson, 1991; Noddings, 2005; Watson, 2008). In nursing caring is defined as "a nurturing way of relating to a valued other toward whom one feels a personal sense of commitment and responsibility" (Swanson, 1991; p.162). Skovholt (2005) suggests that caring professions, like counselling, is a series of attachments and separations that occur between clients in need and professionals. In these professions caring is a key because it transfers effectiveness and competence and assures positive outcomes for the cared-for. The term of *professional caring* (Smylie et al., 2016) derives therefrom.

Frameworks of caring in human service occupations offer specific definitions of professional caring, hold a relational perspective to caring and study caring at an individual level, i.e. between a caregiver and a care-receiver. Caring in human service occupations is focused towards the process of caring, the interplay between a care-giving person and a cared-for. A distinction is made between instrumental caretaking, or one-sided caregiving, and involvement of both parties in caring, which is the most desired state for caring connection (Martela, 2012). Caring is considered to be obligatory, is a part of one's duty (in case of social workers or nurses) or is provided on request, and thus those frameworks may be prescribed to applied disciplines. What is essential in human service occupations is that (a) the cared-for is in need for care and (b) caring is anchored in people's problems and/or their suffering.

Theoretical frameworks used in human service occupations offer an understanding of caring attitudes (e.g. knowing, being with, doing for, enabling, and maintaining belief) (Swanson, 1991) in the specific work context of healthcare. What is also specific to professional caring is that a cared-for person in most cases is an

individual external to the organisation: a client, or a patient who is treated by and large as a passive or helpless recipient of caring, which does not apply to the business context, where individual employees are increasingly treated as active, engaged and independent persons.

In literature a distinction is made between professional and personal care and caring. *Professional care and caring* refer to some action provided on behalf of another in particular professions (Smylie et al., 2016). *Personal caring* is more than one does; it involves manner, matter, motivation and competent provision of care (Noddings, 2005; Smylie et al., 2016). In this dissertation personal care and caring are studied. The term *care* is used as a noun to denote the content (qualities) of caring actions or messages, while *caring* refers to the provision of care (a process). When referring to both content and process, the term *caring* is used. *Caring for* and *taking care of* are used synonymously. When citing other authors, the terms used by them are usually displayed.

In management literature the words “care” and “caring” are used in reference to caring in organisations and outside them and they are conceptualised on different levels: *institutional*, when talking, for instance, about care for the environment or particular social groups of people (Engster, 2004; Tronto, 2010), *organisational* that refers to caring of organisations about different stakeholders including employees (Liedtka, 1996; Weber, 2014), and micro-level caring, which investigates caring on the level of a group (Houghton, Pearce, Manz, Courtright, & Stewart, 2015) or individual person (Carmeli et al., 2016; Kahn, 1993; Kroth & Keeler, 2009): between co-workers, managers and employees, etc. Based on this we can distinguish between an immediate manager’s (proximal) and organisational (distal) levels of caring for employees. Besides different concepts are used in different level studies, as well as actors who are involved in caring.

It is also noteworthy that the concept of caring is rarely studied in management studies and organisational behaviour literature as a distinct construct and is instead mostly referred to implicitly as a *phenomenon* in different theoretical approaches, disciplines or constructs, such as *positive organisational scholarship* (Luthans & Youssef, 2007), *soft human resource management* (Truss et al., 1997), and others. They do not always use the concept of care explicitly and refer to constructs or ideas similar (or related) to caring for employees, such as *perceived organisational support* (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986), *perceived supervisor support*

(Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988), *compassion* (Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014), *spiritual leadership* (Fry, 2003), and thus refer to organisational caring implicitly. Many of them, especially those pertaining to managerial caring on an individual level, will be further discussed in more detail in this thesis.

1.2.2. Analysis of caring as a distinct construct in management research

In management, research on caring is still in a nascent stage and has received increasing attention only in the past decades (Delios, 2010; Kawamura, 2013; Rynes et al., 2012; Sewell & Barker, 2006; Solomon, 1998). Below in section 1.2.2.1. to explain what managers' caring for employees in organisations means, theoretical frameworks will be presented that explicitly refer to the concept of caring in management research, i.e. caring is studied as a distinct construct. The section starts from the analysis of the definitions of caring and follows with the presentation of several theoretical frameworks from caring literature in the field of management. Next (section 1.2.2.2.), the ethics and moral perspective to caring is discussed, where the term of caring is used explicitly too.

1.2.2.1. Understanding of caring in management literature

This section analyses the explicit use of the caring concept, or construct, in management research. Scholars who have specifically studied "caring" have suggested a number of different definitions of the concept (see Table 1). They by and large use dynamic terms ("relating", "transfer", "expressing", "interrelating", etc.) that refer to caring as a process. Caring definitions most often include both participants: the caregiver and the care-receiver (cared-for), and regard both as active. The cared-for can choose to respond or not to caring; however, caring is viewed as mutual ("growth of care", "interrelating"). It involves emotions ("feels", "emotional act") and behaviours (e.g. inviting, advancing, capacitising, and connecting behaviours). A deeper analysis of caring theories has shown that the manager's caring implies a broad spectrum of the manager's responses to employee needs (Kroth & Keeler, 2009; Kahn, 1993). A manager may attend to employee needs, listen to them, understand them empathically, consider them, and satisfy them if it is needed and possible, which may include various manager behaviours in the end. Flexible managers' responsiveness to employee needs should allow not only employee needs being satisfied, but also prevention of employee need thwarting.

Table 1. Definitions of caring

Source	Definition
Noddings, 1984, p. 5	„any thoughtful human response (or non-response) that enables others to thrive“.
Swanson, 1991, p. 162	*caring* is “a nurturing way of relating to a valued other toward whom one feels a personal sense of commitment and responsibility.”
Kahn, 1993, p. 542-543	„*caregiving* is an essentially emotional act, involving the transfer of emotions through exchanges of resources, time, information, counselling, or services“
Kroth & Keeler, 2009, p. 521	„*managerial caring* as a process wherein a manager exhibits inviting, advancing, capacitising, and connecting behaviours toward an employee or employees“. „*care building* is the ongoing process of managerial caring, subsequent employee response, and then ensuing managerial response that result in the growth of care between the two parties. “
Carmeli et al., 2016, p. 48, 49	*caring* as a “specific form of interrelating which builds positive work relationships” caring between members in teams is “the way in which members interrelate with each other by paying attention and showing genuine interest in each other's inner needs”

First contributions to the conceptualisation of caring for employees in management theories were offered by authors who built their frameworks on research conducted in *caregiving organisations* which, according to Kahn (1993), can be defined as institutions serving their clients via personal relationships between caregivers and care-seekers. Such institutions comprise hospitals, schools, churches, and social service agencies. The importance of caring for these organisations is based on caring as an integral part of the service provided to clients. Along with the importance of care for clients, the importance of taking care for service providers themselves has been emphasised, as taking care of clients is highly dependent on how employees who take care of clients are taken care of themselves.

To date the most notable work in developing frameworks of caring for employees has been done by Kahn (1993, 2001) and Kroth & Keeler (2009). Kahn (1993) looked at caregivers and how their networks of relationships with other organisational members provided them with emotional resources they needed to provide care for their clients. Making a distinction between *caregiving* and *caretaking*, Kahn (1993) argues that the latter diminishes their capacity to care for themselves. Instead, in proper caregiving, caregivers “help others to help themselves toward growth and healing by simultaneously staying in relation with and keeping themselves apart from those others” (Kahn, 1993, p.554). Based on an in-depth qualitative inquiry of a social service agency, Kahn (1993) has offered the following eight behavioural dimensions of caregiving:

1) accessibility - remaining in the other person's vicinity,

2) inquiry - asking and probing for others' experiences, thoughts, feelings and other information necessary to provide good care,

3) attention - actively attending to other's experiences, ideas and self - expressions,

4) validation - communicating positive regard, respect, and appreciation to others,

5) empathy - imaginatively putting self in other's place and identifying with other's experiences,

6) support - offering information, feedback, insights and protection to others,

7) compassion - showing emotional presence by displaying warmth, affection and kindness,

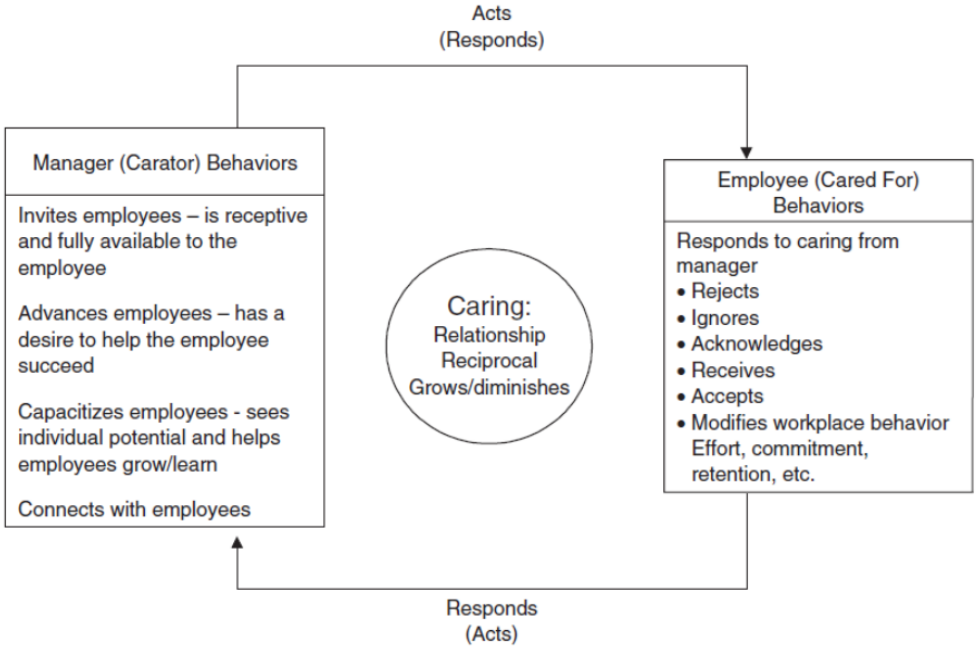
8) consistency – providing ongoing, steady stream of resources, compassion and physical/emotional/ cognitive presence for the other.

Kahn (1993) believes that organisations *per se* cannot offer caregiving. It is members of the organisation with hierarchical responsibility who can provide caregiving to their subordinates. When a manager provides or deters care, their subordinates feel cared for or "withheld from" by their organisation, as represented in the person of their manager. Caring is experienced at an individual level. Although Kahn (1993) distinguishes between different types and directions of flows of caring through the hierarchy of the organisation, he does not distinguish between the qualities of manager or co-worker caring.

Kroth and Keeler (2009) conceptualise caring in management by integrating education, nursing and management literature related to caring. They propose the definitions of managerial caring and care building and a process model of Manager–Employee Caring, which they call "Recursive Model of Manager **-** Employee". In it caring is reflected as a duplex relational process (Figure 2).

According to the model managerial caring and care-building are ongoing processes wherein a manager exhibits five predispositions/behaviours towards an employee, which are conceptualised as dimensions of caring, such as inviting, advancing, capacitising, and connecting. In a later study, connecting was split into two dimensions – connecting and valuing (Keeler & Kroth, 2012).

Figure 2. Recursive Model of Manager-Employee Caring



Source: Kroth and Keeler (2009).

What is in common between Kahn (1993) and Kroth and Keeler (2009) is that they 1) introduce the concept of caring in management at the individual level, i.e. emphasise the relevance of caring for employees and 2) see employees as active participants in the caring process.

Kawamura (2013) further develops the concept of caring in management by proposing it as overwhelming *activity* embedded in all managerial activities and a constituent part of management. In this sense, Kawamura (2013) defines caring *as a practice* at different levels: organisational, such as organisational culture and managerial practices, and individual, such as characteristics (qualities) of managers who provide care.

Managerial qualities of caring comprise *individual* (e.g. curiosity, integrity, and courage), *relational* (e.g. nurturing, valuing, and fostering), and *decision-making* qualities (e.g. respect, balance, and mindful attention). It can be precluded from this that Kawamura (2013) follows the relational perspective towards care; however, she also adds a cognitive element (i.e. decision-making) to the conceptualisation of caring: “Humans and their organisations have always made choices to care (or not) and where to place their care” (p.116).

According to Kawamura (2013), care comprises identifiable qualities which differ from those associated with either commodity-like resources (e.g. land, labour, or capital) or “ethics of care” research, which is presented in section 1.2.2.2. What is also new in Kawamura’s (2013) approach is that she sees care *as energy* that can transform organisations and organisational work and as an intangible resource. Her approach is a nice contribution among a few others that put caring into the centre of attention; however, her reasoning remains conceptual and therefore needs to be further developed to explain the relationship between different qualities of managerial caring and the mechanism of how caring can transform organisations.

Caring leadership is another explicit concept of caring, which has been mostly researched in education management (Louis et al., 2016; Van der Vyver et al., 2014). It may be defined as influencing followers through the caring matter, manner, and motivation of leader actions and interactions, which go beyond the call of duty in dispatching the leader’s responsibilities (Gabriel, 2015; Hasu & Lehtonen, 2014; Smylie et al., 2016). Influence, which typically pertains to leadership, has been demonstrated through caring by Hasu & Lehtonen (2014) in their qualitative study that illustrates the dynamics of the influence of care among employees and managers in a public service organisation. It suggests that “shared caring can be a pattern of relational, embodied leadership influence, directed to nurture, improve or help the situation of others in the work community” and proposes the notion of *leadership with care* to describe this type of leadership influence (Hasu & Lehtonen, 2014, p.9). Besides, Hasu & Lehtonen (2014, p.13) note that leadership with care embraces both “caring for” and “caring about” as “simultaneous relational and material actions that promote responsibility and the experience of justice”. In this way caring leadership reflects both a relational perspective and responsibility expressed in the ethics of care literature, which will be analysed in section 1.2.2.2. What is important to note here is that *caring leadership* (or *leadership with care*) is proposed by Hasu & Lehtonen (2014) not as another type or style of leadership, but as a means of influencing others through *caring* behaviours within a specific leadership type.

Another explicit mention of the concept of caring has arisen in the discipline of positive organisational scholarship. C*aring* here is defined as a specific form of interrelating which enables building positive work relationships (Carmeli et al., 2016). Respectively care and caring might be included into Luthans' (2002) list of positive concepts of Positive Psychology and Positive Organisational Behaviour, such as hope,

optimism, resilience, vitality, health, talent, and thriving. Carmeli et al. (2016) suggest that when team members care for each other's inner needs and look after them, a generative psychological space is shaped in a way that allows them to see new, positive opportunities and thus take a fuller account of their surroundings. Caring as a set of behaviours, according to Carmeli et al. (2016), includes three key elements: (1) being attentive and showing genuine interest in the other person; (2) expressing empathy with what is occurring in the other person's life; and (3) acknowledging that the interest and empathy one shows in another person's world go beyond the mere work role within an organisation.

Caring as a relational construct was also studied in knowledge creation literature (Von Krogh, 1998) where caring as a constituent of organisational relationships is regarded as a key enabling condition that allows the process of knowledge creation to happen. Von Krogh (1998) argues that the understanding of responsibility as a caring relationship plays a key role in knowledge creation and sharing, which is a key to organisational competitiveness and survival: when there is a lack of care, employees are left alone to struggle with their tasks, and the trial and error process in the individual learning hinders the achievement of their task completion. Conversely, when care runs high, the context is favourable to the exchange of ideas, experimentation and failing, challenging of existing norms, processes, or rules, and leads to the creation of innovative solutions (Von Krogh, 1998).

Summarising the above approaches, which analyse caring in organisations explicitly, we learn that caring is a particular form of interrelating between people. It provides the basis for positive human relationships (Kahn, 2001; Solomon, 1998) and mostly manifests as an intangible resource, or energy in particular (Kawamura, 2013). It is also noteworthy that caring in organisations has been theorised through behavioural predispositions between employees and their managers, and between team members. Thus, this literature on managerial caring (Carmeli et al., 2016; Kahn, 1993) largely does not distinguish between managers' or co-workers caring. What is important in the conceptualisations of caring in management is a constant, ongoing source of caring, which does not arise on the occurrence of a problem or difficult situation, or as a response to suffering, but is provided regularly to employees. The client is not always the key focus in managerial caring frameworks; what is important, however, is the caring environment between organisational members, which is understood as a fundamental condition for the provision of external care to clients. It

is also noteworthy that in this strand of research caring is understood more like voluntary actions rather than obligations or duties. Employees are also seen as capable to choose whether to respond to managerial caring and in what ways. Thus, they are regarded as autonomous, motivated, and full of initiative (*versus* helpless or passive caretakers). Managers' caring has been also disclosed as *a pattern of influence* (Hasu & Lehtonen, 2014), which comes close to leadership influence. This research also informs us about the mutuality of caring, which means that leaders acting in caring environments and receiving caring from their organisation or from their immediate managers are more inclined to care for their subordinates and other associates, who, in turn, if receiving care, will be prone to care for others in organisations.

1.2.2.2. Caring and care in morale and ethics literature

Caring about employees is also addressed in corporate social responsibility and stakeholder-theory-based strategies with their underlying ethic to "do good", as well as in sustainability initiatives that integrate social justice, environmental, economic, and human factors to achieve a triple bottom line. These research areas primarily view caring from an ethics lens. Therefore, in this section I will review the research stream that looks at caring from an ethics perspective, refers to the notion of caring explicitly and is known as *ethics of care* (Engster, 2004, 2011; Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Noddings, 1984, 2002, 2005; Tronto, 2010).

The ethics of care posits that caring is motivated by morality and emphasises the feminine relationality of life as opposed to more masculine, justice-based frameworks (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). As an ethic of managers, care becomes a responsibility – or even a value and a practice (Held, 2006) – in the moral dilemmas of decision-making (Kawamura, 2013). Research on the ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Noddings, 1984) argues that a complex interweaving of relationships (among human beings and between humans and the environment) is the background for humanity and morality (Kawamura, 2013) and is associated with the *situated response to individual needs* (Gilligan, 1982). Noddings (1984) asserts that ethical caring arises out of "natural caring" like a mother's care for her child and out of one's memories of being cared about. Rooting caring in maternal relations allows to examine caring as an ongoing source of strength for people no matter whether they are suffering or not (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). In this respect, ethics of care relates

to corporate social responsibility for its standpoint to law: “to care is to act not by fixed rule but by affection and regard” (Noddings, 1984, p. 24).

Caring is both a prerequisite for entering into a relationship and is central to „the dynamic potential for growth in relation“(Noddings, 1984, p. 703). Acts of caring can be conveyed naturally (i.e., „natural caring“) or they derive from a sense of obligation (i.e., “I must“). However, as an „active virtue“ it requires these two conditions to be enacted. In that sense, „in caring, we accept the natural impulse to act on behalf of the present other“.

According to Noddings (2005), the one who is caring exhibits *engrossment and motivational displacement.* Through caring we are engrossed in the other, which means openness and receptivity to that another (Noddings, 2005, p. 15). Motivational displacement is a desire on the part of the caregiver to help the other. Displacement occurs when the caregiver’s focus shifts from his or her plans to those of the cared-for (Noddings, 2005). “We have received him and feel his pain or happiness, but we are not compelled by this impulse. We have a choice; we may accept what we feel, or we may reject it“ (Noddings, 1984, p. 701). Also, Noddings (1984) proposes mutuality in the acts of caring. An important contribution put by her lies in the inclusion of the perceptions of the cared-for into the definition of caring. Besides, the author acknowledges that the cared-for should recognise the caring received: “I must admit that, while I feel that I care, X does not perceive that I care and, hence, the relationship cannot be characterised as one of caring” (Noddings, 1984, p. 68).

Based on Noddings (2002) we distinguish between *caring for* and *caring about***.** *Caring for* mostly refers to face-to-face encounters, when one person cares for another. This is what all people learn earliest in their life and is mostly concerned with “natural” caring. While *caring about* is more general, it takes place more into the public, ethical and reflexive realm. Caring about is oriented to people needs more abstractly. According to Noddings (2002), *caring about* is almost certainly the foundation of this sense of justice, and a prerequisite for sustained relationships.

Another approach to the ethics of care has been proposed by Liedtka (1999). According to the author “organisational care” is an organisation-centred phenomenon reflecting perceptions regarding the provision of care by the organisation to all its employees. The essence of organisational care is contained in a "deep structure" of values and *organising* principles that bring coherence over time and across situations to organisational routines and practices (Liedtka, 1999).

Caring from the morality perspective for some is consistent with an altruistic orientation (Gabriel, 2015), or a responsibility and benevolence (Fuqua, Newman, 2002). An important distinction made in the ethics of care is that caring is not the same as benevolence or altruism. Benevolence is an individual state and caring is a social relation, which is more than an individual state (Held, 2006). Caring involves concern not only for others but also for oneself and one's own well-being within the relations of care (Engster, 2004; Held, 2006) when persons in a caring relation are not competitors for benefits; thus, caring may not be equalled to altruism either (Held, 2006).

In a caring culture a high degree of being in communion, belongingness and meaningfulness are cultivated: executives and leaders develop and maintain trust among the members of the organisation, share responsibility, build strong and open relationships with team members, listen to their feedback, and encourage voices of all organisational members (Engster, 2004; Kawamura, 2013; Smylie et al., 2016). Caring cultures are people-centred and are based on collectivism and humane orientation that: 1) all people are important; 2) people shape the culture; 3) people working together perform at higher levels; and 4) all people should benefit (Black & Venture, 2017; Galanaki & Papagiannakis, 2015).

Another organisational environment-based notion that is close to caring culture is that of caring climate. The employee-supportive, or caring climate, as a facet of organisational climate, is conceptualised differently in literature. To give just a few examples, Burke, Borucki, and Hurley (1992) differentiated work climates labelled as "concern for employees" by suggesting that organisation may have policies and practices that are positive in the sense that employees feel well-treated. Psychosocial safety climate is conceived as a climate for psychological health and safety, and is different than the safety climate, which refers to physical well-being (Idris, Dollard, Coward, & Dormann, 2012). Organisational caring climate from the perspective of the *Ethical Climate Theory* (Victor & Cullen, 1988) refers to few of its theoretical types: *friendship* (*benevolence* – individual) and *team interest* (*benevolence* – local) (Arnaud & Schminke, 2012; Galanaki & Papagiannakis, 2015; Simha & Cullen, 2012) and may be best illustrated by example items to measure it: „Our major concern is always what is best for the other person", "What is best for everyone in the company is a major consideration here" (Victor & Cullen, 1988; Wang & Hsieh, 2012)

The value of caring needs to be encapsulated in management culture over time (Florea, Cheung, & Herndon, 2013; Liedtka, 1999) and is likely reflected through

beliefs and caring managerial practices that create and support caring culture. There are however arguments whether it is possible to generalize the moral principle of caring to fulfil employee' particular needs (Held, 2006) and that organisational caring cannot be simply reflected in any particular configuration of managerial practices, as they over time require different action in response to shifting employee needs, task environment and other contextual factors (Fine, 2006; McAllister & Bigley, 2002; Tronto, 2010; Weber, 2014).

Frameworks of ethics and morale propose the idea of caring environments (organisational care, caring climate and culture) that "tend to encourage behaviours that yield a positive outcome for the greatest number of constituents" (Simha & Cullen, 2012, p. 21). A caring environment allows employees to perceive organisational concern for their well-being and also signals that they should also care for the well-being of other stakeholders. Those frameworks add interests and needs of all organisational stakeholders into the play.

Approaches of ethics hold a relational perspective to care, which is similar to the construct of care and other care-related approaches, which are presented before or will be presented later. They add the notions of responsibility for others, benevolence and volunteering to the understanding of caring. It is worth to note that theories of ethics, by and large, refer to organisational levels of care manifestations, and emphasise values as an important dimension of care. In this sense ethics of care offer a broader perspective to caring in comparison to management theories of caring, which were described in previous section 1.2.2.1., as the latter mainly build on caring behaviours and/or attitudes. Nevertheless, the ethics of care, as situated mostly on theoretical level, does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the application of caring behaviours in operational people management of line managers.

1.2.3. Caring as a phenomenon in organisational research

This section analyses literature that refers to caring implicitly. First, the understanding of caring from the perspective of the positive organisational scholarship is provided in section 1.2.3.1. Next, caring is discussed from the viewpoint of reciprocity (section 1.2.3.2.), which is a norm in the social exchange theory. In the same section (section 1.2.3.2.) care-related constructs of social support, perceived organisational support and perceived manager support, which are theorised based on social exchange, are discussed.

1.2.3.1. Caring in positive organisational scholarship

Positive organisational scholarship by and large treats caring not as a distinct construct, but incorporates it, or some of its aspects, into high quality positive relationships (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2012).

Positive organisational scholarship highlights interdependence, *positive emotions*, employee need fulfilment and regards individual health and well-being as important organisational performance outcomes *per se* (Cameron & Dutton, 2003). This strand of literature stresses *positive relationships* and/or *positive connections* at work, in which people are viewed as supportive and helpful, and showing genuine interest in each other's needs, expectations, and well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Luthans et al., 2002). Positive relationships can be generative sources of enrichment, vitality, and meaningfulness at work (Ragins & Dutton, 2007). Dutton and Heaphy (2003) distinguish between *high-quality* and low-quality connections between two individuals based on "whether the connective tissue between individuals is life-giving or life-depleting" (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003, p.15). High-quality connections between two individuals offer three essential subjective experiences to persons engaged in those relations (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003): a feeling of vitality and aliveness, positive regard and a feeling of being known or being loved, and experienced mutuality, which means that both persons in a connection are engaged and actively participating. Thus, caring has been implicitly referred to in the literature of positive organisational scholarship as a phenomenon.

Besides, positive psychology proposes *generativity* as a key mechanism that leads caring to positive outcomes. Carmeli et al. (2016) theorise that these generative relationships act as a key mechanism which enables a work team to develop new ideas and see positivity in a changing environment. Their assumption is that only generative relationships can nurture an optimal psychological space. Thus, caring and generativity are seen as a micro-relational mechanisms (Carmeli et al., 2016). This contrasts to the social exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960), which sees relationships are a means for exchanging resources for the attainment of by and large selfish purposes (Ragins & Dutton, 2007). The discussion of caring in the social exchange theory will be provided in more detail in section 1.2.3.2., as social exchange is among the most influential theories in organisation sciences.

Research on caring in the organisational setting has emerged in positive organisational scholarship research along with studies on *compassion* (Dutton et al., 2014; Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006; Lilius et al., 2008). According to Dutton et al. (2014) compassion entails a concern for other people and caring responses to their problems. Caring and compassion are closely interrelated, and their terms are often used interchangeably (e.g., Solomon, 1998; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Rynes et al., 2012; Tsui, 2013) despite they are separate concepts. Compassion has been explicitly referred to as a form of interpersonal caring (Dutton et al., 2014), while caring as a value (or caring philosophy) has been for some regarded as an antecedent to compassion (Simpson et al., 2013). Thus, there are no clear boundaries between the constructs of care and compassion in the management literature on compassion. However, for some researchers caring is distinct conceptually from compassion (Fuqua & Newman, 2002; Grant et al., 2008; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Weber, 2014) since caring towards another person does not necessarily mean that the other person is in pain, and caring is not necessarily induced by one's suffering like compassion. In this sense compassion is similar to professional caring, but professional caring is not long-term orientated. It is important, therefore, to distinguish caring from compassion in the context of management.

Dutton et al. (2014) define compassion based on its constituent parts as an interpersonal process involving noticing, feeling, sense-making, and acting that alleviates the suffering of another person. Suffering at work may stem from various events in a person's life (Lilius et al., 2008). Work itself may also cause suffering (Dutton et al., 2014) when negative interpersonal experiences arise due to job stress, lack of security, organisational actions, negative interpersonal encounters, e.g. sexual harassment, psychological abuse (Dutton et al., 2014), workplace bullying, etc. Acting compassionately can encompass different behaviours, ranging from the presence or listening, planned or improvised at the moment (Dutton et al., 2006), to more elaborate, coordinated, and durable actions that involve directing multiple resources toward a sufferer. Instrumentally, compassion often involves the provision of resources that can help people resolve or cope with the sources of their suffering and recover the ability to carry on with their lives (Dutton et al., 2006), but compassion most of all is related to the provision of intangible resources.

All in all, positive organisational scholarship embeds caring in high quality relationships. From the point of view of the positive organisational scholarship caring

may be found both in continuous relationships and in discrete interactions that emerge on certain occasions. Positive organisational scholarship tends to view caring as a micro-relational mechanism. In this strand of literature being respected and cared for in a relationship means being regarded positively. Research on caring in the field of positive organisational scholarship offers some specific dimensions of caring: mutuality, active empathy and attention to the other, which equal to the other's acces to help. However, the notions of caring in the positive organisational scholarship generally have little specificity to HRM for they are borrowed from psychology. In general, we need a renewed understanding of caring in the context of management and more specific knowledge on manifestations of caring in people management.

1.2.3.2. Caring in the conceptualisations of support

The social exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960) is another strand of research that refers to caring implicitly and provides a basis for caring conceptualisations based on support. Thus, first this section provides a discussion of the social exchange theory, and then the analysis of employee support conceptualisations follows. In the literature on support, caring has been referred to and examined as a phenomenon, not a distinct concept or construct (i.e. implicitly).

Following the social exchange theory, exchange requires a bidirectional transaction between two parties in which something has to be given and something returned. *The relationship* and *exchange* (the transaction process) are viewed as distinct but related constructs concluding that relations can be both a result and a resource for exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchel, 2005). The underlying process of social exchange relies on an individual's obedience to a moral norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), according to which the party receiving a "gift" feels a need to respond by giving something in return, even if there is no formal obligation to do it. Reciprocity, as a moral norm, is probably the most widely known form of exchange. Additionally, within an exchange reciprocity can be based on a transactional pattern of interdependent exchanges (Gouldner, 1960), such as mutual advice, guidance and help for the successful functioning of the organisation. If applied to caring, this kind of reciprocity may imply that care received as a benefit would trigger a need to give something in return on the part of the recipient. This contract linking the parties of the exchange leads to an almost mechanical wish of the recipient to reciprocate and more generally to a positive and cooperative attitude towards the giver, i.e. assumptions of mutual

caring. Social exchange theorists assume that employees can form different social exchange relationships with different parties: an immediate manager, co-workers, employer organisations, customers, suppliers (Cropanzano & Mitchel, 2005), etc.

On the grounds of the social exchange theory caring may also be explained in regards to resources that may be exchanged; however, not all types of resources have been equally appreciated in the exchange by organisational scientists (Cropanzano & Mitchel, 2005). For instance, Foa & Foa (1980) have identified six types of resources: love, status, information, money, goods, and services, however, those resources are likely to be exchanged in different ways (Cropanzano & Mitchel, 2005). Care as a resource resembles love, which is also referred to in the conceptualisation of spiritual leadership that will be discussed in section 1.2.4.2. Cropanzano & Mitchel (2005) propose that love is a highly particularistic and symbolic resource, which means that its importance depends on who provides it. Besides, it conveys a meaning that goes beyond an objective value. It is interesting to investigate what type of resources line managers‘ caring for employees may include.

It is noteworthy, however, that reciprocity is not the only guiding rule of exchange. Among other rules, Cropanzano and Mitchel (2005) refer to negotiated rules, rationality, altruism, group gain, status consistency, and competition. At the one end, we have rules that inflict harm to others, like negotiated rules and competition, while at the other end stand those that encompass taking care of others, such as for instance altruism or group gain (Cropanzano & Mitchel, 2005). Altruism is when one seeks to provide some benefit to another at a cost to oneself (Batson et al., 1995). In terms of providing benefits, the definition of altruism is close to personal caring.

Given the central attention to relationship formation in an exchange, a distinction has been made between economic and social exchange (Kuvaas, Buch, Dysvik, & Haerem, 2012). Besides the social exchange theory has focused on an interpersonal attachment between two or more individuals (Shore, Sy, & Strauss, 2006). As a consequence, some relational constructs have been introduced into a social exchange, such as organisational commitment, perceived organisational support, (perceived) supervisor support, leader-member exchange, trust, to name just a few. Organisational commitment deserves the attention first as it has laid the grounds for the understanding of possible benefits of caring from the social exchange theory perspective. The relational approach to social exchange theory pertains that *social exchange relationships* (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001) evolve when

employers “take care of employees,” which in turn makes employees exchange their commitment for the care provided by the employer.

In the literature review below I will discuss distinct conceptualisations that build on the operationalisations of the social exchange theory which are most relevant to the understanding of line managers‘ caring. These operationalisations are designated to measure employee relationships with the manager and the organisation. In this section support based conceptualisations – perceived organisational support and perceived manager support – are presented, while the conceptualisation of the leader-member exchange is presented in section 1.2.4.3. along with research on caring in leadership literature, as leader-member exchange is often understood as another approach to leadership. Even though it is not only the organisation or the manager, but other parties too, especially co-workers, play an important role in the exchange, the greatest attention will be devoted to the manager as a social exchange partner as line managers‘ caring is the main object of investigation in this thesis.

Support has been investigated extensively in organisational behaviour and management literature. Research on support of people takes its origins in social support. A display of care can be found in *social support* which, according to Leavy (1983, p. 5), is “the availability of helping relationships and the quality of those relationships”. Social support research focuses also on specific behaviours that help another person feel more efficacious, accepted, and understood (Horowitz et al., 2001). Workplace support may be conceptualised as a composite concept that includes support to an employee from both the organisation and its members in general and immediate managers in particular (Russo, Shteigman, & Carmeli, 2016). Social support theorists (e.g. Cohen & Wills, 1985) posit that supportive relationships promote individuals’ well-being as they increase their capacities to cope with difficulties in life. Workplace social support nurtures optimal psychological and environmental conditions for employees due to which they feel safer and more capable to invest in activities (Russo et al., 2016). Acts of support include both tangible goods and services, as well as expressions of affection and evaluation.

Perceived organisational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) is a widely researched construct and has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the impact of caring in the work environment (Kroth & Keeler, 2009). Perceived organisational support is defined as an employee global belief about the extent to which the organisation they work for values their contribution and cares about their well-being

(Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Based on the social exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960) Eisenberger et al. (1986) argue that high levels of perceived organisational support create feelings of obligation, whereby employees feel that they ought to be committed to the organisation and engage in behaviours that support organisational goals. Thus, the employee-employer relationship is developed through reciprocity as employees develop beliefs about how the organisation values them (Kroth & Keeler, 2009). Perceived organisational support is an individual-centred phenomenon representing the perceived, individualised receipt of support by an employee from the organisation. Resources received from others are more highly valued and contribute to perceived organisational support more if they are based on a discretionary choice or the supervisor's voluntary actions rather than on external circumstances or obligations (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Challenging the social exchange theory, Mignonac and Richebé (2013) have offered the notion of *disinterested organisational support,* which they build on the premises of the attribution theory (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008). Disinterestedness, as defined by them, refers to a giving which asks nothing in return; however, it is not the same as indifference. Hence social exchange is by and large based on interest, and Mignonac & Richebé (2013) propose *beneficence* to be the guiding principle of disinterested organisational support. They suggest that the norm of disinterestedness could contribute to a better understanding than perceived organisational support of how employees subjectively evaluate investments of the organisation that benefit them, and how these perceptions influence their attitudes and behaviours.

A more solid input into the understanding of the manager's caring comes from the leadership behaviour perspective through the notion of *supervisor support*. Although supervisor support may be regarded as a kind of leadership behaviour, the notion of supervisor support is discussed in this section, as it builds on social exchange theory. In the perceived organisational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) manager support is regarded as an important antecedent of perceived organisational support. The organisational support theory holds that employees see supervisors as agents acting on behalf of the organisation, and therefore regard the degree to which supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being as an important indicator of the organisation's support, and feel an obligation to reciprocate through in-role and extra-role performance.

Perceived supervisor support is a form of organisational support that should be understood as the supervisory recognition of the employees' contributions and caring about their well-being (Knies & Leisink, 2014b). Employees' view in terms of the degree to which their supervisor values their contributions and cares about their well-being is considered as perceived supervisor support (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). Referring to Knies & Leisink (2014a) supervisory support should be distinguished from organisational rewards such as pay, promotion, and job security, and favourable job conditions such as autonomy and training, which are regarded as HR practices that show recognition of employee contributions. This distinction is made because these latter forms of organisational support are not specifically seen as involving the agency of the supervisor.

However this spectrum of a supervisor's behaviours is usually not covered in the measurement instruments of supervisor support, which traditionally has been measured by substituting the word „supervisor" for „organisation" in Eisenberger's et al. (1986) „Survey of Perceived Organisational Support" (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). To measure perceived supervisor support, Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley (1990) concentrate on the assessment of the degree of career support employees receive from their supervisor manager. This approach to supervisor support suggests that only selected employee needs (especially the need for career development) are taken into consideration while others are neglected.

Even the most elaborate, at least to my knowledge, instrument to measure supervisor support in people management (Knies & Leisink, 2014b; Leisink & Knies, 2011) reflects the instrumental nature of supervisors' support and performance enhancement motives, which are more directed to supporting employee activities leading to job roles and work performance rather than fostering employee well-being. For instance, the need for development is narrowed down to career development, while other employee developmental needs are neglected.

As demonstrated above, care expressed through support may exist at distal organisational and proximal managers' levels. Care therein has been noted by general terms (global belief, valuing contributions, caring about employee well-being) and is long-term oriented from the first sight. However, showing interest in someone does not mean caring for someone indeed. Instruments provided by the support literature are rather narrow as they measure broad beliefs and views and give us a picture of abstract behaviour that a manager assumes while caring about their subordinates,

namely concentrates on the support of employee commitment and support of employee career development, or support of their well-being in general. To grasp the essence of the manifestations of manager's caring for employees a more sensitive measure is needed than those that the stream of support literature has provided so far.

1.2.4. Caring as a phenomenon in leadership literature

This and subsequent sections will discuss how leadership theories inform line managers' caring for employees, as the focus of this thesis is on line managers' caring for their subordinates. As line managers act as leaders to their subordinates the term "leader" here is used interchangeably with the "line manager"; however, priority is given to the "leader" as it is used in leadership literature. Leadership is central in the research on the caring environment in organisations, since caring leaders cultivate caring environments (Smylie et al., 2016). Schein (2004) has noted that leaders play a key role in establishing organisational culture that articulates behaviours, rules, and values critical to the achievement of an organisation's mission and strategy. This author has also acknowledged the critical importance of the internal integration of the organisation or the degree to which individual needs of employees are met within the organisation that reflects the essence of caring.

Further on I will discuss leadership literature, which has implicitly embedded caring into leadership. First, section 1.2.4.1 presents how the literature on leadership behaviours approaches managers' caring for employees. Next, section 1.2.4.2. describes types of ethical leadership and their contribution to the understanding of caring for employees. Finally, section 1.2.4.3. presents the leader-member exchange theory, which emphasises the quality of the relationship between managers and employees.

1.2.4.1. Caring exerted through leadership behaviours

Leadership literature refers to caring leadership behaviours, or supportive behaviours, which pertain to the provision of career guidance, performance and other kinds of feedback to employees, challenging work assignments and work opportunities that promote employee development, allow demonstrating concern for employees' feelings and needs, encouraging them to voice their concerns, and facilitating

employee development (Greenhaus et al., 1990; Knies & Leisink, 2014a; Oldham & Cummings, 1996).

Another approach to caring through leadership behaviours relates to relationship (or consideration) based leader behaviours (Stogdill, 1950), which include supporting employees, showing respect for employees' ideas, increasing cohesiveness, developing and mentoring, looking out for employees' well-being, managing conflict, and team-building (Donaldson-Feilder, Munir, & Lewis, 2013). In contrast, task (or initiating structure) based leader behaviours include planning and organising, assigning people to tasks, communicating information, monitoring performance, defining and solving work-related problems, and clarifying roles and objectives (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004). Research suggests that consideration/relationship-based behaviours have a positive impact on employee well-being (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2013). From the perspective of the transformational leadership theory, looking out for employee well-being is a feature of an individualised consideration, which is a dimension of transformational leadership. It includes active development of the follower potential by providing new opportunities, coaching, mentoring, and taking their needs and desires into consideration (Bass, 1999; Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2013).

As described above, caring, according to its theorists, is a relational construct. Given this, through caring for their subordinates in HRM implementation line managers are likely to demonstrate consideration**-**based leadership and relational behaviours aimed at supporting, developing, recognising, empowering their followers, etc. (O'Donnell, Yukl, & Taber, 2012).

1.2.4.2. Caring in ethics-related theorising of leadership

From the leadership perspective, managers' caring is well articulated in *ethical leadership*, which according to Yukl (2013), includes transforming, servant, spiritual and authentic leadership styles. Although different, these schools of leadership have much in common, as they emphasise the same values, such as integrity, altruism, humility, empathy and healing, personal growth, fairness and justice, and empowerment (Yukl, 2013). Their comparison demonstrates that the broad domain of ethical leadership includes a moral element, as it is highly people-centred and stimulates intrinsic motivation of followers. Hereby, I provide a broader discussion of the types of ethical leadership and their contribution to the understanding of caring for employees.

The most developed in the ethical leadership category and relevant for research of caring is the stream of *servant leadership* because its definition closely relates to the concept of caring (Kroth & Keeler, 2009; Van der Vyver et al., 2014). Servant leadership emphasises priority for employee development and personal growth (Liden et al., 2008) and is regarded as an ethical (as it includes a moral element) and people-centred theory of leadership. It is less focused on organisational objectives than transformational leadership. Servant leaders serve their followers by showing concern about them and acting with a focus on social responsibility and equality (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Besides, servant leadership has progressed in its measurement instruments, which have been developed by several authors (e.g. Liden et al., 2008; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

Spiritual leadership is another type of leadership closely related to leaders' caring. It describes how leaders can enhance the intrinsic motivation of their followers by creating conditions that increase their sense of spiritual meaning in their work. Fry (2003) incorporates *calling* and *membership* as two key follower *needs* of spiritual survival into his definition of leadership which "entails 1) creating a vision wherein organisation members experience a sense of calling in that their life has meaning and makes a difference; 2) establishing a social/organisational culture based on altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have *genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others*, thereby producing a sense of membership and being understood and appreciated" (Fry, 2003, p.711). Thus, according to Fry (2003), spiritual leadership comprises three dimensions: vision, altruistic love, and hope/faith.

Important for this study is the dimension of *altruistic love*, which, according to Fry (2003), is manifested through *unconditional, unselfish, loyal, and benevolent care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others.* Fry (2003) defines altruistic love as a sense of wholeness, harmony, and well-being and proposes qualities (values) pertaining to it (Fry, 2003; Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005), as well as their operationalisation through individual behaviours, which are as follows: patience, kindness, integrity, empathy, forgiveness, honesty, courage, trust, and humility. Noteworthy is the distinction that Fry (2003) makes between *love, or care, and concern for others* and *need*. Focusing on care and concern for both oneself and others, independent of one's own needs, drives out negative feelings and provides a foundation for personal well-being and positive outcomes such as joy, peace, and

serenity. It also produces loyalty and commitment of individuals in social networks from which it is received.

The literature review provided in this section has shown that certain types of ethical leadership include caring for followers as a dimension or part of leadership behaviours. Their comparison demonstrates that the domain of ethical leadership is people-centred, based on internal moral values as well as directed at stimulating the intrinsic motivation of the followers. Ethics and morale related frameworks (section 1.2.2.2. above) have provided a similar understanding of caring. However, ethics-related theories of leadership, as Yukl (2013) observes, suffer from a lack of clarity in their definition of essential qualities and the explanation of influence processes, which makes it unclear whether the theory describes an actual leader or an ideal form of ethical leadership that a leader can hope to attain or develop. Due to these shortcomings, *ethical leadership* theories may not provide specific and sufficient guidelines for the manifestations of managers' caring for employees.

1.2.4.3. Caring in leader-member exchange

Leader-member exchange (LMX) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) is a pervasive and developing theory that has been investigated extensively in management research, which is concerned with the reciprocity of work relationships (also discussed in section 1.2.3.2) to a greater extent than other leadership theories; thus, the research on LMX and its implications for the understanding of caring are discussed in more detail here.

The LMX theory emphasises the quality of the dyadic relationship between managers and employees (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). It is typically assumed that LMX relationships fall on the continuum of exchange, where one side points to low-quality transaction-based (or economic exchange) relationships involving a little bit more than what is stipulated in the employment contract, while on the other side of the continuum lie high-quality (or social exchange) relationships, which represent the exchange of resources and support based on trust, mutual liking, and respect (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Kuvaas et al., 2012).

Moreover, Kuvaas et al. (2012) propose that social and economic exchange relationships differ in their qualities rather than pertain to different levels of quality in LMX. This means that economic LMX (ELMX) and social LMX (SLMX) make two distinct constructs, or two dimensions of dyadic leader-member exchange relationships. ELMX is impersonal; it rests upon downward influence, formal status

differences and discrete agreements, involves economic or quasi-economic goods, motivated by immediate self-interest, where both the leader and the follower expect direct reciprocity, which may be negotiated, and is contingent and short-term (i.e. demand repayment within a particular period). In SLMX the emphasis is on socio-emotional aspects of exchange, trust in the exchange partner, long-term in-group generalized reciprocity: feelings of diffuse obligation, less in need of an immediate "pay off", ongoing exchanges between leaders and followers. It follows that leaders' caring for employees is more likely to arise in the latter type, i.e. social LMX, relationships.

According to the social exchange theory (Gouldner, 1960), leaders provide various kinds of favours to their followers by building relationships embedded with expectations for a repay from the follower. Consequently, leaders are likely to pay more attention to the needs of the followers with whom they have a better social LMX relationship and are more inclined to meet their needs and motivate them. Similarly, when the relationship between the manager and their subordinate is of higher quality, employees are likely to be more attentive to the behaviour of their manager. Thus, LMX should differentiate managers' caring for employees upon the quality and type (economic or social) of LMX relationships.

It is worth mentioning that research findings on leader behaviours (O'Donnell et al., 2012) have shown that some relations-oriented leader behaviours, such as supporting and delegating, are strongly related to LMX. Effects of the change-oriented and other relations-oriented leader behaviours (recognising, consulting, leading by example) are mixed; and task-oriented behaviours (clarifying, planning, monitoring) were not significantly related to LMX.

All in all, LMX similarly to managerial caring is based on the relationship between the leader and the follower. LMX suggests that a manager may have relationships of different quality with different employees. Thus, LMX differentiates employees in regard to caring because it is clear that a manager cares more for those employees with whom they are in a better relationship.

1.2.5. Summary and comparison of approaches to caring

To summarise the above presented theorising on caring, first, an analysis and summary on different notions of the concept of caring is provided in this section by presenting their commonalities. Second, the above presented care-related constructs

that refer to caring implicitly are juxtaposed to the explicit concept of caring by discussing their main similarities and differences.

There are a number of broader or narrower definitions and descriptions of caring and many forms of caring (Fine, 2007; Held, 2006; Weber, 2014): paid and unpaid caring, professional and personal caring, etc. For the purposes of this research, the following working description of a manager's personal caring for employees on an individual level, or its major elements, may be provided that takes into consideration propositions of several schools of caring theorists.

First, caring is powerful in addressing *the immediate needs* of those in need for care (Louis et al., 2016), i.e. employees in our case, to achieve tangible and experiential benefits (Smylie et al., 2016). In this respect, managerial caring can be described as *a necessary workplace social response to human frailty and vulnerability* (Fine, 2006). Therefrom the particularity and situationally of caring (Engster, 2004; Louis et al., 2016; Weber, 2014) emerges. It means that what is good for one employee in one situation may not be good for another one in another situation (Engster, 2011). Effective caregivers will not impose their own notions of care on others but will rather remain attentive to the needs and concerns of others as they express them (Kahn, 1998).

Second, caring has certain distinctive features, also regarded as qualities or dimensions of caring, including attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, accessibility, receptiveness, empathy, support, compassion, sharing, fostering, advancing, valuing, respecting, authenticity, and genuineness, etc. (Carmeli et al., 2016; Kroth & Keeler, 2009; Louis et al., 2016; Tronto, 2010). Some of these qualities (support, advancing, valuing, respecting) may also be found in care-related conceptualisations; however, *authenticity, orientation to and interest in another person, responsiveness to other's needs* are similarly viewed by many authors as specific characteristics of caring.

Third, intra-organisational caring first of all entails *a disposition, an attitude of concern for others or another*, which is not a personal characteristic but a state (Wiegand & Geller, 2005). Recipients of care sustain caring relationships through their *responsiveness* (Held, 2006). Even more, research suggests *mutuality* in a caring connection: not only that responsiveness of the caring party influences behaviour of the cared-for but also that responsiveness of the cared-for influences behaviour of the caring party (Finkenauer & Meeus, 2000; Martela, 2012). This mutual responsiveness

is important in the attachment theory research in organisations (Crawshaw & Game, 2015; Richards & Schat, 2011), positive organisational scholarship (Wiegand & Geller, 2005) and the ethics of care (e.g. Held, 2006).

Forth, other people and *relationship-orientation* constitute the background of and a motive to care for, support and love others. It is not only belonging to an organisation, team or social network, but caring of particular individuals that fosters well-being of employees in the organisation who are mutually dependent on other internal organisational members for their well-being (Tronto, 2010).

Fifth*,* intentions *to do good for others* underlie the actions of caring (Finkenauer, Meeus, 2000; Hamington, Sander-Staudt, 2011; Held, 2006; Lawrence, Maitlis, 2012; Weber, 2014). Caring as a concern for others is often defined through their well-being, as *concern for another person is an intangible, mental aspect of care that involves a cognitive, rational and emotional concern for the well-being of others (Fine, 2006).* Caring requires that the person caring for the other acts on the behalf of the cared-for in a selfless way by putting the cared-for ahead of oneself (Noddings, 2005). Caring is used in reference to activities directed at the well-being of the cared for; it may refer to a manager's activities aimed at fostering employee well-being. Researchers of caring differ in their understanding of individual well-being. For instance, the ethics of care approach is primarily concerned about the "growth" (Gilligan, 1982) of a person, i.e. "moving [the cared for] toward the use and development of their full capacities, within the context of their self-defined needs and aspirations" (Liedtka, 1996, p. 185). Van der Vyver et al. (2014) regard caring as directed at the well-being of an employee as a human being *per se*. Hence, caring in organisations is associated with the *quality of relational employee experiences that lead to employee well-being at work*.

Sixth, *caring can inflict further caring*, and those who care for others can become cared for in another situation, which assumes agency for all parties (Hasu & Lehtonen, 2014; Kahn, 1993; Liedtka, 1996; Louis et al., 2016; Luthans, Youssef, 2007; Smylie et al., 2016; Von Krogh, 1998). People in caring relations seek to preserve or promote a relation between themselves and particular others; thus, as a result, caring between individuals generates cooperative well-being. It constitutes the well-being of those in the relationship and the well-being of the relationship itself, in which extremes and conflict situations (egoism versus altruism, selfishness versus abstract humanity) may be avoided (Held, 2006). Thus, networks of caring persons constitute an environment where people share their knowledge and learn about caring from their experience of

it, and the totality of caring that persons experience in an organisation leads to a spread of caring and its positive outcomes.

All in all, caring is a manifold phenomenon: it is more than an attitude or disposition. Caring as behaviour, an activity and practice is a constituent part of management. Considering caring as an activity involves labour of caring, i.e. work and the expenditure of energy on the part of the caregiver, and the standards by which caring activities can be evaluated (Held, 2006). For the purpose of this thesis managers‘ caring may be defined as *managers' actions in meeting employee needs through regular informal and personalised interactions* (Carmeli et al., 2016; Gabriel, 2015; Kahn, 1993; Kroth & Keeler, 2009).

Further in this section different approaches to caring discussed in the literature review above are compared according to selected aspects of relationships (Table 2). What is in common to all approaches to the construct or phenomenon of caring is that caring is perceived as *relational*. However, not all relationships necessarily entail caring. For instance, short-term transactions, as in economic LMX, are hardly associated with caring. Thus I only include in the comparison theorisings that may be applied to caring on the individual level and that best allow advancing the understanding of managers‘ caring for their subordinates. What is also common to all literature on caring and care-related constructs is that all theoretical approaches refer to the provision of resources, which may vary from instrumental to emotional, tangible and intangible, etc. Further on I will compare caring with key care-related constructs (construct by construct) that may be applied on an individual level of managers' caring for their subordinates.

Social support vs caring. Support to an employee, which ranges from instrumental help (e.g., providing a needed device for a job to be done) to conveying appreciation for one's work (e.g. granting financial rewards), does not tap the essence and substance of caring because support does not involve either display of genuine concern about another person‘s inner needs or empathic behaviour. Although the notion of support refers to the provision of some intangible resources to the cared for, in its essence it is more instrumental.

Table 2. Comparison of approaches to caring

APPROACHES TO CARING	ASPECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS							
	Type of caring (Noddings, 2002)	Object of caring	Motives of caring	Caring content			Process focus	Outcomes focus
				Empathy	Genuineness	Formality		
Social (workplace) support (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Horowitz et al., 2001; Leavy, 1983;)	Caring about	Individual in organisation	Ongoing part of relationships	No	No	Formal and informal		√
Compassion (Dutton et al., 2006; Dutton et al., 2014; Lilius et al., 2011)	Caring for	Individual in organisation	Ongoing part of relationships	Yes	Yes	Informal	√	
Caring in management (Kahn, 1993; Kroth & Keeler, 2009)	Caring for	Individual in organisation	Ongoing part of relationships	Yes	Yes	Informal	√	√
Ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Liedtka, 1999)	Caring for and caring about	Individual in organisation	Ongoing part of relationships	Yes	Yes	Formal and informal	√	
Leadership (Liden et al., 2008; Fry, 2003; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011)	Caring for	Subordinates	Influencing Ongoing part of relationships	Yes	Yes	More informal than formal	√	√
Leader member exchange (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Kuvaas et al., 2012)	Caring about	Subordinates	Influencing Ongoing part of relationships	No	No	Formal and informal		√
Perceived supervisor support (PSS) (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010; Leisink & Knies, 2011)	Caring about	Subordinates	Ongoing part of relationships	No	No	More formal than informal		√
Positive organisational scholarship (Luthans et al., 2002; Carmeli et al., 2016; Stephens et al., 2012)	Caring for	Individual in organisation	Ongoing part of relationships	Yes	Yes	Informal	√	√

Furthermore, based on Kahn (1993), support is considered a dimension of caring, as it provides resources enabling the caregiver to collaborate in the growth and healing of the cared-for (Kahn, 1993) such as “information (about salient issues/situations), feedback (about other's strengths/weaknesses), insights (about caregiving relationship), and protection (from distracting external forces)” (p.546). Thus, support offers a very narrow definition of caring.

Compassion vs caring. Caring should be also distinguished conceptually from compassion. First, compassion is considered as a dimension of caring (Kahn, 1993), while empathy (the understanding of the emotional state of the other person) is regarded as a dimension of both compassion and caring. Second, compassion is all about responding to another person‘s pain or suffering (Lilius et al., 2008). In a compassionate relationship not only does one show genuine concern or understanding of the emotional state of the other person, but also demonstrates a sustained and practical determination to do whatever is possible and necessary to help to alleviate it. However genuine caring towards another person does not necessarily mean that the cared-for is in pain.

Leadership vs caring. Based on the above literature review that concluded that caring is relational, it follows that caring can manifest only in relationships-oriented leader behaviours. At the same time caring leadership literature shows that managers’ caring for employees may be understood as an influence (Hasu & Lehtonen, 2014).

LMX vs caring. Leader-member exchange suggests that a manager may have different quality relationships with different employees. Thus, LMX differentiates employees in regard to caring because it is clear that managers care more for those employees with whom they are in a better relationship. Although in the nowadays world of scarce resources it is difficult to care for every employee; caring based only on high-quality relationships might impair employees with a high need for caring. Moreover, the distinction between social and economic LMX would propose that not all LMX relationships pertain to caring. For instance, short term transactions, as in economic leader-member exchange relationships, are hardly associated with caring. Relationships-oriented literature shows that caring is embedded in relationships, which should be of high quality; for instance, resemble social rather than economic LMX, and are long-term oriented or manifest in discrete interactions (Stephens et al., 2012).

Perceived organisational support and *perceived supervisor support vs caring.* Perceived organisational support, which has been widely studied in organisational

behaviour and management research, builds on Eisenberger's works (e.g. Eisenberger et al., 1986). It takes into consideration employee beliefs about the extent to which the organisation "values their contribution and cares about their wellbeing" (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 698). Kroth & Keeler (2009) however argue that an organisation might value an employee's contribution without caring for the employee at all. Besides even if perceived organisational support did refer to caring, it would be neither a theory of caring, nor a process of caring. Perceived organisational support is more about „caring about", which is distinguished from „caring for" by Noddings (2002). "Caring about" is a general concern for/ interest in somebody, while "caring for" is person-oriented and refers to the attendance of one's particular needs. Perceived support, which is simply a transfer of support from the organisational to dyadic level, which is seen from the development of instruments of perceived support, similarly fails to embrace the entire process of caring and is narrower than the construct of caring. Support refers to two dimensions of caring in Kroth & Keeler's (2009) model (section 1.2.5.1.): "advancing ", which means having a desire to help the employee to succeed, and "capacitising", which is seeing an individual's potential and helping employees to grow and learn. Perceived organisational support and perceived support are instead a more static measurement of perceptions.

The theoretical framework on which support conceptualisations lean, i.e. social exchange theory, is also too narrow to explain caring to its full. Social exchange theory-based care-related constructs (perceived organisational support, perceived manager support, leader-member exchange) are built on the principle of reciprocity and refer to the moral obligation of the receiving party to reciprocate in return to the received support. Transferring this logic of reciprocity to caring would mean that the caregiving party has no reason/ motivation to care about the other unless they have some specific long or short-term interests. Social exchange theory-based conceptualisations refer to the support that employees, in general, can expect to receive in return for their services ("caring about", Noddings, 2002), while caring is primarily concerned about a particular caring relationship ("caring for", Noddings, 2002) between two persons in an organisation, e.g. a manager and an employee (Kroth & Keeler, 2009). The social exchange theory also does not fully explain how same caring activities on the part of the organisation may lead to different employee responses to caring or employee perceptions of the value of care they have received from their organisation or manager (Mignonac & Richebé, 2012). Moreover, social exchange-based care-related

conceptualisations do not merge Latin meanings of *caritas* and *cura* into one construct. Support reflects *cura*, which is, among other meanings, the upliftment and realisation of a person's potential (Fine, 2007), but does not include *caritas,* which is selfless love or love directed at others that is not self-centred, an unlimited loving kindness towards all others (Van der Vyver et al., 2014) expressed through genuineness in caring.

Thus, other theoretical considerations should be considered in future research on caring. Some of them have been already employed to explain caring notions in organisations, such as the attachment theory from the psychology and personal relationships domain (Collins & Ford, 2010; Crawshaw & Game, 2015), generativity (Carmeli et al., 2016) and Resource-Gain-Development framework (Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007) from the positive organisational scholarship. The attribution theory (Nishii et al., 2008) and relational approach (Gittell, Seidner, & Wimbush, 2010) have been used to explain caring notions in HRM.

All in all, the existing care-related concepts, which refer to caring implicitly, are either abstract or narrow. Often they are merely dimensions of other concepts (e.g. concern for others in servant leadership) and are thus limited in specifying the scope of the process of caring, including a manager's readiness to care for their subordinates and actions through which caring is expressed. In general, managers' caring adds to care-related constructs genuineness, empathy, responsiveness and consideration of versatile and immediate employee needs.

1.3. Line manager caring in HRM implementation

As noted in section 1.1.4., line managers play a specific role in managing their subordinates that differs considerably from that of higher-level managers. The analysis of line managers' caring, hence, needs to rely more upon their responsibilities in the operational management. Line managers assumed autonomy to behave in a way that they think the most appropriate allows them taking into consideration the particular objective situations within their work units and the context-specific and personal circumstances of individual employees (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). Managing people thus also incorporates taking care of their needs, interests and preferences, or their well-being in a more general sense (Hasu & Lehtonen, 2014; Knies & Leisink, 2014b; Kroth & Keeler, 2009; Kuvaas, Dysvik & Buch, 2014). Research on the leader–follower distance states that the lower the leader's hierarchical level the higher is the leader's

impact on its followers (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). Hence, line managers, as immediate managers, have the greatest influence on shaping their subordinate experiences of HR practices (Mirfakhar et al. 2018). Consequently, the power of their position allows line managers' to influence employee well-being in HRM implementation by affecting upper management's perceptions of employee value (Gilbreath, 2004).

Employee concerns and needs are not always *a priori* incorporated into HR practices; thus, it becomes line managers' responsibility to take them into account (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Rousseau et al., 2006), since they are regarded as key indicators of effective HRM implementation (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). HRM effectiveness refers to "the extent to which organisational and employees' needs are taken into account by the line manager in executing his or her HR role" (Gilbert et al., 2015, p. 4).

Under the people management approach (discussed in section 1.1.4.), *leadership behaviour* refers to actions aimed at influencing employee attitudes and behaviour and giving them direction (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Knies & Leisink, 2014b), in which caring is played down as manager's *supportive leadership behaviour* through specific acts intended for helping one's employees (Knies & Leisink, 2014b). People management literature suggests that caring of line managers is a strong reason to consider HRM implementation and line manager leadership as a symbiotic relationship for which the term „people management" is used (Knies & Leisink, 2014b). Supportive leadership behaviour is two-dimensional and entails support for employee personal commitment and support towards employee career development (Knies & Leisink, 2014b), which was discussed in section 1.2.3.2. Thus these two dimensions of the people management concept offer a theoretical grounding for the role of line managers in caring for their employee well-being through HRM implementation. However these two dimensions suggest that while some selected needs of employees (especially career development) are taken into consideration others are neglected. Caring, as analysed above, needs to address immediate and versatile needs (Engster, 2004, 2011; Louis et al., 2016; Weber, 2014) of employees. These dimensions also reflect the instrumental nature of people management, which is more intended to support employee activities leading to job roles and enhancement of work performance. Thus, the conceptualisation of supportive leadership behaviours is handy in understanding line managers' caring for employees enacted through managers' discretionary

behaviour beyond the instrumental implementation of HRM. However further understanding of manifestations of line managers' caring in HRM implementation is needed.

The importance of managers' caring for employees in HRM implementation has been stressed in prior research of a few single HR practices. For instance, employee accounts of career management effectiveness were found to parallel behavioural components of caring, such as acceptance, accessibility, awareness and collaborative career planning, and decision-making (Crawshaw & Game, 2015). Similarly, employee perceptions of developmental practices were found to be influenced by high levels of perceived line manager support (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). The importance of line managers' caring in HRM implementation has been further supported by studies (Jiang, 2013) that have included care-related constructs (leader member exchange and servant leadership) in their theoretical models to examine their impact in the relationship between manager and employee perceptions of HR practices. In the implementation of work-life balance practices managerial behaviours directed at meeting employee needs included (Hammer et al., 2009): 1) *emotional support* - the perception that one's needs can be met when managers talk to workers and are aware of their family and personal commitments, 2) *instrumental support*, when managers interpret policies and practices in a way that responds to an individual employee's needs, e.g. scheduling, 3) *modelling behaviours,* when managers demonstrate how to integrate work and family, and 4) *creative management,* when managers strategically and innovatively restructure work to facilitate work-life balance. Line managers' caring, however, may manifest in the implementation of other HR practices too; how it occurs however remains under-explored.

Caring is part of line managers' leadership, i.e. supportive leadership behaviours exerted through supervision of employees, which was discussed above in this section. Caring is also part of the HR policy expressed through employee orientation in HR practices. Organisational caring (or *employee orientation*) exerted through particular HR practices may also affect the line manager's caring in the implementation. For instance, performance-oriented HR practices aimed at attaining organisational goals, which may be more unpopular among employees, may influence how they perceive their implementation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). Research has shown that employee attitudes to HR practices differ depending on the purpose(s) behind their implementation. More specifically, if HR practices are perceived by employees as

organisational care about their well-being, their implementation leads to positive employee reactions (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Koys, 1991; Nishii et al., 2008). Performance-oriented HR practices, such as performance appraisal, performance-related pay, etc., may imply different line managers' caring behaviours in their implementation than employee-supportive practices, such as work-life balance, employee voice or learning and development (Marescaux et al., 2012; Salas-Vallina et al., 2020). Thus, it is needed to explore how managers' caring manifests in the implementation of various distinct HR practices.

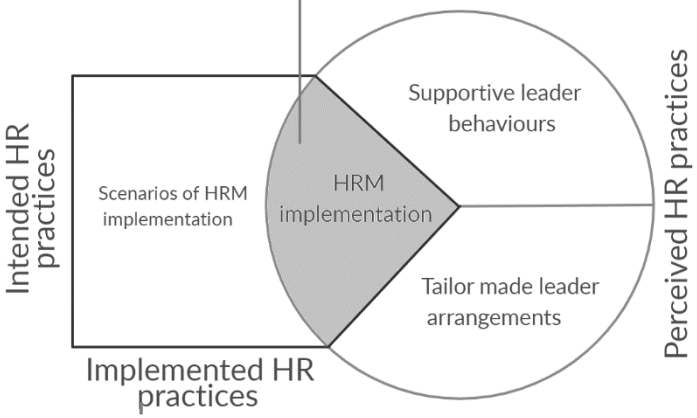
Through their daily people management line managers shape the context based on which employees form their HRM perceptions (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Line managers may minimize employee exposure to inappropriate HR practices and improve practices by taking the local context and subordinate needs into consideration (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). They can also spend more time with their subordinates and thus make sure that "HR practices can easily capture the attention of workers" (Ryu & Kim, 2013, p. 949). Line managers who implement HR practices in line with a caring perspective will likely talk about such practices with their employees (Den Hartog, Boon, Verburg, & Croon, 2013), which will, in turn, helps employees understand what HR practices are and why they are used in the organisation (Jiang, Hu, Liu, & Lepak, 2015). Also, because they care, line managers may invite employees to engage in HRM implementation. Furthermore, employees may perceive more HR practices (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018) and consider them more valuable (Meijerink, Bondarouk, & Lepak, 2016). However, we still lack knowledge about the role of relationship-oriented or leadership-related variables in HRM implementation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Jiang, 2013; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010).

To sum up, Figure 3 demarcates the areas in which line managers caring for individual employees manifests, which will be further studied in the empirical research of line managers' caring for employees in HRM implementation. Based on the process theory of Wright and Nishii (2013), the process of HRM implementation includes three step-points: intended, implemented and perceived HR practices (presented in section 1.1.3). The *implemented HR practices* are at the center of this empirical investigation (the pentagon). Their implementation can progress through various *scenarios* (presented in section 1.1.4.). The circle in the diagram depicts manifestations of caring through: 1) supportive leadership behaviours, 2) tailor made leadership arrangement, and 3) implementation of HR practices *(or HRM application)* (Knies & Leisink, 2014b).

The overlap of the pentagon and the circle (marked in grey) is the focus of the empirical research, i.e. line managers' caring for employees is studied in HRM implementation, which may be performed under different scenarios.

Figure 3. Manifestations of line managers' caring under this research

HR practice construct	Intended HR practices	Implemented HR practices	Perceived HR practices
Research focus	Line manager responsibilities in HR practice implementation HR practice design Employee orientation	**Line managers' caring** **HRM implementation scenarios** HR practice design Employee orientation	



The study of line managers' caring for employees in HRM implementation, as shown in the legend (in the form of a table) above the diagram, requires analysis of intended, implemented and perceived HR practices. Line manager responsibilities in practice implementation (discussed in section 1.1.4.), HR practice design and employee orientation (discussed in section 1.1.2.) will be investigated as contextual factors, which will help answer the research question. The main research concepts explored were line managers' caring (primarily, research sub-question 1) and HRM implementation scenarios (secondarily, research sub-question 2), which are presented in section 1.1.4. The main research focus will rest on line managers' caring and HRM implementation scenarios.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Aims of the research

Theoretical analysis of caring that has been accomplished in the thesis did not provide satisfactory answers about the manifestation of caring in HRM implementation. Thus, the aim of the empirical research is to explore how line managers' caring for employees manifests in HRM implementation, which has raised the following sub-questions of research:

1. In what ways do line managers engage in caring for their employees in HRM implementation;
2. Which scenarios do line manager take by caring for their subordinates' in HRM implementation;
3. Which line manager caring forms and scenarios manifest in the implementation of single independent HR practices.

The research was conducted iteratively and was started with the general broad research question that evolved into the first sub-question. Since the design and analysis of this research was a cyclical movement, which demanded researcher's context-based individual judgements (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010; Van Maanen, 1998), the second and the third research sub-questions emerged in the course of research process and data analysis. To answer the last sub-question (which manager caring forms and scenarios manifest in the implementation of single HR practices), differences of caring in HRM implementation are explored between single HR practices that perform different functions and vary in their design as intended in the two organisations.

2.2. Research philosophy

In this research, I have chosen to follow a pragmatic philosophical position, which might have been influenced by my prior experience as a practitioner in business and especially in HR management and organisational consulting, since according to pragmatism, research is to be understood as practical to provide an understanding, which can be useful for people in life (Wicks & Freeman, 1998). The pragmatist philosophical viewpoint adopts an objective view of ontology (there is a reality out there

independent of cognition) and subjective epistemology that emphasises the relation between knowledge and action – knowledge is truthful to the extent that it is successful in guiding action (Van de Ven, 2007). Pragmatism epistemology states that multiple interpretations of events and different concepts and classificatory schemes can be used to describe phenomena (Wicks & Freeman, 1998). It focuses on the solution of research problem rather than on methods and can accept for pragmatic reasons that there are differences between facts and values, and different methods are appropriate to study them; thus, it allows a plurality of methods or mixed-method studies, concentrating on what works best (Creswell, 2009; Klenke, 2008). Last but not the least, an important feature of pragmatism is the inclusion of axiology in their paradigms (Klenke, 2008; Van de Ven, 2007), which means pragmatic research is value-laden despite its strive to create useful knowledge. Pragmatic researchers actively influence the beliefs of others, and thus are required to pursue ethical and moral goals through the knowledge and its associated values (Wicks & Freeman, 1998). The topic of this dissertation is also very much related to here promoted values of respect and appreciation that organisations are recommended to foster towards their employees.

For practical reasons the research objective has called me to re-analyse the suitability of methods that other philosophical paradigms offer. Finally, for this research, I have arrived at the combination of pragmatism and interpretivism, which, while having separate epistemologies, have relative consensus in assumptions about knowledge (ontological positions). Due to some similarity of many directions of qualitative research, sometimes a compromise is suggested allowing for some permeability between competing qualitative paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Having a researcher's own philosophical position is an appropriate approach (Reay, Zafar, Monteiro, & Glaser, 2019) as these basic assumptions influence consistency of the research, observable phenomena and desirable results.

In this empirical study I attempt to understand phenomena through my subjective understanding and the meaning that research participants assign to them (Gioia & Pitre, 1990). People being studied also interpret social situations subjectively (Myers, 2009). As under most qualitative research paradigms (Klenke, 2008), I strive to understand phenomena in their context, or as they are within their context (Madill et al, 2000; Myers, 2009). In terms of ontology, I follow pragmatism, which aims to create the best available and most useful, in terms of research aims, explanation that although objectively unattainable, can reflect the experienced reality (Martela, 2012;

Van de Ven, 2007). The goal of the researcher is to take into account personal subjectivity of researcher, their theoretical grounding, the researched and the context, which is emphasised in the pragmatic paradigm (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). Knowledge in this research is gained through interpretations of meanings, which comes from interpretive research (Myers, 2009). Thus, as a result, I seek to produce a descriptive analysis that emphasises deep, interpretive understandings of social phenomena of interest.

Knowledge in pragmatism can be achieved through abductive inquiry. In inductive inquiry, theoretical generalizations arise from the data (Gioia et al., 2013; Klenke, 2008). However, "phenomena are not, in general, observable; they are abstractions wrought from the relevant data, frequently as a result of a reductive process of data analysis" (Haig, 2005, p. 374), with which I agree, as well as with the value of abductive reasoning. It is an active role of the researcher to interpret data with theoretical inferences (Madill et al., 2000). Abductive reasoning from the perspective of pragmatism is dependent on three forms of contexts: researcher's pre-understanding, data and its empirical context, any other material available such as previous theoretical explanations about the phenomenon (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). This means that, as a researcher, I had to be self- aware and reflective in every choice and encounter these contexts in the research process.

Abduction is a useful approach for expansion of the existing knowledge when theory is not completely absent (Von Krogh et al., 2012), which is the case regarding caring and its implementation phenomena in this study. However, abduction may complicate generating new theoretical implications (Orlitzky, 2012), which has led me to combine abduction with induction for this study by relying on a particular method (Gioia et al., 2013) more favoured by interpretive researchers to analyse data and show findings (Reay et al., 2019).

2.3. Research design

A qualitative study, suitable for investigating complicated structures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), like caring and HRM implementation processes, is appropriate for the aims of this thesis. Moreover, a qualitative approach has been suggested for topics for which theory is in the intermediate stage of development (Edmondson & McManus, 2007), which is the case in regards the theoretical grounding of the caring concept and its acting mechanisms in management research. It may be useful to propose a

relationship between the phenomena of interest and established constructs (Edmondson & McManus, 2007).

In-depth instrumental case study design was chosen (Stake, 2005), which has been recommended for HRM process studies in strategic HRM (Paauwe, 2009) and HRM implementation literature (Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Two retail organisations provided insight into line manager caring and HRM implementation. To illustrate how caring and implementation occur in the circumstances of several exemplars of retail units (Stake, 2005) twelve stores, regarded as twelve cases, were selected from each organisation. To gain an understanding of how caring manifests in the implementation of single HR practices together with the analysis of each practice a two-case design was employed, which allowed comparison of HR practices between the two organisations.

This study employs accounts of organisational members collected through interviews. The choice of interview technique was based on its appropriateness for the understanding of participant perceptions or learning how they have come to attach a certain meaning to phenomena of interest (here caring, implementation, HR practices). An interview is also suitable for investigating unusual themes (Berg, 2001), which is caring as it is rarely investigated in organisations, especially the profit-oriented business context. This type of study allowed to observe actual HR practices, rather than treat them as a "black boxed" phenomenon (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Mäkelä, Smale, & Sumelius, 2014).

The quality of the study. To evaluate the quality of this research criteria have been applied, as recommended in the literature for qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Symon, Cassell, & Johnson, 2018). Evidence from HR and line managers was added to employee data to assure completeness (triangulation of informants), which might be regarded as an alternative criterion to construct validity in a positivist approach to research. Written transcribed narrative was given to managers who had participated in interviews to get their feedback on results and their views on what was missing (so-called member check). To allow others to understand what has been done, rich description of the study findings is provided to make decisions regarding transferability of findings to other settings, which might be juxtaposed to external validity in a positivist's ideology. These quality improving procedures are regarded as the most popular in the qualitative research because they are time and cost-effective (Creswell, 2009).

The quality of the research was further enhanced by taking detailed field notes, tape recording and transcribing the recordings, which are typical qualitative research procedures. The analytical choices made in the course of the data analysis are carefully documented in the data analysis section in moving from raw data to a final interpretation of it (so-called audit trail) (Creswell, 2009; Symon et al., 2018). To assure quality, a careful reading of data was conducted by the first author and a second researcher. To stimulate critical thinking, a coding scheme of caring forms was developed through discussions between the author and two other HRM researchers. Finally, the researcher's subjectivity through reflexivity within the whole research process is disclosed in relevant sections of the thesis, for instance, researcher's familiarity with the organisations, as this may have influenced the research process and interpretation of the research findings.

2.4. Research setting

Research context. The study took place in the retail sector. The retail sector, as a rule, follows an HRM policy of attracting less-experienced workers, offering lower wages and limited internal employee development (Van de Voorde & Boxall, 2014). Edgar et al. (2017) distinguish retail due to a high concentration of young people and female employees often on precarious work contracts (i.e., casual, part-time or agency work). Herewith retail belongs to a customer service industry where the job requires emotional labour from employees while serving other people (Boyd et al., 2014). In this environment line managers have a versatile role: partnering with upper management, HR department, subordinate employees, as well as corporate organisation, suppliers, and customers. They also experience organisational pressure in regards to ensuring productivity and quality (Arnold et al., 2009). All this increases work role stress for employees and line managers (Evans, 2017) and underline the relevance of line managers caring for their employees' well-being in retail.

Research organisations and units. Both investigated organisations are retail specialty chains spread across the Baltic region and are local capital investments (not international companies). Both expressed interest in revisiting their employee orientation, did not have poor records on employment relationships and made above average investments in their human resources. As such, they could be considered "caring" organisations. Under contracts with companies, it was agreed not to reveal their names. Both chains are not competitors, the goods that they sell are different.

The first organisation (hereafter Company A) had 24 shops and 180-190 employees in Lithuania (see Table 3 for characteristics of organisations). All their shops are small or average in space with 4-11 employees directly subordinate to a shop manager. And the second organisation (hereafter Company B) is the large-sized organisation in Lithuania. Its shops are average or spacy, and some of their 11-23 employees are not directly subordinate to a shop manager. Company B had 105 shops and around 1200 employees during the period of the data collection. Company A mostly employed full-time employees, and only a few part-timers. Company B was using full and part-time work contracts. Full work time enrolment was 40 work hours per week of enrolment for an employee, part-time was respectively less, 30 or 20 hours per week usually.

Table 3. Company and unit specifics

Organisational characteristics	**Company A**	**Company B**
Total employee number in Lithuania	190	1200
Units (shops) in Lithuania	24	102
Average age of staff (in years) in studied units:		
Line managers	40	33
Employees	30	23
Unit size	Small to average	Average to large
Employees per unit	4-12	11-23

Twelve cases in Lithuania were selected: 6 shops operating under different brand names from each organisation in 2 cities. The units were selected for the study by first including their manager (hereafter line manager) according to the selection criteria (see description in the following section). The characteristics of investigated companies and retail units are presented in Table 3.

HR practices studied. Companies varied in the number of HR practices implemented, the degree of their formalisation and implementation, as well as HRM devolvement. Information about the selection of HR practices, their analysis and descriptions are provided further (sections 2.7.3 in chapter 2 and 3.1 in chapter 3).

2.5. Participants of the study

This study includes 36 research participants from 3 groups: 2 heads of HR departments, 12 line managers and 22 employees. In both organisations, I have used a nonprobability purposive convenience sampling (Saunders, 2012) for the selection of individual participants, such as line managers and employees. Purposive convenience sampling enabled meeting the aims of this research by inviting research

participants with diverse individual characteristics, due to which participating managers varied in respect to their caring and HRM implementation, and employees varied in their perceptions of the manager's caring and HRM implementation. For convenience (mainly travelling) reasons, the study was limited to shops from 2 largest Lithuanian cities. Varying in personal characteristics (Table 4) the sample of line managers and the sample of employees allowed breath in investigation, and homogeneity of both of these separate samples allowed in-depth examination aiming

Table 4. Characteristics of research participants *(n.d. – no data)*

	Ref No	Job function	Age/ years	Tenure in the company (years)	Tenure in the position (years)	Education
Company A	A_HR	HR manager	33	<2	<2	University
	A_LM_1.1.	Line manager	26	3	<2	Secondary
	A_LM_1.2.	Line manager	37	<5	<2	University
	A_LM_1.3.	Line manager	35	<10	2	College
	A_LM_1.4.	Line manager	41	16	5	College
	A_LM_2.1.	Line manager	32	<6	4	University
	A_LM_2.2.	Line manager	27	4	<2	College
	A_Emp_1.1.1.	Sales consultant	21	<1	n.d.	Secondary
	A_Emp_1.1.2.	Specialist	54	<5	n.d.	University
	A_Emp_1.2.1.	Specialist	40	<4	n.d.	University
	A_Emp_1.3.1.	Sales consultant	26	<2	n.d.	University
	A_Emp_1.3.2.	Specialist	36	3	1	University
	A_Emp_2.2.1.	Sales consultant	37	<11	n.d.	College
	A_Emp_2.2.2.	Sales consultant	31	<4	n.d.	College
	A_Emp_2.2.3.	Specialist	29	<1	<0,5	University
Company B	B_HR	HR department head	45	14	14	University
	B_LM_1.1.	Line manager	25	<1	<1	Secondary
	B_LM_1.2.	Line manager	28	<7	<3	Secondary
	B_LM_2.1.	Line manager	39	<11	<8	University
	B_LM_2.2.	Line manager	55	<9	<8	College
	B_LM_2.3.	Line manager	44	<4	3	College
	B_LM_2.4.	Line manager	48	<19	<18	University
	B_Emp_1.1.1.	Sales consultant	23	<1	n.d.	College
	B_Emp_1.1.2.	Sales consultant	21	<1	n.d.	Secondary
	B_Emp_1.1.3.	Sales consultant	19	<0,5	n.d.	Secondary
	B_Emp_1.2.1.	Specialist	24	<3	n.d.	Secondary
	B_Emp_1.2.2.	Sales consultant	21	<1	n.d.	Secondary
	B_Emp_2.1.1.	Sales consultant	43	<1	n.d.	Vocational
	B_Emp_2.1.2.	Sales consultant	20	<2	n.d.	Secondary
	B_Emp_2.1.3.	Sales consultant	32	<10	n.d.	College
	B_Emp_2.2.1.	Sales consultant	23	<1	n.d.	College
	B_Emp_2.2.2.	Senior consultant	32	<10	n.d.	University
	B_Emp_2.3.1.	Senior consultant	27	1	n.d.	Secondary
	B_Emp_2.3.2.	Sales consultant	37	<10	n.d.	Secondary
	B_Emp_2.4.1.	Sales consultant	23	<2	n.d.	Secondary
	B_Emp_2.4.2.	Sales consultant	46	<11	n.d.	Vocational

to answer the research question (Saunders & Townsend, 2016). Those samples are considered homogenous as all research participants came from the same retail sector, the same position and the same or equivalent company (Kindsiko & Poltimäe, 2019). The number of participating line managers and employees, whose data was mostly taken into account in the investigations of caring in the HRM implementation, grew up to 32 when I stopped interviewing after theoretical saturation (Saunders & Townsend, 2016) was reached.

Although the representativeness of the sample is not an end in itself in this type of study (Madill et al., 2000), it was achieved by purposive sampling of informants when seeking their variability. So, the characteristics of the selected managers and employees resembled the data provided by organisations on their average employees' characteristics. In Company A the average age of staff in the shop unit was 30 or 40 years. In Company B the biggest part of the workforce was young people over 20 years, so the average age of staff in the shop unit was 23 or 31-34 years. Minority employees were more senior, as well as line managers. Younger employees (both line managers and their subordinate employees) were employed in shops, which were selling goods dedicated to customers of younger age in Company B. All participants were female (women make 99% of employees in the studied units), which is typical for the retail sector in Lithuania (Statistics, 2019) and other countries (Chang, Travaglione, & O'Neill, 2015; Edgar et al., 2017).

Heads of HR. Interviews were conducted with HR heads of each organisation (herein the HR). These people were decision-makers, who hold full or shared (with other upper management) responsibility for determining, introducing and monitoring company HR policy, and as follows, know and can present it best. Company A had only one HR manager in their HR department (further referred to as HR) responsible for the Lithuanian market, who had almost 2 years of experience in the company (see also Table 4 for characteristics of research participants) and none subordinate employees. She claimed that she participated in all the decisions concerning people in the organisation, and those decisions were usually made collectively by several senior managers and general manager of the company. Company B had an HR department (further referred to as HR) managing all Baltic countries, and its head of HR was invited to represent the company in the study. She was 43 years, had worked in the company for 14 years and had 10 HR associates reporting to her.

Line managers were unit managers who came from different retail units of each organisation (6 from each), which are all separate shops. Line managers were recommended for interviews by the heads of HR department based on requested line management characteristics, such as age, experience in the company and the position, line managers' educational level (see Table 4), most of which were recommended to account by previous research in the area of HRM implementation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). The sample of line managers may be questioned in terms of the number of interviews from it (12). However, considering expert recommendations and triangulation of the line manager sample with research participants from other job positions to get more completeness (Madill et al., 2000), allows regarding it as sufficient to reach the aims of the research (Saunders & Townsend, 2016).

Employees. 22 non-managerial research participants were interviewed, which included 8 interviews from Company A and 14 interviews from Company B. Initially it was planned to interview 2-3 subordinates of all line managers who participated in the study; however, it was not always the case, as one line manager refused to organise meetings with her subordinates motivating that nobody was willing to speak to the researcher. Employees were suggested by the line manager to whom they reported, on requested employee characteristics. They were selected seeking variability of age, tenure in the company and their employment contract type (part or full-time employment). All interviewed employees were working on the shop-floor (and therefore considered front line employees). Majority of them were holding positions of sales consultants. Other positions were named "specialist" (see Table 4) for reasons of corporate confidentiality so as not to disclose the identities of the companies under the study.

2.6. Research procedure

First, pilot interviews were conducted to check how employees and managers understand and respond to the interview questions.

Getting access to research participants. HR managers of both companies not only acted as research participants but were the main gatekeepers who allowed implementing the study in their companies, provided the requested information about the employees and the company, supported access to the participants. The management of Company A was interested in getting the results of this research to

improve their HR management, and Company B just allowed collecting the data for scientific purposes and supported in gaining access to line managers. I had worked six years before the start of the study in Company B. Respectively, I knew the working environment in its stores, trends in its HRM policy, and had personal contact with the head of HR department, but was not personally familiar with other research participants from this organisation. This familiarity not only helped to gain access to interviewees from that organisation but could have also influenced the research process, which will be discussed further where it is relevant.

Before choosing the line manager candidates to be interviewed, I studied personal characteristics from the data that HR have provided. Together with HR of each company I discussed the selection criteria presented above aiming for variability so that each interviewed line manager would be different from her company counterparts on at least one of these personal characteristics.

The HR manager of Company A, my main contact person in the Company, sent an informational email to all stores explaining the study, the organisation's decision to participate in it and the process of the interviewee selection. Thus, I could approach line managers without the interference of their HR manager. The Head of HR from Company B insisted on introducing the study ("nobody will talk with you like somebody from the street") to the selected shop managers personally informing them about the purpose of the study, confidentiality and tape recording during the interview. I found this support very handy. After the refusal of 2 line managers from Company A to participate in the interviews I asked their HR to help to get consent for participation from other selected shop managers as a personal invitation from their HR seemed to work best in Company B. However, getting access to line managers and later to employee research participant was difficult in Company A. They tried to escape interviews saying they were too busy; thus, scheduling meeting times was rather difficult.

After the completion of several interviews with line managers, I asked each HR for a list of shop employees that met the above-listed selection criteria. Then I asked line managers to propose a few subordinate employees who differed in their age, contract type (part or full time) and tenure in the organisation as candidates for interviewing. Since interviewing took place during shop working hours it was important to coordinate with line managers in advance the day and the time when employees could be interviewed. Getting participant consent to take part in the interview was first

taken care of by their line manager, the exact time for conducting the interview was agreed by me with their line manager. It is clear, therefore, that line managers acted as second gate-keepers to access employee informants.

Interview procedure. Interviewing was carried out in 3 steps: first HR heads of both organisations were interviewed, then selected line managers and finally, their subordinate employees. Such sequencing was needed to make more targeted use of informants' time by asking them only about specific practices, first reviewed through HR and then through line managers.

Meetings with HR heads required more time (120-150 minutes per both meetings) than with other research participants to audit all HR practices used in their companies; thus, they were split into two interviews. During the second interview with HR, I also crosschecked issues about the company HR policy that had emerged during interviews with the first interviewed line managers.

Interviews with line managers lasted between 45-90 min. I crosschecked with line managers whether they indeed implemented HR practices identified with HR. Interviewing of employees took between 45 and 75 minutes. I focused with them on five HR practices that were identified as those in the implementation of which line managers played the biggest role, including internal recruitment, career management, talent management, performance appraisal and work scheduling.

Interview structure. I conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews in the Lithuanian language. An interview guide with several broad predetermined themes was prepared for each group of research participants. The focus was on the *themes/topics* to be covered, not detailed questions. First, the outline of each of the themes was prepared separately for each group of research participants. Although main inquiry themes about caring in HR implementation took part in the interview time, other questions were used to get descriptive information, facilitated the informants to get to the topic of the study and helped me understand the organisational context. Main question themes were developed taking into consideration the research question and its sub-questions, and included questions related to line managers' caring for employees through HRM implementation, questions concerning line managers' approach and employee views towards employee orientation in the company's HR practices. Questions about organisational caring and line managers' regular caring for employees through day-to-day interactions served to contextualise the main data.

Next, specific questions were developed for each question category: scheduled main questions, scheduled extra questions and scheduled probes (Berg, 2001).

Scheduled main questions were the central focus of the study geared toward eliciting specific desired information. Scheduled extra questions were roughly equivalent to some of the main questions but worded slightly differently. They were asked to assess the possible influence that a change of wording may have or to be used in case the participant did not provide an answer to the main question (did not understand the meaning, was not sure about it, etc.). They were helpful to have a prepared alternative instead of crafting a question on the spot and avoiding unprofessional and leading questions. Probes, or probing questions, had a purpose to elicit more information about whatever the informant had already said in response to the already asked question. Separate probing questions and a few structured series of probes were scheduled for one or another response or in case of lack of information on some main question.

Separate sets of themes for questioning were employed for HR heads, line managers and employees (see Appendixes 1, 2 and 3 for the more detailed interview guide). When interesting concepts emerged as the interviewing process progressed or some questions seemed inappropriate after initial interviews, some interview questions were changed in wording or content of themes elaborated (Gioia et al., 2013). Efforts were made to follow the thematic sequence to keep the conversation running smoothly. However, when the participants themselves began to address another relevant topic, they were allowed to develop it further. Later on, I returned to uncovered themes when it was needed to deepen what they had already talked about. To obtain an account in the participants' terms (Gioia et al., 2013), unscheduled probes were used. Their purpose was to elaborate on the topic from the subject's perspective. Sometimes they were the same scheduled probes in changed wording according to the language (vocabulary) the participant had been using. Sometimes general probes were used to elaborate an answer.

I also used "throw away" (Berg, 2001) questions, which were unnecessary for gathering the key information examined in the study, but valuable to draw out a complete story. They were used at the beginning of the interview where their purpose was mainly to establish a rapport. Some of them were demographics questions prepared as easy questions to develop a rapport, even though characteristics of all employees were provided before interviews by HR heads or line managers. Some

“throw away” questions were used throughout the interview change the focus of the interview theme or to set the interviewing pace.

Interviews with heads of HR departments largely focused on their organisation’s HR practices, namely each intended HR practice used in their company, also line managers’ caring activities for employees in general and in implementation of HR practices. HR heads were also asked about line managers’ caring but this is why they participated in this study as they wanted to know about line management caring. Thus, HR did not provide much information on the main research question of this study. Line managers were asked about their experiences as implementers of HR practices. Line managers’ role in HRM implementation was explored in regard to those practices that they implemented. Through these interviews, I wanted to find out what line managers considered as constituting caring for their subordinates in HRM implementation, and what specific activities they performed to address employees’ needs and well-being while implementing HRM. Finally, line managers were asked to elaborate on what they did at their discretion to care for their employees when implementing HRM. Employees were inquired about their views about line manager’s role in the implementations of specific HR practices, their line manager’s caring activities during this process trying to get as many specific details as possible about the latter, as well as the employees’ perceptions about the relevance of line manager’s caring to employee well-being.

2.7. Data analysis

In this section, I will describe how I analysed the caring perspective in the implementation of the HR practices studied under this thesis. After several readings of interview transcripts it was possible to define several different ways in the data as to how research participants perceive caring for employees in HRM: 1) through the company's offer of certain HR practice and 2) through the process of HR practice implementation. I tried to identify in the data what line managers used – HR practice design or HRM implementation process to care for their employees. The data analysis followed an interpretive approach, according to which multiple interpretations may be made of a phenomenon depending on the research context and the position of the researcher. The reflexivity of the researcher and attempts to approach the phenomenon of interest from different perspectives are important requirements in this type of qualitative research (Madill et al., 2000).

This section starts with the first step of data analysis (section 2.7.1.): data coding and the analysis of manifestations of line manager caring (later labelled as caring forms) in the five investigated practices. The section then continues with the second step of data analysis (section 2.7.2): the explanation of the data coding and analysis to extract HRM implementation scenarios that were noticed during prior data analysis and largely appeared due to line managers' caring for employees in the implementation. Cross case analysis of the interview data was performed in two first steps, which is presented in sections 2.7.1. and 2.7.2. of this section. Finally, the identified forms of caring and implementation scenarios were analysed per each studied practice in section 2.7.3.

For the coding, analysis and presentation of the interview data the method offered by (Gioia et al., 2013) was used. This data analysis procedure was selected, since it may be aligned to the pragmatist philosophical position, embodies induction in the first level of data analysis, and abduction, and provides the logic for ordering and presenting data in a reasonable format.

2.7.1. Analysis of line manager caring through HRM implementation

To answer the first research sub-question, I concentrated on the analysis of research participant responses to interview questions about line managers' caring in the implementation of HR practices. First, I coded all line manager interview texts, and a second researcher, an expert in HRM, coded some of them into meaningful units on line manager caring. Through a discussion we then developed first-order concepts trying to stay as close to the line managers' genuine wordings as possible. Then I coded employee transcripts, which resulted in adding some new first-order concepts. Each coded text unit represented a mutually exclusive line managers' caring behaviour in HRM implementation that is expressed by a phrase, sentence or a short paragraph. To explore manifestations of line managers caring I and two other HRM researchers reviewed and grouped earlier developed concepts into conceptually similar twelve second order themes through multiple discussions seeking similarities and differences among the concepts that emerged from the first-order analysis. Below I provide a more detailed explanation of how this was performed.

Development of the second-order themes. Managers' behaviours that reflected the provision of information on career possibilities to employees were group into the theme *Informing*. Managers' behaviours, which focused on channelling employee

promotion by motivating employees to seek promotion and consulting them on career possibilities constituted the caring theme *Guiding employee promotion*. Another series of managers' behaviours relating to caring about employee careers, which were directed to the HR or upper management who were in the position to accelerate employee promotion, was merged into the theme *Recommending for promotion*. The series of managers' caring behaviour that focused on striving to get acquainted or finding out more about employees were assigned to the theme *Inquiring*, which corresponded to Kahn's (1993) caring dimension of “Inquiry” that means asking and probing for others' experiences, thoughts, feelings, and other information necessary to provide good care. Managers viewed engagement in conversation with subordinates as a specific form of caring; thus, first order codes, related to the development of a rapport with an employee and two-way communication, were combined into the distinct theme of *Talking with employees*. Managerial behaviours, which reflected HRM implementation through more tangible and proactive actions taken to find the most appropriate solution in the best interest of a particular employee, were grouped under the theme *Considering individual needs*. Manager reports about their differentiation in HRM implementation depending on different individual employees needs to better meet them, were combined under the theme *Differentiating*. The type of line management caring when managers informed the HR department or upper management about employee interests (views, expectations, etc.) seeking support in situations beyond their discretion was called *Voicing employee interests*.

Another series of the first-order codes in line management accounts related to the prevention of negative emotions, strain and tension, and fostering positive feelings in employees. These behaviours are in line with Kahn's (1993) “Compassion”. Following Kahn’s definition (showing emotional presence by displaying warmth, affection, and kindness) the theme was named *Acting compassionately.* Acting compassionately comprises managers’ warmth, affection and kindness displayed towards an employee and better reflects the study data than the term Compassion, which would not show the level of proactivity that rested in my data.

Research participants considered noticing and recognising employee strengths and potential as caring behaviour. This referred to the recognition of employee strengths and potential and ways to use them, which formed a separate theme called *Recognising employee strengths*. This second-order theme also falls under Kahn's (1993) dimension “Validation”. *Recognising employee strengths* was narrower than

“Validation”, as it referred specifically to the recognition of employee strengths and potential rather than to employee recognition in general. Besides, managers also focused on how to use the strengths of employees. That is why this theme was regarded as different from *Validating employees* (described below).

A series of the first-order codes embraced sharing of one's personal experience with employees and providing on-site training to enhance their competencies. A great number of codes under this theme were extracted from employee accounts. These codes were combined under the theme of *Mentoring*.

Several first-order codes fell under Kahn's (1993) “Validation” dimension, which is defined as communicating positive regard, respect, and appreciation to others. So, I combined them into the theme of *Validating employees*. This theme was narrower and showed more proactivity in managerial behaviour than Kahn’s Validation. In the line manager data *Validating employees* incorporated a large portion of employee accounts on their managers' managerial behaviour, such as supporting employee aspirations and encouraging their pursuit, providing positive feedback, etc.

Development of aggregated dimensions. Through discussions between me and two other HRM research experts and revisions of the higher-order coding scheme, 6 aggregate dimensions were developed from the second-order themes. To do this, the second-order themes were compared with the theoretical dimensions from the managerial care literature (Kahn, 1993; Kroth & Keeler, 2009). While developing dimensions I tried to stay as close to this literature as possible. In section 3.2. data structure of managers' caring for employees in line with the six aggregate dimensions of caring is visualised. Below is the explanation of how the aggregation of themes was performed.

Three internally different second-order themes (*Informing, Guiding employee promotion, Recommending for promotion*) of managers' caring concentrated on stimulating employee promotion. To aggregate these themes the dimension **Stimulating employee promotion** was created because a similar dimension was not found in the literature of caring. The dimension of “Support” proposed by Kahn (1993), which means offering information, feedback, insights, and protection to others, involved broader managerial behaviours than caring specifically directed to employee promotion. Kroth & Keeler's (2009) dimension of “Advancing” was most similar to **Stimulating employee promotion** from this study, but it was also broader. For Kroth & Keeler's (2009) “Advancing” meant having a desire to help the employee to succeed,

and in this study managers' behaviour was directed specifically to career progression. **Stimulating employee promotion** herein referred to managers' behaviour aimed to help employee progress in their career.

Talking with employees seemed similar to *Inquiring* because in both cases the manager was focused and attentive to the employee through communication. To aggregate these two themes a new dimension was created which was called **Engaging with employees**, since an appropriate dimension was not found in the theories of caring. Both themes – *Inquiring* and *Talking with employees,* are similar to "Communicating" dimension of Kroth & Keeler (2009), which describes receptiveness and full availability to the employee. However, "Communicating" foresees a more passive role for the managers leaving more room for employees to access managers when needed for caring than both themes from this data. "Communicating" is also broader, as it includes such aspects "Accepts the employee" and "Is emotionally accessible", which was not explicitly identified in the quotes on these two themes (*Talking with employees* and *Inquiring*). The remaining content of Kroth & Keeler's (2009) "Communicating" ("Pays attention", "Shows interest in the employee", "Open-mindedness", "Empathizes") is however present in both of these themes (*Talking with employees* and *Inquiring)*. Thus, these common aspects allow merging *Inquiring employees* and *Talking with employees* into one aggregate dimension **Engaging with employees**, which refers to managers' behaviours when striving to get acquainted and develop a connection with an employee.

Three second-order themes (*Considering individual needs, Differentiating,* and *Voicing employee interests*) included mostly employee-initiated manager behaviours, i.e. managers' behaviours in responding to known employee needs, inquiries or requests. The other themes in the data represented mostly behaviours initiated by managers. Those three themes were close to "Attention" in Kahn's (1993) theory, which means active attending to others' experiences, ideas, and self-expression. However, "Attention" as Kahn (1993) defines it, is less proactive and encompasses less than line managers enacted while showing attention to employees and seeking to enact specific actions based on the assessed needs of a particular employee. An appropriate theoretical dimension for this aspect of caring has not been offered in other caring theory either. Thus to aggregate these three themes I created the dimension of **Responding**, since research on caring stresses responsiveness in a caring relationship, which refers not only to the responsiveness of the caregiver but the cared-

for too (Kroth & Keeler, 2009; Finkenauer & Meeus, 2000; Noddings, 2005). **Responding** in this thesis can be defined as managers' actions to do their best to respond to employee preferences.

The theme *Acting compassionately* appeared as conceptually different from other themes, so I did not aggregate it with any other theme leaving it a separate dimension with the name of the second-order theme, i.e. **Acting compassionately**. This form of behaviour means a manager's warmth, affection and kindness displayed towards an employee. It incorporates managers' behaviours referring to employee emotions: getting to know employee feelings and supporting them emotionally.

I aggregated *Recognising employee strengths* with the theme *Mentoring* because the content of the concepts in both themes is concerned with how a manager develops employees. I combined them according to Kroth & Keeler's (2009) theory under the aggregate dimension of **Capacitising employees**, which means seeing an individual's potential and helping employees to grow and learn. I also considered similarities between themes *Recognising employee strengths* and *Validating employees,* as both them fell under Kahn's (1993) "Validation" dimension; however, as explained earlier in the construction of the themes, it was decided that they have different meanings and they were not aggregated into the same dimension.

The theme *Validating employees* also manifested as conceptually different from other themes, so I did not aggregate it with other themes leaving it as a separate dimension with the name of the second-order theme **Validating employees**, which means communicating positive regard, respect, and appreciation to an employee.

2.7.2. Analysis of HRM implementation scenarios

To answer the second research sub-question, I again concentrated on the analysis of research participant responses to interview questions about line managers' caring in HRM implementation; however, here the focus was on identifying excerpts of the text of the research participants perceptions, experiences and decisions towards line manager implementation of HR practices when they displayed caring for employees.

First, after repeated reading of the interview texts, I coded line manager interviews so that they represented line managers' views from respective (line manager) research participant accounts. Some coded interview excerpts coincided with the excerpts used in the analysis of manifestations of caring for employees (caring forms), the remaining

excerpts represented other managers' actions toward intended HR practices. In the next step, the first-order concepts, which were derived from the data, were compared with the theoretical themes of implementation scenarios developed in the HRM implementation literature (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017), such as ignoring, imitating, integrating, internalising, deviating from, or initiating HR practices. Thus, in the analysis of the scenarios, literature was introduced in the second level of analysis when the abductive analysis was conducted by cycling between theoretical themes, extracted first-order concepts and remaining study data. The abductive mode of inquiry means a continuous movement (or iterative process) back and forth between particular theories and empirical data taking all contextual factors into account (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). In this way, additional first-order codes were extracted that represented line manager caring but had not been assigned to implementation and thus not coded in the beginning. For instance, the theme *Introducing* was extracted in this way. A practice introduced by one line manager was called “Bringing-up” following the manager’s label attached to it.

After the grouping of the first order concepts into themes from line manager data, employee data was analysed. Since in general employees had not much to say about their managers' implementation scenarios, except for the fact whether a specific HR practice was introduced to them by line management or not, after reading and coding their texts no additional themes were identified. Thus, employee views mainly enriched and helped to illustrate the findings extracted earlier from line manager data. Interviews with HR heads provided an understanding of the context of certain scenarios and HR involvement in the implementation.

In the final step, differences and similarities between themes were analysed. After noticing that the main criterion for the differences in implementation scenarios was the degree of deviation from the intended HR, the themes were grouped into dimensions (see section 3.3.) according to the extent to which the implemented HR practices deviated from the intended HR practices. All in all, ten themes were grouped into five broader dimensions. Two of the themes were completely different, referring to two scenarios opposing classical HRM implementation, such as *Ignoring*, which meant not implementing HRM at all, and *Introducing*, which meant line managers' design of practices on their own. The majority of themes concentrated on modifications of intended HRM, so it was important to find differences between them. It appeared that HRM modifications for *Negotiating* and *Imitating* were based on trimmings from the

intended HRM, so they were aggregated into **Suppression** dimension. And the majority of the other themes, such as *Communicating, Facilitating, Improving* and, covered more additions based HRM modifications (or at least did not by and large include trimmings) when an intended HR practice was complemented during its implementation; thus they were aggregated into **Tailor-made HRM arrangements**. *Differentiating* scenario was implemented through a combination of practice augmentation (more talking informally) and reduction (not appraising) for some employees, and through reduction of the practice for others. Thus it may be assigned to the **Suppression** dimension too, and it is most similar to Imitation scenario, distinguished by Bos-Nehles et al. (2017), which means that managers adopt an HR practice to imitate its implementation but do not truly perceive a practice as valuable.

Two scenarios – *Following and Integrating*, referred to HRM implementation as intended. Respectively they were aggregated together into the dimension of **Implementation**.

2.7.3. Analysis of single HR practices as tools for line manager caring

Before starting interviews with line managers, I performed an analysis of HR practices in both companies. First, a list and description of intended HR practices in each organisation were obtained from the heads of HR departments. After this HR practices that performed a similar function in both companies were identified. Then I crosschecked with the line managers if they implemented them. After interviews with line managers, five groups of HR practices were identified in both companies that were intended by the HR department and recognised by line managers as practices in the implementation of which they played a significant role, such as performance appraisal, career development, internal recruitment, talent management and work scheduling. The intended design of these practices is described in Results (section 3.1.).

First-order concepts and second-order themes of caring forms from the first step of analysis (section 2.7.1.) and scenarios themes from the second step of analysis (section 2.7.1.) were assigned to one of the five investigated HR practices in the implementation of which these manifestations of caring occurred or scenarios appeared. The same first-order concepts and related second-order caring themes appeared in a few practices (see results of analysis in chapter 3). Through comparisons between the two companies, differences in HR practices from the same function were revealed. For instance, career development and performance appraisal

practices were designed differently in Company A and B. Findings from this analysis are presented in chapter 3, section 3.4.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Empirical results are presented in the following order in this chapter. First, HR practices as intended, which were investigated, are presented. Forms of line manager caring in HRM implementation are described in the second section. The next section presents HRM implementation scenarios in line manager caring. This part concludes with a presentation of line managers caring and implementation scenarios in individual HR practices investigated in this thesis.

3.1. Overview of single HR practices at case organisations

Company B, a large-sized organisation in Lithuania, had more practices than Company A, and they were better defined and more formalised. We knew about practices design from HR and line manager research participant. When asked about HR practices (rules, systems, guidelines, etc.) in general in their companies and after an explanation what an HR "practice" is, line managers could hardly name anything more than work scheduling, while subordinates, by and large, could not name any practices at all. Research participants had more to say about caring in implementing specific HR practices rather than asked about caring in the implementation of HRM in general. Employees had minimal insights at the attributes of HR practices also, they tended to perceive the HR practice as integral, if at all. Often they valued the entire HR policy of their company without a focus on one single HR practice.

In this section a description of each studied HR practice as intended is presented, including expected line managers' activities in its implementation. Where practices differed between the two companies, they are described separately.

Performance appraisal. In both companies line managers are supposed to conduct annual performance review meetings (a.k.a. interviews). Company B has a description of their procedure, while company A does not. In both companies, line managers are expected to conduct annual performance reviews with their subordinates following the intended procedure by HR: prepare for the interview, organise the interview, talk about the recommended areas, fill in the interview form and send it to the HR. In company B, sometimes line managers are invited to discuss

the appraisal results with the HR, but post-appraisal decisions are made by the HR alone. In company A, line managers are not systematically required to share performance review results with the HR or to conduct review meetings with all subordinates.

Career development. Company A has a formalised three-grade system under which one can advance to a higher grade after they demonstrate the required knowledge. A move to a higher grade means one's assignment to a higher job category (job position remaining the same) and a salary increase. Advancement to a higher grade is almost automatic, as the company has predefined periods (every 9 months) for such knowledge check-ups (tests) and expected advancement. Knowledge check-ups are conducted by the chain manager. Line managers have to advise and remind the chain manager when the time for such check-ups comes; however, line managers do not participate in them.

In Company B career development practice is less formalised. Shop managers implement it through job enrichment, i.e. providing possibilities to shop assistants to learn some new things and have extra responsibilities (e.g. working at a cash register, etc.). To do this, shop managers first have to assess an employee's abilities and preferences. Then line managers evaluate the development of new skills and knowledge in action, i.e. through a performance of shop-floor activities/tasks, and through a conversation (or a few of them) with the employee, fills in a form and makes a recommendation to the HR to officially assign a respective employee to a higher position with more responsibilities (for instance senior sales assistant). The final decision on the promotion is made by HR, who also evaluate the employee. Employee development is considered as an indicator of shop managers' performance too.

Internal recruitment. This practice, along with career development and talent management, was related with employee succession planning. New job openings are announced internally in both companies, and any interested employee may apply for them. Line managers receive job postings from the HR and are expected to post them on their shop information boards.

Talent management. Company A had no formalised talent management procedures; the practice was defined as it is customary to do*:*

> *It can vary, it is not defined anywhere… We work as a team, not as individuals...*
>
> *Me, the chain manager and the general manager know everything. If we can*

offer something more to an employee than they are capable at the time, we determine what are their weaknesses and work on it to eliminate them (A_HR).

The HR identifies potential employees in the recruitment process or through line managers' recommendations. Providing recommendations was reported by the HR Manager as line managers' responsibility in Company A.

Company B runs various talent identification programs as through them the organisation "helps employees to reveal their potential, listens to them" (B_HR). One of the examples is the programme called "Try out a career", which is aimed at talent identification and development of a reserve for higher positions (e.g. shop managers, deputy managers, etc.). Line managers are expected to inform their employees about the programme by posting an advertisement on the shop bulletin board and later on to participate in decision making about the applicants. However, sometimes such decisions are made by HR without involving shop managers (as reported by line managers). Finally, line managers are expected to act as trainers for the identified talent to help them gain competencies needed for a target position.

Work scheduling. Managers have to develop work schedules in conformity with the Labour Code provisions and company rules set by the HR concerning work and non-work time division, planning and monthly, weekly and daily distribution of work hours among staff, work time accounting, and allocation of vacations in employee work schedules. Company rules require line managers ensuring that all work processes at shops function properly by distributing employee work time respectively. It is the shop manager's discretion on how to apply company rules and legal regulations. In Company A line managers need to gather information on employee preferences, develop work schedules and reach an agreement on them with employees. Once this is done, the schedule has to be sent to the chain manager for approval. Company B has the same procedure, with the exception that the approval is conferred by the HR alone. In both companies line managers may be asked to adjust schedules to meet employee shortage needs in other shops.

3.2. Forms of line managers' caring in HRM implementation

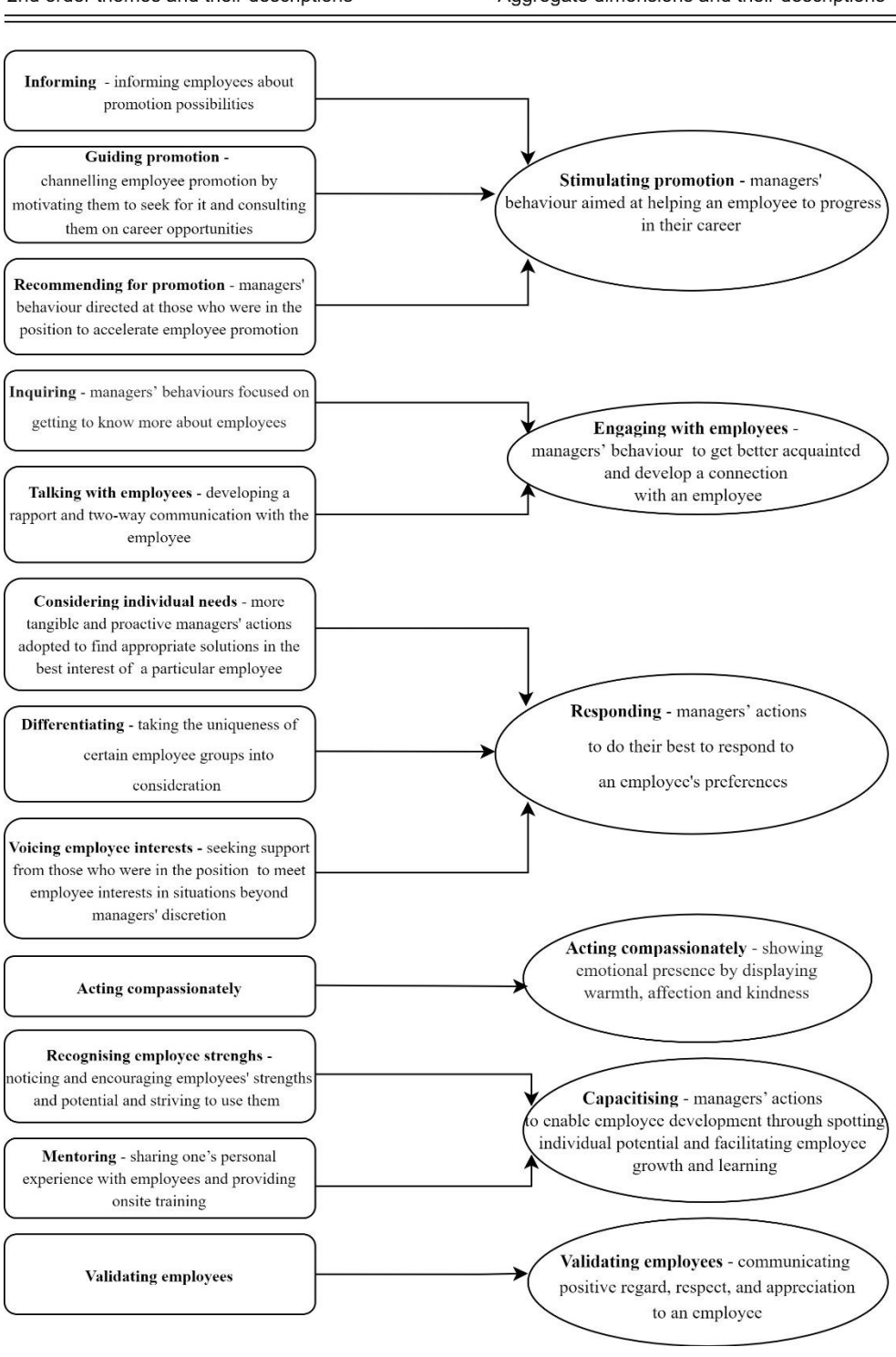
To answer the first research sub-question I looked in what ways line managers care for their subordinates during HRM practice implementation. In total, 12 themes (second order codes) and 6 aggregate dimensions related to forms of experienced line managers' caring for their subordinates were identified (Figure 4), which are described

below**.** Representative quotes of line manager caring in HRM implementation are provided in Appendix 4.

Stimulating promotion – managers' behaviour aimed at helping an employee to progress in their career. Stimulating employee promotion included three internally different themes related to caring about employee promotion, i.e. informing, guiding promotion, and recommending for promotion.

Informing. Line managers considered that provision of information on career opportunities to employees constituted a form of caring. Employees shared their opinion, for instance: *"Ads are placed [on the notice board] in our room, and she says: 'Here it is, please take a look, anyone can try'"* (B_Emp_2.1.2). Whenever a new job vacancy or talent identification programme was announced, some managers recognised that employees may not fully comprehend the requirements on their own (e.g., whether they were eligible before the end of the probation period). For some employees applying for a vacancy or a talent identification programme was not easy, even if they had all the information about it. Some did not dear to apply or did not believe they would succeed. Therefore, whenever line managers posted a vacancy or talent identification programme some of them additionally notified their employees without being asked by HR to do it, to make sure that none of the employees missed the opportunity: "*I spoke to everyone in person [about a vacancy] …. If I don't see potential, it doesn't mean they don't have potential" (A_LM_1.1.).* Some managers notified their distinguished employees about new possibilities in person: *"[the name of shop manager] once told me: 'would you like "to try out" a career?'*" (B_Emp_1.1.2).
Line managers from Company A proactively notified sales assistants about the career management practice ("When I started working, I learnt about categories: you have to pass a test, the manager told me about it" (A_Emp_1.3.1)) and that time for their assessment had come even though employees were well acquainted with the system and the scheduled timing for their category upgrading: "*There are those assessments during which I keep an eye on an employee's category, and tell them every 9 months that their time has come* " *(A_LM_2.2.).*

Figure 4. Forms of line management caring in HRM implementation (from employee and line manager perspectives)



Guiding promotion. A special form of caring encompassed channelling employee promotion by motivating employees to seek for it and consulting them on career opportunities. This was largely characteristic for the practice of internal recruitment. A few managers discussed vacancies with employees and encouraged them to apply because they wanted to retain them in the company: "*I can say it from my own experience that encouragement, noticing is needed…" (B_LM_1.2.), "I have to do it and to notice in time… A salesperson doesn't stay long"* (B_LM_2.1.). Line managers encouraged not only those with the potential or those they believed were suitable for the position *("If they secretly expect it, think it's only a step forward, believe they can really do it." (B_LM_1.2.))*, but also those in doubt of their eligibility or competence *("as they may not know it yet themselves, maybe they need to try, change the environment…" (B_LM_2.2.)).*

Managers also discussed vacancies and/or possibilities of applying with their high-potential employees or the ones who approached themselves: "*Think if you need it, you'll have to do this and that*" (B_Emp_2.2.2), "*You may be pointed to the right direction, [the manager] sees that you are this and that, you can try in that sphere, you can try sending your CV*" (B_Emp_2.3.1.). Thus, they were sharing their experience and information that helped employees to assess their competences and appropriateness as well as the opportunity. A manager said: "*a girl that addressed me … I motivated her to do it, to apply; I told her about clients there, etc. And she took that position" (A_LM_2.2*.). Employees spoke not only of their own experience but also concluded the way managers treated other employees: "If she finds out that someone is willing to become [the name of position], etc., she will always encourage. She will say 'go and try'. This happened to my colleague" (B_Emp_1.2.2).

There were plenty of research participants' reports on the theme *Guiding promotion.* Both managers and employees saw and recognised the active role of managers in promoting and shaping employee career. Managers expressed more of their encouraging and motivating role, while employee responses showed that managers also helped them to make decisions in their career choices by providing them with career mentoring, expertise and guidance.

*Recommending for promotion***.** This theme relates to managerial caring about employee career and includes behaviour directed to the HR or upper management who were in the position to accelerate employee promotion. In Company A line managers were expected to provide recommendations to HR when asked about a

particular person; however, managers in both companies said they provided referrals on their discretion whenever they noticed potential employees: "*I have noticed that one employee was doing better in communicating with people, while the other was better at repairing, so I voiced my opinion [to my manager] about it, and then it is up to them to decide" (A_LM_1.2.).* Managers also provided information on employees *"even if there [was] no vacancy at the time ……this employee may be in this or that position in the future, and that one in …." (A_LM_1.2.).* Employees shared their views about their managers, although managers' behaviour under this dimension was harder for them to notice: *"I think she [shop manager] says some praise, but I don't know if they [HR] pay attention to it"*. (B_Emp_2.3.2.).

A manager from company B admitted that after one of her "good" subordinates was not selected for a vacancy, she: "*kept whining to the HR that she must work in [the name of the unit] and that she will quit her job if her efforts are not recognised"(B_LM_2.1*.). In both companies line managers also recommended HR to officially assign a respective employee extra responsibility or appoint to a new position.

Line managers from Company A also sometimes proposed to the chain manager to upgrade a specific employee's category ahead of time if they saw that an employee was performing well: "*It is your duty as a manager to motivate the person. If you see that a person may upgrade his category ahead of time, you say it [to chain manager]…" (A_LM_2.1.)*

Engaging with employees – manager's behaviour to get better acquainted and develop a connection with an employee.

Inquiring. This theme covers managers' caring behaviours focused on getting to know or proactive ways of finding out more about employees. Line managers reported that when implementing HRM they spent time talking to employees to understand their situation, needs, preferences, feelings: *"to find out what's important for an employee" (B_LM_2.4.)*. Knowing nuances of employee personal life was particularly relevant when making work schedules; managers had to know employee preferences for combining their work and life: "*I always ask, as I perfectly understand that there is another side - not work, but personal life, public holidays, birthdays, and all the rest" (A_LM_2.1.)*.

Line managers also tried to get to know employees better at performance appraisal meetings:

> *The conversation always starts with how I am doing. This relates not to how I am doing in general, but at work, always asks what I like, what I don't like, what I would like to change. How I am getting on with colleagues, doing the job…* (B_Emp_1.1.1.).

Or "*The manager asks how you are feeling in the company anyway. You can say everything, what you lack if you would like something*" (B_Emp_2.1.3). In those meetings line managers also asked additional questions that were not provided in the interview form, e.g.: "*How are things going on, did you have any problems in the past year, which problems did you have?" (B_LM_1.2.).* Employees often mentioned that their manager was talking with them and asking about them; however, in terms of HR implementation, they could recall instances of managerial behaviour that would fall under *Inquiring* in reference of the practice of performance appraisal. Next, line managers engaged in inquiry to learn more about them (their hobbies, skills, aspirations, etc.) to identify employee career aspirations or recommend employees to HR: "*You ask a person what he would like to do, and what he would not…" (A_LM_2.1.)*

Talking with employees. Talking with employees manifested in developing a rapport and two-way communication with an employee as an equal partner rather than acting authoritatively or conducting a uni-directional appraisal: "*Every employee is happy when given attention. He feels good because of the manager talks to him... A dialogue is, in itself, caring*" (B_LM_1.1.). Within the scope of *Talking with employees*, as in *Inquiring*, some employees mentioned that their manager talked to them at work not only when implementing HRM:

> *I personally have a lot of opportunities to talk to [the name of the shop manager], but there are a lot of employees who don't. This makes annual appraisal meetings a great thing for them to speak out their opinion, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, or their desires, expectations… It's a good thing for me too, even if we discuss many things, there are many things we do not talk about every day* (B_Emp_1.2.1.).

And when it came to HR practices, it was during the performance appraisal when managers talked to employees: "*if we do not engage in conversation, we will not be able to find a common language..." (A_LM_2.1.); "Sometimes we do talk. ... We have individual [meetings] during which the work plan [is discussed]. I find it interesting to discuss this. The conversation is more official then, it's not that we just talk to each other."* (A_Emp_2.2.1.). Employees sometimes felt that their manager's conversation during performance appraisal was a company's initiative rather than the manager's:

[the former manager simply did what had to be done according to the plan, and that's it]: she had to talk, and she did it. ... It can be used as a means for caring. [The name of the current manager] is a manager who cares.... (A_Emp_2.2.2.).

Responding – managers' actions to do their best to respond to an employee's preferences.

Considering individual needs. Managerial behaviours that fall within this theme cover more tangible and proactive actions than listening or talking and were adopted to find appropriate solutions in the best interest of a particular employee. This was characteristic of the post-performance appraisal phase because some managers doubted if performance appraisals were sufficient to take care of employees and made post-appraisal decisions on their own discretion: "*You ask questions and get answers, and then you have to do your best for that employee ..." (A_LM_2.1.).* One manager from Company A indicated that before the assessment she inquired employees if they were willing to upgrade their category, and she said that some did not want to.

Multiple line managers took employee needs and preferences into consideration when caring about employee work-life balance, which was mentioned as an indispensable part of work scheduling by all research participants. When creating schedules each LM had her way of finding a compromise between employee needs and company rules. Most managers would set a timeline by which employees could indicate their preferences for days-off, and managers would then consider them in schedule development or *"... they come and tell me that they need a day-off and we find some solution in those cases" (A_LM_2.1.)*.

Differentiating. To better meet the individual needs of employees, some managers reported they behaved differently in HRM implementation depending on different employees' needs. Line managers did not seek to promote or recommend to HR any employee (even those with potential), but only those willing to advance or upgrade their position*: "… if a person is comfortable in their current position, I don't urge them too much….If a person is young, or they need to advance, I recommend them [to the HR]…" (B_LM_2.2.).* One manager thought younger employees needed to make progress: "*the younger ones need appraisal … They appreciate that feedback and see it as a possibility to attain something" (B_LM_2.4.),* while senior ones valued comfort and stability. Therefore, she conducted informal performance appraisals with senior staff. Also, special attention was given to students in schedule formation. They could

bring their class schedule and managers would prepare their work schedule to enable them to attend classes.

Only one employee spoke up on *Differentiating* about her manager: *"She may spend more time on some [performance appraisal] issues depending on the employee; otherwise, she simply follows the procedure"* (B_Emp_1.2.1.). However, some employees argued that equal conditions for all employees better ensured caring for their well-being, e.g.:"*[The manager] tries to divide it equally, so that same girl does not always work till 10.00 p.m. unless they want it, no matter if you work half a year of five years (B_Emp_2.1.1.).*

Voicing employee interests. When seeking for support in meeting employee interests in situations beyond their discretion, managers used to inform the HR or upper management about employee interests, views, expectations, etc. From the line management perspective, this form of caring specifically manifested in line managers' actions after performance appraisal meetings. They asked the HR to read about employee expectations in appraisal reports and also rose employee expectations during the discussion of performance appraisal results with the HR: "*We have yearly result discussions; HR looks through the forms and I tell them things. It's caring, as the expectations employees voiced are then taken into consideration" (B_LM_*2.3*.).* Similarly, line managers had to seek staff work schedule or vacations approval from their upper management, and in doing so they sought to represent the employee side: "*If a person needs something, she will try to do it, if it is possible. For instance, a person needs a day off and there is nobody to swap your work and you badly need it, so she calls the upper management*" (B_Emp_1.2.1.), "*When the [chain] manager asks what and how in particular about employees … [that's caring]" (A_LM_1.2.).* Employees talked about situations when their managers were looking for possibilities to improve conditions that employees were not satisfied with (e.g. salary, position), for instance:

> *it is then discussed with the HR or chain manager. In simple words, she cadges for our work conditions and she is not afraid to explain our position, what inhibits us doing work well. … She talks a lot to the chain manager, finds out about the pay in other companies and tells them, gives arguments on how much our basic pay should be increased, so that we do not leave the company, as we are already valuable employees* (A_Emp_2.2.3.)

Managers, however, did not always act with care when representing employee interests. In one case when the manager expressed the employee's expectations to the upper management, she disappointed the employee by promising a decision that

she had no authority of taking herself: *"The shop manager can only inform [HR] and suggest that this and that person would like, so could they?... And she, you understand, promised, not suggested, and that's the most a manager may be unspecific*" (A_Emp_2.2.2.).

Acting compassionately - showing emotional presence by displaying warmth, affection and kindness.

This theme and dimension related to preventing negative emotions, strain and tension, and fostering positive feelings in employees. For instance, when an employee was not selected by the HR to the talent pool, line managers told how they reassured them: "*We discussed it with her, how it went, how she feels after it [the talent identification] interview...*" (B_LM_1.2.). Managers also tried to avoid negative emotions at performance appraisals. First, they sought to make the person feel good, not tense, by providing a suitable interview venue, encouraging them and showing that it was not a fearsome thing: "*We can simply sit [and talk]*" (A_LM_2.1). Second, they turned interviews into an open conversation, "*less formal, and it's then more friendly*" (B_LM_2.4.) to avoid tension and focused on learning how employees felt at work rather than appraise them. Only managers spoke up on the theme of *Acting compassionately* in regard to caring during the implementation of HR practices. So it can be assumed that employees did not perceive it as managers compassionate behaviour, it was not important to them, they understood this behaviour differently, or they did not regard it as the manager's caring manifested during the implementation of HR practices.

Capacitising – managers' actions to enable employee development through spotting individual potential and facilitating employee growth and learning.

Recognising employee strengths. Research participants considered noticing and recognising employee strengths and potential as caring behaviours. This referred not only to employee recognition *per se ("If I see that [name of the person] is good at displaying [name of goods], I assign taking care of [name of goods] displays to her" (B_LM_1.2.)*, but also to the recognition of their strengths and potential and ways to use them, which made this theme different from *Validating employees*. For instance, if line manager noticed a potential employee she asked her whether she wanted to do something more: "*if she spots a potential employee, she talks to her to find out if she'd like it – she can become an expert with us [in the same shop], then she can go higher still*" (B_Emp_2.1.3.) or told employees in person what she considered their strengths

that could lead to career opportunities in the company: "*when I talk to an employee, I say you are good in this and that; for instance, that in the future there is a possibility to study to become …"* (A_LM_1.2.). Employees spoke not only of their own experience but also concluded the way managers treated other employees: "*Well a girl came, and after three months she is being prepared for the position of an expert. It means the manager could see something in her, she can spot a stronger personality*" (B_Emp_2.4.2). One employee felt that the manager could be biased in selecting a favourite employee for promotion, and that formal practices would be preferable in this regard: "*To put it simple there should be some kind of a table with all employee aspirations or desires… what each employee could attain, it would be easier to consider them all*" (B_Emp_2.1.2). One employee told that she was strongly motivated by her manager belief in her when the manager showed initiative to further invest into employee development: "*And if you see that initiative, that positive disposition, so that the manager can see something in you (potential), that you are capable of doing something more, it provides you lots of internal motivation, which can be called caring about you"* (B_Emp_2.1.2.). After noticing employee strengths line managers informed them about the company career programme and also told HR about the employees who had demonstrated strong competencies.

Mentoring. This theme embraced sharing one's personal experience with employees and providing on-site training to enhance employee competencies. The data on *Mentoring* in HRM implementation was richer from the employee perspective. This form of caring was mostly observed in the implementation of career management practice when line managers were assigned by HR to prepare employees for future promotion: "*It depends on the position the person is seeking to get … if it is at the shop level, so the shop manager gives it more attention, [the name of manager] teaches you then. … The manager shares the experience she has to share*" (B_Emp_1.2.1.). However, sometimes employees asked managers to do something more and then: "*She says it's great you told me, I was thinking of teaching you doing this and that*" (B_Emp_1.2.2.). Sometimes line managers mentored on their initiative: "*I teach them, show [how to do it]…" (B_LM_2.1.),*

> *She started teaching me making 'ten days'. … The young lady also wanted to do something else, so she was given more responsibilities too … 'I want you to learn, I don't want you to be bored, I want you to aspire for something, not to stay in the same position all the time'"* (B_Emp_1.1.1).

One manager noted that she used performance appraisal meetings to share information and experience with employees. Employee (B_Emp_2.1.3.) considered it was caring when the manager afterwards helped them to meet goals set out for at the meeting.

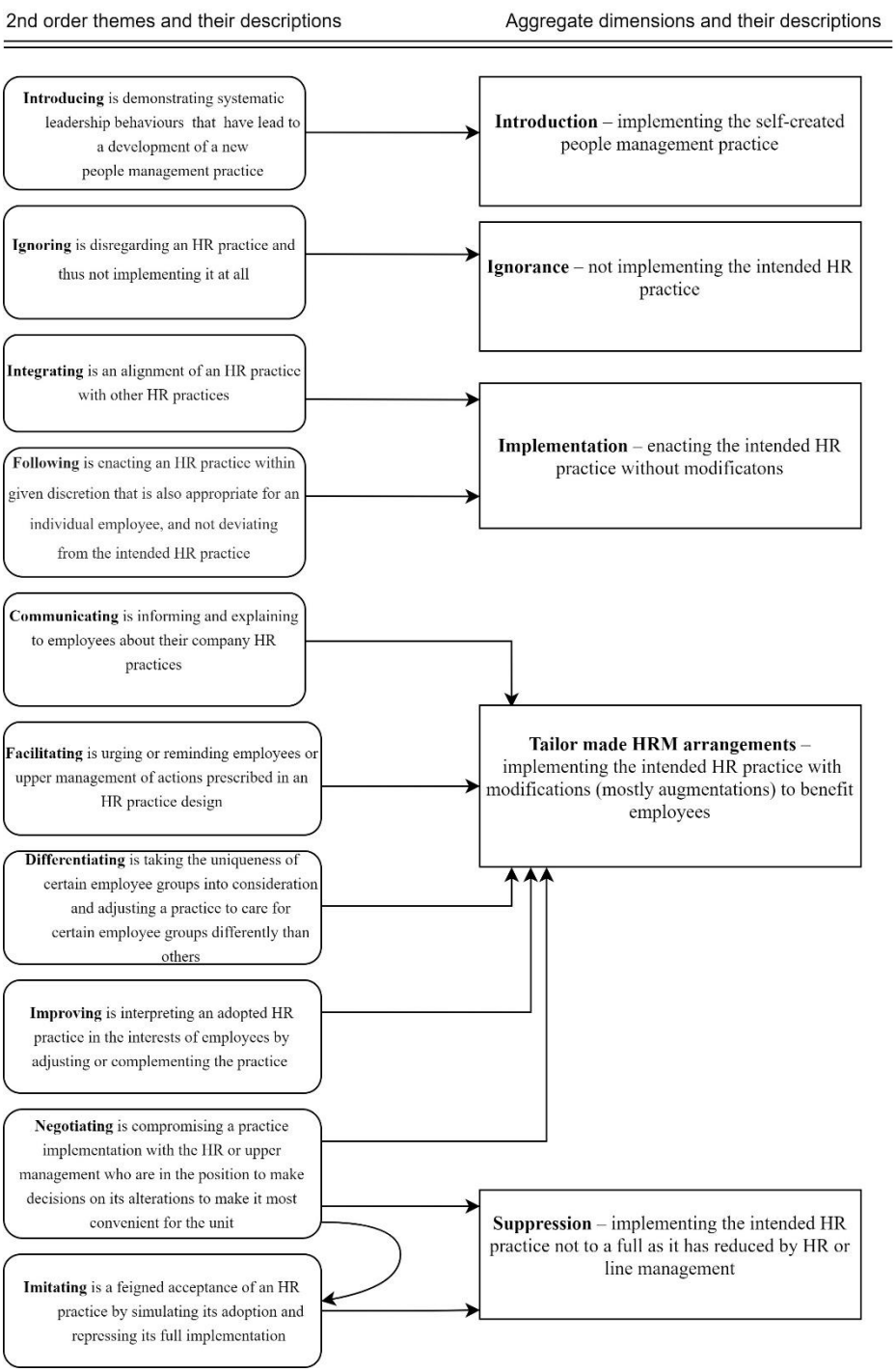
Validating employees – communicating positive regard, respect, and appreciation to an employee.

This theme and dimension incorporated such managerial behaviour as supporting employee aspirations and encouraging their pursuit, providing positive feedback. Line managers urged employees to take up their favourite tasks: *"You … encourage her if she is interested in that" (A_LM_2.1.),* supported them in pursuing career dreams: *"[the programme] is a great step even when a position you try out is not available. You move ahead towards it nevertheless. When the possibility arises (again), you can say 'I can do it and I know it'" (B_LM_1.2.),* "*I had just started working there, but I sent my CV nevertheless, so she [line manager] called me, gave advice, said it was great I went [to the interview], as it will be easier next time*" (B_Emp_1.1.1.). Line managers also admitted they did things to support employees that were not stipulated in the description of performance appraisal, as they valued their employees: "*I may encourage [an employee], as she is usually open and may speak out more freely what she would wish and strive for. For instance, they say 'I would like this and that…', and I say 'it's great'"* (B_LM_2.1.). Positive feedback about employee work was also considered by employees as a manager's caring: "*And I think that she thinks high of my work. … We discuss it at annual appraisal meetings: 'You are doing well', she keeps saying it. I cannot say I feel to be not valued*" (B_Emp_2.4.2.).

3.3. HRM implementation scenarios in line manager caring

This section answers the second research sub-question and presents how line managers behaved towards the intended HRM policy considering employee interests. In other words, ways of HRM implementation, or scenarios applied by managers to care for employees in the HRM implementation process are presented how they were experienced by study informants. 10 themes (second-order codes) and 5 aggregate dimensions related to line managers' HRM implementation scenarios through caring for their subordinates were identified, which are described below**.** These scenarios are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. HRM implementation scenarios in line manager caring (from employee and line manager perspectives)



Introducing a practice refers to demonstrating systematic leadership behaviours that have led to the development of a new people management practice. A case of introducing a new practise was noticed in Company B. A manager who initiated a bringing-up practice was aiming to encourage employees to develop themselves. She provided some examples of how she was mentoring those employees who did not believe they could excel or those who had demonstrated negative behaviours. One special instance was bringing-up a "hooligan" girl for a few years which the manager called caring for her: "*… Once she came with a bruise. I talked to her a lot: 'What are you thinking? Who are your friends?' … We then assigned her additional duties and she started putting effort…" (B_LM_2.2.).* This girl "changed" and finally won an internal competition and was promoted in the company. The manager noticed that in such cases it was her and her colleagues' trust in the person that had increased those persons' work engagement and willingness to learn more.

Ignoring is disregarding an HR practice and thus not implementing it at all. Some managers were not implementing the practice of performance appraisal in Company A. Only two (out of the six interviewed) managers reported conducting performance appraisal meetings with their subordinates. And this was noticed also by employees: *"I asked another store manager about the annual meetings. She waved her hand and said it was nonsense. She said: 'I told my staff that I would not talk to you'"* (A_Emp_1.2.1.). In research participants' view, in their company performance appraisal first and foremost meant performance evaluation, goal setting or discussing needed competencies rather than hearing employee expectations or providing feedback: *"They have always been that way [of evaluation and improvement]. Attitudes [of the company] towards an employee need to change when it comes to assessment"* (A_Emp_2.2.2.). In company A, line managers were not systematically required to conduct performance review meetings with all subordinates or share performance review results with the HR. Line managers and some employees did not see much value in this practice *("It seems to me a formality"*, *"What has changed as a result of it?"* (A_LM_1.3.)) in contrast to Company B where managers believed that this practice went hand in hand with caring. This might have influenced why some line managers were not conducting performance reviews and/or not sharing interview reports with HR.

Next two scenarios - Integrating and Following - felt under the dimension of **Implementation**, which means enacting the intended HR practice without modifications.

Integrating refers to an HRM practice alignment with other practices. Two line managers said that they were ready to do their best to provide each employee what they needed in general and not necessarily relating it to one particular HR practice: "*I have to do it and to notice in time… A salesperson doesn't stay long; they quit. So, I have to inform, notice, encourage to apply, and in addition, I warn the HR" (B_LM_2.1.)* This indicates that line managers, in general, were using their leadership behaviours in HR practice implementation and providing caring for employees through a set of HR practices simultaneously. The integration was also characteristic of the post-performance appraisal phase when managers wanted to provide some tangible benefits for employees: "*... You then decide if they need to attend some seminars, or it concerns some changes in their workload" (A_LM_2.1.),* or to mentor employees in the attainment of personal goals set up during the performance review meeting through the application of other HR (e.g. training) practices: "*The manager helps in attaining the goals [raised during the annual appraisal meeting] together with the employee… but it is related specifically to the job*" (B_Emp_2.1.3.).

Following is enacting an HR practice within given discretion that is also appropriate for an individual employee and not deviating from the intended HR practice. When managers said that it was not difficult to balance between the HR guidelines and considering employee needs they implemented the practice as intended by their HR. This was easier to do when they were given discretionary room:

> *You can even write when you need a day off or so. And always takes it into consideration. And for instance, if you need an hour or so off you can take it in advance; you will compensate for it later; it's not that you need to go somewhere and you can't* (B_Emp_2.1.1).

Thus, they implemented many practices in alignment with HR requirements, especially in Company B. And this was also perceived by employees: *"…The manager needs to chat [with employees]; it's a short talk, and that's it. And that is initiated by the organisation. It's about work, nothing else*" (A_Emp_2.2.1.).

In general, it was difficult for employees to notice practice modifications and to distinguish who took the initiative in caring through a practice - was it a manager or was it incorporated in that practice design by the company: "*I don't know if she [shop*

manager] modifies, she didn't tell me. She does a little bit by herself, and some of them [the company]" (A_Emp_2.2.1.). It also appeared that practice implementation is not necessarily separated in time from the design of the practice. For instance, in company A, work scheduling seemed to be a matter of an agreement between a line manager and the upper management, and a line manager and an employee respectively rather than the application of a practice designed in advance: *"Schedules are a matter of mutual consent"*. Maybe this was the case, as in Company A the practice of work scheduling was not formalised and defined in much detail by the HR.

Managers in Company B indicated that they, by and large, were following their company policy of the annual performance reviews. They indicated that the execution of this practice went hand in hand with caring too.

A large group of scenarios: Communicating, Facilitating, Differentiating, Improving and Negotiating - are covered by dimension **Tailor made HRM arrangements**, which means implementing the intended HR practice with *modifications in the form of augmentations* to benefit employees.

Communicating is informing, reminding and explaining to employees about the company HR practices. Lines managers and employees reported that managers informed them about newly introduced and existing career, talent management and internal recruitment related practices and possibilities and explained what employees were to know about them: *"When I started this work, I learned about the categories and that you have to pass the test - the manager told about this"* (B_Emp_2.3.1.). Whenever a new job vacancy or talent identification programme was announced, some managers assumed that placing an advert on the board did not suffice and additionally notified their employees about it: "*Ads are placed [on the notice board] in our room, and she [the shop manager] says: 'Here it is, please take a look, anyone can try'*". (B_Emp_2.1.2). Line managers were also sharing their experience and information to encourage employees to seek promotion.

Facilitating **-** urging or reminding employees or upper management of actions prescribed in an HR practice design. This scenario was characteristic to the career development practice, especially in Company A. First, line managers proactively notified a respective shop assistant that time for their assessment had come even though shop assistants were well acquainted with the system and the scheduled timing for their category upgrading. Line managers proposed to the chain manager to

upgrade a specific employee's category ahead of time if they saw that an employee was performing well:

> *In my case, the manager urged me and explained to me where I stand with my knowledge and experience, and she did it earlier, as I wanted to apply for that category after a year and a half or two years, and I was urged after six months to learn more about it, to try, as she saw some potential in me, she simply wanted me to get higher* (A_Emp_2.2.3).

Managers in both companies also recommended employees for promotion to the HR even when there was no vacancy or talent identification programme announced, thus forming a supply of potential employees for selection in forthcoming job openings in their company and maintaining employee motivation:

> *She [shop manager] has told the chain manager something needed to be done in my regard. They say I should wait a little more. She would then keep reminding something needs to be done. She said she will look for possibilities to raise my salary. There are no vacancies at the time* (A_Emp_2.2.1.).

Differentiating **-** considering the uniqueness of certain employee groups and adjusting a practice to care for certain employee groups differently than others. A few managers considered employee differences towards their willingness to develop: *„If a person is young, or they need to advance, I recommend them. And if a person is comfortable in their current position, I don't urge them too much" (B_LM_2.2.).* One manager said that she conducted performance review differently for younger and more senior employees, as in her opinion the former needed feedback and progress, while the latter valued comfort and stability. Thus she more focused on getting to know more about the latter instead of appraising them, and thus conducted more informal conversations. In fact, the Differentating scenario may be assigned to the **Tailor made HRM arrangements**, but it is an exception in this group, as it was implemented through the combination of practice augmentation (more talking informally) and reduction (not appraising). Thus it may be assigned to the **Suppression** dimension too, and most probably means that managers adopt an HR practice to show its implementation (because it is required) but do not truly perceive it as necessary.

Improving - interpreting an adopted HR practice in the interests of employees by adjusting or complementing the practice. Managers admitted that they tried to implement HRM in a way that was most appropriate for individual employees. For instance, managers were providing emotional support to their subordinates during talent management and performance appraisal and recommending employees to HR

managers for promotion on their initiative. One manager from Company A indicated that before assessments she always inquired employees if they were willing to upgrade their category.

Since line managers tried to find out as much as possible about employees at performance review meetings to get to know them better, they devised some additional questions, for example: „*How are things going on, did you have any problems in the past year, what problems did you have?"*, or "*I ask what we need, what is better for the staff [unit] ...", "Questions arise in conversation" (B_LM_1.2).* Even if managers in Company B said they did not deviate from the performance review procedure they also admitted they were saying extra things that were not stipulated in the practice description as they wanted to recognise that employees were valuable. Or they took post-appraisal decisions on their own discretion.

Although they tended to use the same extra behaviours as managers in Company B, those few managers who performed performance appraisals in Company A, modified the practice more than managers in Company B to improve it. One manager in Company A even said that she personally was learning about performance review meetings even though her company was not providing such a training and she knew how to improve the practice. She was making more out of the performance appraisal form given by the company and not limited the practice to its mere filling in. She was also engaging in a conversation with her subordinates, which was not intended by their company HR manager:

> *I ask what we need, what is better for the unit [the staff]. How to improve the climate, how to boost sales – this [information] stays with us [in the unit], you don't have to define [the practice does not foresee it] the individual input in it (A_LM_2.1.).*

The next two scenarios: Negotiating and Imitating, refer to the **Suppression** dimension, under which the intended practice may be changed by the HR or reduced by line managers.

Negotiating - is compromising a practice implementation with the HR or upper management who are in the position to make decisions on its alterations to make it most convenient for the unit (employees or/and the line manager). In cases where it was not difficult to balance between the HR guidelines and considering employee needs (for instance in Company B), managers implemented HR practices as intended by their HR. However, when some violation of the company rules could be anticipated,

for example in work scheduling, the manager would negotiate the practice (implementation) with the HR or higher-level management. "*If a person needs something, she will try to do it, if it is possible. For instance, a person needs a day off and there is nobody to swap your work and you badly need it, so she calls the upper management*" (B_Emp_1.2.1.).

One shop manager stated that caring was, in particular, relevant in the introductory phase of a new HR practice. When she was told to introduce a new practice that contradicted employee interests or some resistance towards it was encountered from the employee side, the shop manager would engage in *bargaining* with the initiators of the practice: "*We then discuss it with the HR people" (B_LM_2.1.*). For instance, a new practice of "Mystery shopper" was developed in their company under which shop employees were supposed to greet all incoming clients. However, due to the specific location, the shop was constantly bypassed by accidental strollers-by who had no interest in goods sold in that shop. Employees failed to greet all visitors, as required by the new practice, and those bad results from customer service monitoring upset them to the point that they became reluctant to meet and greet anybody coming into the shop. Consequently, the shop manager explained it to the HR that it was complicated to make the first welcome contact in their shop that was usually full of strollers-by, and HR changed the standard for this shop. Thus, by negotiating the implementation of that HR practice, the manager tried to consider the employee perspective, to help them feel important: "*It is of utmost importance for them to be heard …" (B_LM_2.1.*).

When it was not possible to agree with the HR on a practice adjustment in the best interest of employees, the same line manager said she would not implement the newly introduced practice to the full and would adjust it on her discretion, as otherwise, it may have slowed down the pace of work: *"Because everyone starts panicking when something new is introduced. So I then calm them down by saying that we will do as much as we can, and we'll let the rest go stray..." (B_LM_2.1.*). Thus "negotiating" switched to "imitating" scenario.

Imitating is a feigned acceptance of an HR practice by simulating its adoption and repressing its full implementation. Performance appraisal meetings in Company A were implemented mostly because it was required: *"However it is as it is. We simply fill in the form and send it out"* (A_LM_1.2.). One manager in Company B said she avoided appraising employees, or did it to a minimum, and instead tried to make

performance review meetings more informal and learn more about employees during them. This manager regarded this as a consideration of employee needs. However, judging from the employee statement, who found that this manager is somewhat indifferent to employees, and the manager's own observation that HR no longer checks the interview forms, it could be seen as this manager's avoidance of performance appraisal conduction through their simulation. Possible reasons for managers' behavior in *Imitating* scenario were described in the *Ignoring* scenario above.

3.4. Line manager caring through single HR practices

In this section it is presented how line managers incorporate caring for employees and HRM implementation scenarios in the following five HR practices: performance appraisal, career development, internal recruitment, talent management and work scheduling (see Table 5). These practices have been chosen for analysis, as caring forms were identified and studied in them (see also section 3.2 for results on caring forms).

Performance appraisals. Research participants noted that in performance appraisal caring for employees first and foremost referred to a dialogue. For this, company B had prescribed interview questions that unit managers had to ask employees: „*You can learn much more about a person through conversation*" (B_LM_2.2.). Company B considered conversations as necessary, while Company A expected nothing more than employees signing the appraisal form and making notes in it: "*Sometimes we do talk. ... We have individual [meetings] during which the work plan [is discussed]. I find it interesting to discuss this. The conversation is more official then, it's not that we just talk to each other"* (A_Emp_2.2.1).

Line managers said that performance appraisal interviews provided them with a possibility to get to know better their employee personalities and expectations, which they admitted being often lacking in their daily routine. Employees also appreciated the possibility of being heard, the recognition that they and their work were valuable, and getting feedback about their work.

The HR of both companies wanted to know how they could improve this practice: "*we will simplify it all next year… I am not sure that managers conduct those interviews well. I think in some cases they simply fill in the form and that's it – they forget what they spoke about*" (B_HR), and Company A wondered if interviews were needed at all.

Table 5. Aligning studied HR practices with line manager caring forms and HRM implementation scenarios

Forms of line managers caring/ 2nd order themes	HRM implementation scenarios/ 2nd order themes
Performance appraisals	
Inquiring Talking with employees Considering individual needs Differentiating Voicing employee interests Acting compassionately Validating employees Mentoring	Ignoring (company A) Following Integrating (company B) Differentiating Improving Imitating
Career development	
Informing Recommending for promotion Differentiating Considering individual needs Inquiring Validating employees Recognising employee strengths Mentoring	Communicating Facilitating Following Improving Introducing
Internal recruitment	
Informing Guiding promotion Considering individual needs Recognising employee strengths	Communicating Following
Talent management	
Informing Recommending for promotion Differentiating Acting compassionately Validating employees	Communicating Differentiating Improving Following
Work scheduling	
Inquiring Considering individual needs Voicing employee interests	Following Communicating Differentiating Negotiating

Line managers and employees also considered how this practice could better meet employee needs. Search for solutions in such situations has led managers to the *Integration* scenario that required a connection between appraisal and compensation or providing something an employee requested during the interview:

> *Those annual conversations are totally meaningless. You may be appraised well during them, but nothing changes. In other companies, when you speak to other people, you are recognised for good performance, there may be some financial reward, promotion, and here you are appraised and that's it, till next year* (B_Emp_2.3.2).

From the view of the research participants', in Company A performance appraisal first and foremost meant performance assessment, goal setting or discussing needed competencies rather than hearing employee expectations or providing feedback: *"It's just a conversation for a manager, and for an employee it's just an evaluation. …During the appraisal meeting you need to ask if an employee is lacking anything or in need of something [assuming that it is not like this in their company]"* (A_LM_1.2.). Performance appraisal meetings in Company A were implemented mostly because it was required: "*Because we had to. If the company saw a benefit in that, we did it" (A_LM_1.4)*. This contrasted the situation in Company B where the majority of research participants believed that this practice went hand in hand with caring, as it enabled managers to show attention to individual employees, to get to know them better, recognise that they were valuable, find out their expectations and engage in a dialogue. Thus, it can be concluded that performance appraisal was more concerned for employee wellbeing in Company A than in Company B.

One line manager in Company B told she tried to avoid performance appraisals. Her employee stated that this manager was somewhat indifferent to employees. Some withdrawal in the post-appraisal stage from the full implementation of this practice in favour of employees was also observed on the HR side as well: "*Everything is just sent for them [the HR]. There really isn't much interest in either of those [employees] with larger goals, or others. I haven't heard of it"* (B_Emp_2.1.2.).

All in all, in Company B line managers implemented the performance appraisal practice smoothly and its execution was viewed by managers and employees as going hand in hand with caring, as the practice enabled them to show attention to individual employees, to get to know their employees better, recognise that they were valuable, find out their expectations and engage in a mutual conversation. Hence, in Company B performance appraisal was by and large implemented through the *Following* and *Improving* implementation scenarios. In Company A, however, performance appraisals provided fewer possibilities to serve as a caring tool for line managers and they were often implemented under the *Ignoring* or *Imitating* scenarios.

Career development. The HR and line manager communication regarding career development practice was extensive in Company A: "*It is discussed directly; we have normal communication about qualification rising*" (A_Emp_2.2.3.). Such caring through communication (urging, reminding, informing) was apparent in the *Communicating*, *Improving* and *Facilitating* scenarios of HRM implementation. Line managers urged or

reminded employees and chain managers about actions prescribed in the practice. On the one hand, this was done because the opportunities offered by this practice were limited in time, and line managers wanted to ensure that employees did not miss them. On the other hand, line managers strived to retain well-performing employees to ensure their unit performance:

> *In my case, the manager urged me and explained to me where I stand with my knowledge and experience, and she did it earlier, as I wanted to apply for that category after a year and a half or two years, and I was urged after six months to learn more about it, to try, as she saw some potential in me, she simply wanted me to get higher* (A_Emp_2.2.3).

Career development practice in company A was experienced as a resource, i.e. a tool enabling employees to progress to the highest grade that their qualification allowed for and respectively in a short period. Thus this practice was often implemented according to the *Following* scenario. But employees with a longer tenure lacked practices that would satisfy their advancement needs: *"They [competence evaluation and annual performance appraisal] have always been that way [of evaluation and improvement]. Attitudes [of the company] towards an employee need to change when it comes to assessment"* (A_Emp_2.2.2.). It may be concluded that the mere presence of the career development practice was perceived as an important resource for employee well-being advancement.

In Company B line managers promoted employees by providing possibilities to shop assistants to learn some new things and giving them extra responsibilities. Line managers first had to informally notice and assess an employee's abilities and preferences (e.g. who was better in sales, working with the computer, etc.). A shop manager would then evaluate the development of the person's new skills and knowledge through their work-floor duty fulfilment and by engaging in a conversation (or a few of them) with the trainee*: "When I see her, I try talking to her to find out how she feels about it*" (B_LM_1.2.).

Thus, the practice of career development in Company B also, as in Company A, provided employees with possibilities to advance: "*As far as she [shop manager] knows, she would find a possibility to try it here; she will suggest it in the same shop*" (B_Emp_1.1.2). Additionally, through informal procedures line managers recognised employee competences and potential, talked with employees to identify their expectations, encouraged them to advance, trained them and explained what they were to know to take up possibilities provided by the company. Line managers felt their

opinion was considered in the promotion of their subordinates, and employees were happy not only to have possibilities to advance but, as a result of the above mentioned efforts of their line managers, the actual help received in their career progression.

Given that they regarded the practice of career management useful, line managers often applied the Following scenario to its implementation. When line managers evaluated employee development and made a recommendation to the HR to assign a respective employee to a higher position, line managers sometimes used the *Facilitating* scenario by trying to speed up employee assignment, which was related with more responsibilities and higher pay for an employee. In Company B the *Introducing* scenario of a new career management practice was noticed when the manager started encouraging employees, who did not believe they could advance, to develop themselves. This line manager noticed that in such cases the employee felt trusted, which in turn led to their increased work engagement and willingness to learn more.

However, some employees perceived the evaluation procedures in the career development practice as unfair or lacking transparency in terms of favouritism and unclear promotion criteria. Special notes were given to situations when the company did not follow its established practices or provided discretion to line managers, which resulted in familiarity and "a direct connection"*:*

> *It could be done so that everything is formalised. … Now if there is some possibility, you have to go and ask, propose yourself for it, or the manager selects the one she considers most worthy it, the best. To put it simply, there should be some kind of a table with all employee aspirations or desires… what he could possibly attain; it would be easier to take them all into consideration* (B_Emp_2.1.2).

Thus informality of this practice in Company B had its dark side which was detrimental to employee wellbeing.

Internal recruitment. Whenever a new job vacancy was announced by the HR, line managers actively engaged in *Communicating* about it to employees. Some managers assumed that placing an advert sufficed to inform the employees, who could then apply for the position on their own. Other managers, however, recognised that employees may have not fully comprehended the requirements (for example, whether they were applicable if their probation period had not finished yet); therefore they also notified every employee on their initiative to make sure that none of the employees had missed the information: "*We have ads. They are regularly printed out and put on*

the notice board so that everyone can see them. And also at appraisal meetings, [the name of shop manager] once told me, 'would you like to try out a career?'" (B_Emp_1.1.2).

Line managers were applying the *Following* scenario in the implementation of the practice of internal recruitment. In doing this line managers discussed with employees the possibility of applying and encouraged doing it, and not only with those whom they believed were the most suitable for the position, but also those in doubt of their suitability or competence, and even those who had demonstrated a negative behaviour. Line managers also shared their experience and information to encourage employees to seek promotion.

Talent management. Whenever a new talent identification programme was launched in Company B, line managers acted as its advocates by engaging in the *Communicating* scenario. The actively informed and reminded unit employees about the rules and opportunities of the practice. Managers in both companies also noted that when they recognised employee strengths, they told them in person that they could lead to career opportunities in the company: „It is important to find out what the employee likes, some, e.g. like working with the computer, others with visualisation" (B_LM_1.2.).

Line managers *Followed* the practice of talent management as it enabled employees with new career opportunities. Line managers were expected to provide recommendations to HR Manager when asked about a particular person: "*When she spots a gifted person, she tells the chain manager" (A_Emp_1.3.2.).* However, in both companies managers *improved* the practice and provided referrals to the HR on their discretion even when there was no vacancy or talent identification programme announced, thus forming a supply of potential employees for selection in forthcoming job openings in their company and maintaining employee motivation:

Line managers also *Differentiated* employee preferences when guiding them in the choice of career possibilities: *"I tell the staff [about the career programme] ... I feel sorry for young people. And I want to do more [for them]" (B_LM_2.1.).*

When an employee was not selected for a vacancy after an interview with the HR, a line manager may try to reassure her subordinate spending some time to talk with them (*Improving* scenario): *"[the programme] is a great step even when a position you try out is not available. You move ahead towards it, nevertheless. When the possibility arises (again), you can say, 'I can do it and I know it'" (B_LM_1.2.).*

Work scheduling. A few line managers took individual employee needs and preferences into consideration when caring about their work-life balance, which was mentioned as an indispensable part of work scheduling by all research participants. When creating schedules each LM had her own way of finding a compromise between employee needs and the company rules, e.g. *"Leaves the schedule blank, and then we put our names in it. And only then she confirms it with the HR"* (B_Emp_1.2.2.). Most managers would set a timeline by which employees could indicate their preferences for free days, and managers would then consider them in schedule development. Line managers also differentiated between specific personal characteristics of their subordinates in work scheduling:

> *Takes into consideration those with kids; if they need some days off, or if the kid gets ill. If she sees you are worried about something and there is not much work, she gives you time off, offers a few days off. She says you have some unused time* (B_Emp_2.3.1.).

Line managers saw matching individual employee and company needs as the ultimate goal they had to attain regularly. This was particularly evident in work scheduling: "*You make it [work schedule] adequate so that it is acceptable for everyone. Well, you make it in a way that suits everyone [employee and upper management]" (A_LM_2.1.).* When some violation of the company rules could be anticipated concerning a schedule, a line manager initiated a discussion with the HR or chain manager, and a compromise was often found, usually in favour of the employee: *"[Shop manager] didn't know if she would be able to adjust the schedule, but she arranged it and informed me about it"* (B_Emp_1.2.2).

This part of the results shows that different HR practices may evoke different line managers' caring behaviours. An interesting finding is that employees lack caring when an HR practice is absent or is not applicable any more, as was the case with career development in Company A. This illustrates that an HR practice is a tool that line managers use for caring, or in other words HR practices serve as a baseline for line managers' caring. This also shows that HR practices were to some degree orientated towards employees, as they experienced some aspects of HR practices as stimulating their well-being.

4. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the manifestation of line managers' caring for their subordinates when implementing HR practices. Line managers' caring in HRM implementation was explored through three perspectives: forms of line manager caring, HRM implementation scenarios, and single HR practice use for line managers' caring. Respectively the three perspectives to the data analysis were most appropriate as not stand-alone, but used complementary to answer the research question, *i.e. how do line managers engage in caring for employees in HRM implementation?*

Exploring this phenomenon through case studies in the retail sector enabled to identify line managers' proactive engagement in employee caring and experiencing caring as an integral part of HRM implementation. Not all results of the study fit into the chosen "Gioia chart" to structure the results of the study linearly (Reay et al., 2019), as the data was more complex and holistic. So, the most relevant and interesting findings are discussed in this chapter in addition to those presented earlier in the results in chapter 3.

Discussion, theoretical implications of the research findings and contributions of this research are divided into four sections. First, research findings and their theoretical implications for HRM literature are discussed in section 4.1, which continues with a discussion of intersections between HRM implementation and leadership domains of research. Then theoretical implications of the findings to the literature of caring and care-related constructs are discussed and complemented by the theoretical implications to the service sector section 4.2.

4.1. Theoretical implications for HRM implementation literature

First, this study has theoretical implications to HRM literature, particularly the literature on HRM implementation. What the devolution literature (e.g. Perry & Kulik, 2008) has depicted as a necessary evil in line managers' responsibility for HRM implementation, this research has shown to be an opportunity to take care of subordinates. The responsibility for the implementation of HR practices at the operational level turned out to be a means for line managers to get to know their employees better and to provide more opportunities to them by supporting, promoting

and lobbying for their employees. The results of this study about HRM implementation scenarios have complemented the literature (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017) by distinguishing more scenarios when practices are implemented and modified within the discretion of line managers without violating the company's HR policies, such as *Communicating, Facilitating, and Improving.* These HRM modifications were implemented though additions (or at least did not by and large include trimmings of HR practices) when an intended HR practice was complemented during its implementation. They were aggregated into the dimension of **Tailor-made HRM arrangements**. Previous research (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017) distinguished HRM implementation scenarios based on the perceived value and usefulness of HR practices, while this study also looked at them through line managers' actions. This allowed to distinguish two types of HR practice modifications: executed through suppression (trimming and reducing) and through augmentation (additions). The latter built into the *internalisation* scenario distinguished earlier in the literature.

The HRM implementation role enabled line management to pay attention and consider individual employee needs. As such, they were able to balance between HRM guidelines on the one hand and employee needs on the other. Furthermore, it was the incorporation of caring for employees that motivated line managers to engage in HRM implementation. They could deploy HR practices as a tool to care for their subordinates and could also facilitate HR practice implementation by urging or reminding employees about actions prescribed by HR departments. While caring, line managers also communicated about practices by notifying and explaining to employees the opportunities provided. When line managers considered it necessary, they were more proactive and modified practices, thereby "improving" intended practices.

Earlier research has already shown that the modification and shaping of HR practices were done by line managers (e.g. Bos-Nehles et al., 2017) as a means to align HR practices to local situations and contexts or was a result of misinterpretation. However, the results of this research imply that line managers may also modify HR practices to care for their employees. They also tailored implementation to employee needs by differentiating HRM implementation for different employee groups depending on their age, length of service, aspirations, personal issues, etc. This finding is in line with what Kehoe and Han (2020) recently described as workforce differentiation, under which line managers generate HRM variations through changing

the design of HR practices. However, their findings were limited to differentiating based on considerations of the strategic value and uniqueness of certain employee groups or through offering idiosyncratic deals to employees. Findings of this research go further, with the caring perspective showing that line managers consider the uniqueness of certain employee groups and suggest idiosyncratic deals to support and promote some groups differently than others. Caring implementation is also less strategic and intentional than what Kehoe and Han (2020) consider as workforce differentiation. It is an interest and doing something extra for employees, which is generally in line with the HRM strategy. Although under line manager caring through differentiation of employee preferences consideration for employee needs may be assumed, differentiation may also lead to the *Imitation* scenario to avoid the implementation of the practice as intended.

Prior research (e.g. McGovern et al., 1997) has shown that line managers are unwilling to implement HRM. On a more general note, the results of this study are in line with more recent research which argues that line managers are motivated to implement HR practices (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013) and are not reluctant to take on an HRM role. This thesis adds to prior research by showing that caring can be a source of line management motivation, i.e. when line managers care for employee well-being they are willing to implement HR practices and they even tend to do more than intended because they want to implement it in a way that employee needs are taken care of.

Findings of this study also showed that when a practice conflicts with employee interests, line managers *negotiate* its implementation with upper management or the HR department to reach a compromise, which offers them an opportunity to integrate caring for employee needs into HRM implementation. Such *bargaining* was also found commonplace when some violation of an HR practice could be anticipated to meet employee needs, e.g. in work scheduling in this study. Line managers *adjusted* HR practices in implementation to prevent damaging employee interests, e.g. not to strain them.

While this study cannot support employee interests being the only reason to implement intended HR practices or not, it identified instances in which line managers preferred *not to implement* a practice when they did not find it useful for employees. This is in line with Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013), Woodrow and Guest (2014) and Kuvaas and Dysvik (2010) who have shown that line managers might *ignore* certain

HR practices. Prior research has shown that line managers can minimize employee exposure to inappropriate practices and improve those practices by considering the variety of subordinate needs (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010); however, in the study of bullying in UK hospitals (Woodrow & Guest, 2014), line managers ignored HR practices not to protect employees but to flee from challenging issues and give priority to more enjoyable issues. Results of this study, however, suggest that line managers' behaviour in HRM implementation is determined by employee well-being. It may be assumed that caring for employee well-being was a more preferable activity for line managers than just instrumental HRM implementation (Hammer et al., 2009) when managers interpret policies and practices in a way that responds to an individual employee's needs. As in general, both line managers and employees felt the design of the practice that was ignored by line managers was incompatible with caring, and they perceived this practice as worthless (Kostova & Roth, 2002). It can be assumed that it is a lack of caring tools in an HR practice design, which might diminish the experienced relevance of a practice and which is one of the reasons to deter its implementation. Furthermore, it may also be assumed that line management and employee experiences of HR practices are affected by the extent of employee orientation in HR practices design, i.e. how much it is aimed at the best interests of employees.

Gaps between what is formally required by an HRM policy and what is implemented by line managers have been regarded as rather dangerous (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Khilji & Wang, 2006; Piening et al., 2014). This study contradicts this and extends recent research on the process of HRM implementation (Bondarouk et al., 2018; Van Mierlo et al., 2018) by showing that HRM variance in implementation may bring positive outcomes. By re-arranging intended HRM, line managers act on the behalf of employee interests and thus create more opportunities for them. The resulting gap from these HRM modifications is value-enhancing (Makhecha et al., 2018) for employees. Through caring for employee well-being, they follow a practice or facilitate and extend its implementation in ways not specified by HR departments to improve the quality of the HR practice. This may help to explain the "still poorly understood and under-theorised" link between HRM and well-being (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019, p. 544). Showing how line managers re-arrange and complement HRM practice to tackle the employee perspective, caring for employee well-being is proposed as an important variable in the HRM-performance linkage. This study thus

broadens the understanding of the reasons behind line managers' deviations from intended HRM policy (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gilbert et al., 2015; Jiang, 2013; Makhecha et al., 2018; Mirfakhar et al., 2018).

All in all, the implementation of HR practices is connected to their design, which was illustrated by this research findings, i.e. what HR practices are offered to employees and the process of their implementation are related. It is in line with the classical work by Bowen and Ostroff (2004, p. 206): "By process, we refer to how the HRM system can be designed and administered effectively". Study results also demonstrate that employees distinguish between organisational actors (HR department representatives or their line managers) implementing HRM rather than the divergence between intended and implemented HR practices, i.e. employees perceive the firm's HR practices as single entities or one HR system, and attach their expectations to organisational actors according to their responsibilities in regards to HR practices.

Moreover, the study results show that caring for employees in HRM implementation may require interaction with other members of the organisation too, such as HR managers and senior managers. This is consistent with research on HRM implementation, which considers HRM implementation as a multi-actor activity in which stakeholders at multiple levels are involved (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018; Renkema, Bos-Nehles, & Meijerink, forthcoming). Effective HRM implementation seems to require that communication between the HR department and line managers is not only top-down (HR departments are responsible for informing and training line managers about HR practices), but also a bottom-up (line managers informing HR departments as to what is required) (Bondarouk et al., 2018; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). Taking responsibility for effective HRM implementation and employee well-being, line managers took charge of informing the HR department and upper management about high-potential employees and the issues that conflicted with employee interests and solving them on behalf of the employee. In this way, caring enhanced line managers' role from an HRM executor towards a more proactive HRM implementer. Thus findings of this study support the argument on the dynamics of HRM implementation process (Bondarouk et al., 2018; Van Mierlo et al., 2018), as they show that HR practices are co-created by line managers and employees, i.e. HR practices evolve and change during their implementation.

This study also has theoretical implications to leadership literature. This study showed that HRM implementation and leadership are interrelated through managerial caring. This is in line with previous research on people management (Knies & Leisink, 2014b; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Interviewed line managers and employees first talked about line managers' discretionary caring actions in general, which was largely related to their leadership, and only, to some extent, to HRM implementation. Only when asked specifically about caring through the implementation of specific HR practices interviewees could explain how line managers integrated caring into HRM implementation. They could apply their leadership in the implementation where it was not defined by HR policy and the discretionary room was left for their improvisations. It follows that, first and foremost, managerial caring is seen as a manager's discretionary behaviour, not as imposed by the company's HRM policy.

Previous research has shown that managers take the HR practice framework and come to *tailor-made leadership arrangements* in HRM implementation (Knies & Leisink, 2014b). Findings of this research are similar in this respect. For instance, *Inquiring* caring behaviours are similar to leader tendency to demonstrate empathy with employee needs in tailoring (Knies, 2011). The reluctance of some managers to conduct performance reviews in this study is similar to findings of Knies' (2011) as they show that managers were willing to discuss with employees their situations daily instead of implementing formal performance reviews. While this extends prior research (Knies & Leisink, 2014b) that in the process of practice implementation managers just take the HR practice framework and come to tailor-made arrangements elaborating the intended practice design, this study adds to the understanding of conditions under which this takes place.

The results of this research also showed that when line managers lack HR practices or find them insufficient, they *introduce* their own practices, which is in line with Bos-Nehles et al. (2017). The introduced practices are only applied within their unit and are not introduced in the entire organisation; hence they were not designed by the HR department or upper management. So, unlike Bos-Nehles et al. (2017) who regard them as new HR practices, the new practices identified in this research might be called *people management practices* or tailor-made HRM arrangements.

Thus, this dissertation makes the following contributions to HRM implementation research*:*

1. findings of this research indicate that through the forms of caring line managers can implement HR practices in a way that allows them to enhance or safeguard employee well-being;
2. this research has extended the understanding of line managers' role in HR practice implementation by showing that it entails not only managers' responsibilities to implement HR practices at the operational level; HRM implementation is also a means to get to know one's employees better and to provide more opportunities to them: voice their interests, recognise their strengths, encourage their promotion, etc.;
3. this research has also broadened the explanation of the reasons behind line managers' deviation from intended practices by showing that line managers might need to shape and modify HR practices to implement them in a way that takes employee needs into consideration. By doing so they are not necessarily deviating from the intended way because of personal interests, but to create more value for their subordinates;
4. this study has complemented the HRM implementation literature by distinguishing some additional scenarios, such as *Communicating, Facilitating,* and *Improving,* not identified in prior research, when HR practices are implemented and modified through augmentations within the discretion of line managers without violating the company's HR policy. Thus, the application of caring can also facilitate the implementation of HR practices through their improvement and by helping employees to understand and trust them;
5. finally, this research has provided insights on the possibilities of encouraging more active line manager engagement in HRM implementation, which as shown in prior research, they are sometimes reluctant to do. Caring for employees is what motivates line managers to engage in HRM implementation.

4.2. Theoretical implications on managers' caring

This study offers some theoretical implications to the literature on caring too. Findings of this study in particular contribute to the understanding of caring in the profit-intensive business sector as previously caring in management was largely

studied in caregiving organisations, such as hospitals, schools, churches and social service agencies (Gabriel, 2015; Gittell et al., 2010; Kahn, 1993; Martela, 2012; Smylie et al., 2016), and public service (Hasu & Lehtonen, 2014). This section compares the research findings with caring and care-related concepts from the literature that appeared relevant to the findings.

To date, the literature on managerial caring has mostly proposed that caring refers to mutual relationships between the manager, as a caregiver, and the employee, as a care-seeker (Kroth & Keeler, 2009). Study results, as mentioned above in the discussion, show that caring for employees in HRM implementation may require line managers' *interaction with other members of the organisation*, who are in the position to support them in meeting employee needs in situations beyond their discretion. Managerial behaviours covered by themes *Voicing employee interests* and *Recommending for promotion* relate to leader political support, which manifests as manager influence through building networks of relationships (Brouer, Douglas, Treadway, & Ferris, 2013; Ellen, Ferris, & Buckley, 2016). Managers' caring behaviours identified in this study were used by managers as a means to influence upper management. Thus this study served for the elaboration (Gioia et al., 2013) of the caring concept. Study findings also suggest a connection between *Negotiation* scenario, *Voicing employee interests* (managers' caring for employees through interaction with upper management) and managers' diplomatic abilities (so named by one of the informants). This is consistent with previous research findings on leaders' political support and their political skills, which should be related to various influence tactics, including upward appeal and coalition tactics (Ferris et al., 2005).

Second, results of this study, in general, showed more proactivity in managerial caring behaviour than caring literature (Kahn, 1993; Kroth & Keeler, 2009) has revealed, especially in the aggregate dimension of *Responding*. This dimension included mostly employee-initiated manager behaviours, i.e. manager behaviours responding to employee expressed needs, inquiries or requests, while other themes mostly represented the manager-initiated behaviour. Thus, *Responding* is particularly oriented towards managers' crafting for individual solutions in meeting particular employee interests. While caring literature refers to the responsiveness of the caregiver and the cared-for (Kahn, 1993; Kroth & Keeler, 2009), which is the overarching characteristic of caring in the ethics of care (Held, 2006; Noddings, 2005) and attachment theory (Finkenauer & Meeus, 2000), the appropriate theoretical

dimensions for the proactivity aspect of managerial caring have not been offered in prior caring theory and research as the overarching dimension of “Consistency” was proposed by Kahn (1993).

Finally, managerial behaviours, which fell under the dimension *Responding,* and in particular, the theme of *Considering employee needs,* went beyond showing attention through listening or talking to employees. Those behaviours incorporated seeking more tangible resources to address employee well-being and proactive actions taken to find appropriate solutions for an employee in a particular case. The literature review showed that caring, as well as compassion, most of all are related to the provision of intangible resources to an employee rather than instrumental help (e.g., providing a needed device for a task to be completed). Care is more of a particularistic and symbolic type of resources, such as love in spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003) that was discussed in section 1.2.4.2. This means that the importance of care depends on who provides it, and it conveys a meaning that goes beyond an objective value (Foa & Foa, 1980). It is illustrated in this research that besides emotional and relational resources caring also refers to the provision of more tangible and specific resources, such as information or services. This is in line with an earlier classification of resources (Foa & Foa, 1980). Different resources are likely to be exchanged in different ways (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which might refer to different forms of caring found in this study.

The results of this study have demonstrated how the integration of caring and HRM implementation take place by describing different forms of caring behaviours through which line management caring manifests in HRM implementation. In this study, it was not intended to develop an exhaustive list of caring forms in HRM implementation; however, out of those that have been identified managers’ communication is noteworthy in particular. Managers’ caring based on communication (*Informing, Talking with, Inquiring, Guiding, Voicing*, etc.) might be more informed by the construct of HR practices rather than the construct of caring, since HR practices are seen as communication mechanisms through which line managers signal to employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Wright & Nishii, 2013). However, caring through communication in HRM implementation means more than just the amount, usefulness or clarity of information communicated by managers (Den Hartog et al., 2013). Caring is the provision of information in such a way that employees „take-up” opportunities (Daverth et al., 2016) provided by the practice, before probably recognising the value

of the practice. It is also more than manager support for HR practices use (Straub et al., 2018) when managers support employees to use HR practices. Caring in the implementation through communicating also means relating, recognising the importance of employee personality, seeking to understand and meet employee needs, which is typical to the concept of caring (Carmeli et al., 2016; Kahn, 1993; Kroth & Keeler, 2009).

It was an interesting finding of this research that the form of managers caring called *Differentiating* (between employees' preferences) might not necessarily be understood as caring by employees when their sense of fairness is violated. This finding demonstrates empirically a link between organisational caring and justice when caring is demanded by organisational procedures, which was suggested in a conceptual study of Faldetta (2016).

This study also purified care-related constructs, such as leadership behaviours, that were demonstrated in managers' caring implementation of HRM, such as *Guiding promotion, Recommending for promotion, Considering individual needs, Voicing employee interests, Validating, Recognising employee strengths, Mentoring*, which resembled leader relationship-oriented behaviours (O'Donnell et al., 2012) or individualised consideration (Bass, 1999). Some of these and other caring behaviours, such as *Inquiring, Talking with employees, Differentiating preferences, Acting compassionately* were similar to leader consideration (Stogdill, 1950). In contrast, *Informing* would be assigned to task-based (or initiating structure) leader behaviour (Judge et al., 2004), specifically providing information to employees, which is an instrument to implement practices and make sure employees do not miss opportunities. Caring behaviours under *Considering individual needs* are similar to leader responsiveness to employee requests (Shore et al., 2006), which fall under the behaviour of social exchange initiated by employees. Accounts of informants also revealed some line managers' caring behaviours similar to literature on managerial practices aimed at affecting employee well-being (Kerns, 2018; Ozcelik, Langton, & Aldrich, 2008). Namely, the theme *Recognising employee strengths* resembles the practice of "Managing strengths", which comes from positive psychology with an idea that helping employees to do what they do best contributes to producing higher levels of well-being (Kerns, 2018). Thus, this research findings and literature analysis showed the breadth of caring as a study area. This allows regarding caring as a phenomenon rather than a distinct construct. It is therefore suggested to use caring for employees

in HRM and management research as an umbrella term encompassing several care-related constructs, including the construct of caring, that have been analysed in this thesis.

All in all, *line management caring in HR practice implementation* may be defined as seeking to foster employee well-being through the application of HR practices and proactive adjusted managers' communication and leadership behaviours towards employees and upper management in line with the HRM strategy. It may be relational as understood in the literature of caring, or instrumental.

This study also has theoretical implications to research on retail and services. It revealed challenges that retail unit managers encounter in regard to employee well-being. Although this study was limited to the retail sector, findings and conclusions of this study may be applied to other service-intensive industries too, which like retail require customer contact and emotional labour (Boyd et al., 2014; Edgar et al., 2017; Kim, Hur, Moon, & Jun, 2017). Line managers acknowledged that to avoid typical retail issues such as staff turnover and assure steady unit performance they had to use all possible tools to satisfy employee needs. Not only may an organisation sometimes fail to provide enough resources needed for line managers for caring (appropriate HR practices, training, HR support), but it may also waste them by inflicting stress by putting pressure on performance. For instance, line managers under this study mentioned a lack of time to care for their employees and they often provided care at their own expense, i.e. working extra hours, being available on their days-off, buying small things, etc. Line managers perceived working time planning and scheduling as the most important organisational tools for taking care of employee well-being in retail. While reaching for business objectives, line managers needed to be creative in using the instruments provided by the HR department to meet employee needs. Scheduling and planning activities helped them to protect their subordinate work-life balance. The importance of schedule flexibility for employee emotions and satisfaction was earlier established in retail (James et al., 2011); however, this study demonstrates that managers' caring for employees is as much critical in a high performance-oriented organisational context, such as retail, as it is in non-profit and caregiving organisations (Gabriel, 2015; Gittell et al., 2010; Hasu & Lehtonen, 2014; Kahn, 1993).

Thus, this study makes the following contributions to the literature on caring as a construct and a phenomenon:

1. the theoretical and empirical analysis showed the breadth of caring as a study area. This allows regarding caring as a phenomenon not only a distinct construct;
2. findings of this research showed that caring may entail building networks of relationships to influence important others in the organisation to make decisions in favour of an employee, which extends prior theorising about caring under which caring refers to mutual relationships between a caregiver and the cared-for;
3. unlike prior research, under which caring is rather passive, findings of this research have revealed that line managers' caring is proactive, and in addition to emotional and relational resources it refers to the provision of more tangible and specific ones;
4. this research has also shown that managers' caring for employees is as much critical in a high performance-oriented organisational context, such as retail, as it is in non-profit and caregiving organisations.

4.3. Limitations and future research directions

It was proposed in the discussion that caring for employee well-being is a solid reason for modifying intended HR practices. This might imply that line managers' caring moderates the relationship between intended HRM and practices implemented by line managers, as well as the relationship between HR practices and employee-well-being. The qualitative nature of this research does not allow making conclusions on the moderation effects. Future research is needed to test these relationships and the role of the moderators. This is also consistent with previous research calls to study relationship-oriented or leadership-related variables in HRM implementation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Jiang, 2013; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). Since results of this study showed that managerial caring first is seen as a manager's discretionary leadership behaviour, not as one imposed by the company's HRM policy, an alternative research model in which HR practices moderate a relationship between caring leadership and employee well-being might be tested (e.g. Kalshoven & Boon, 2012).

The data of this study did not allow to disclose in detail reasons for choosing different HRM implementation scenarios, as it was not intended under the aim of this research. However, it disclosed the importance of employee-orientation in HR practice

design for HRM implementation and for an experienced value of HR practices. The notion of value of HR practices was distinguished in previous research (Kostova & Roth, 2002), and future research could explore how caring can be incorporated into the design of HR practices. It is particularly important to investigate how caring can be integrated into the design of performance-oriented HR practices that are aimed at attaining organisational goals. Furthermore, future studies might examine how line managers and employees perceive HR practice design in regards to caring and performance maximisation, or how HR practice design may shape line manager and employee experiences since prior research claims that HR practices affect employee well-being via their experiences at work (Peccei et al., 2013). More extensive research in this direction would contribute to the understanding of the link between HRM and well-being (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019), which would extremely benefit from studies analysing trade-offs between employee well-being and performance enhancement through both HR practices design and HRM implementation.

This qualitative study was limited to the retail industry and does not allow transferability of results across all industries. However, findings and conclusions of this study may be useful to other service-intensive industries too, which like retail require intensive customer contact and emotional labour (Boyd et al., 2014; Edgar et al., 2017; Kim, Hur, Moon, & Jun, 2017). Conclusions of the study are put forward as propositions that merit testing further on a broader sample. As caring is context-specific (Gittell & Douglass, 2012), it may likely manifest in different ways in other settings and with other HR practices. It might be that managers' caring for employees plays a different role in other industries, which differ from retail in terms of their HR practices, dominant employee groups, their well-being, etc.

Future studies in other business sectors and contextual settings would extend the understanding of intra-organisational caring and its implications for theory and practice so crystalizing the construct of caring (Carmeli et al., 2016), which in turn may require its new operationalisation. Since the domain of caring in management is still lacking clear boundaries, empirical research on the nomothetic network of caring and care-related constructs is needed to better understand similarities and differences of the constructs and to investigate relationships between them. When studying caring, it is suggested to appropriately choose between caring and other care-related constructs, which were analysed in this thesis, to best serve the aims of a researcher's study or

preferences. Overall, I propose caring as a broad area of study for humanistic management research (Adler & Hansen, 2012; Pirson, 2019; Tsui, 2013).

This study was not triangulated by another method of inquiry, and is thus limited to interviews, the retrospective nature of which did not allow to investigate real-time experiences. However, the study provides insights and rich details into HRM implementation and line managers' caring. Another limitation of the study is that caring was analysed only in HRM implementation; thus further research is needed to study caring in daily management.

Since the topic of the study was caring and informants were initially informed that the study was about caring, line managers might have assumed that caring for employees is good in itself and wanted to "show" that they were caring for them. This could have influenced their responses, i.e. they may have talked about what they felt it was expected from them from me as a researcher and /or their company management, rather than what they actually did. However, employee accounts allow to triangulate line managers' data and show that line managers' caring in HRM implementation is not only managers' willingness, or "doing the right thing" (Pless, Maak, & Waldman, 2012), but it is also perceived as caring by employees. The findings of this study showed that some managers were more caring for employees, while others were more performance oriented. This study, however, did not analyse these differences among the quality or amount of line managers' caring.

This study investigated the positive flow of caring; however, it would be beneficial to study non-caring activities of managers and organisations, such as for instance destructive leadership (Schyns & Schilling, 2013), unsustainable and care adverse HR practices (Becker & Smith, 2012; Clarke, 2011), etc., as well as their context and outcomes for business and employees. Future research would also benefit from additional employee insights, which would reveal their need for caring, specific forms of caring they expect, and outcomes of their manager and organisational caring. It would also be important to study managers' internal and external resources needed to care for employees and their antecedents as findings of this study showed that line managers sometimes were in shortage for resources they needed to take care for employee well-being. Further, it is important to broaden the understanding of the consequences of caring for managers' own well-being, which may be influenced by a lack of those care resources. Since research on the determinants of managerial caring, which are required for caring to take place (Van der Vyver et al., 2014; Wiegand &

Geller, 2005), is scarce more studies are needed on the antecedents and motives of managerial caring, especially on their altruistic nature (Lemmon & Wayne, 2015). These studies might also shed more light on the explanation of caring mechanisms from another theoretical perspective than social exchange (e.g. Van Knippenberg, Van Prooijen, & Sleebos, 2015), which was debated in the literature review (section 1.2.3.2).

All participants of this research were female (which is typical to service and lower-paid jobs (Edgar et al., 2017). This, however, does not allow offering implications to organisations with more male-dominated or mixed labour-force. Although previous studies have not shown a strong gender differentiation in the propensity to use care (Giammarco, 2016; Jaffee & Hyde, 2000), in future it is suggested to conduct studies on caring with managers and employees of different genders to explore the integration of caring and HRM implementation among other than female labour-force.

4.4. Managerial implications

Given line managers' need to take care of their employees, organisations may win by providing discretionary freedom to line managers in HRM implementation and involving them in HR practice design and improvement. Organisations are advised to design such HR practices that include care for employees among their business-oriented targets. This would add to the perceived value of HR practices from both the line management and employee perspective and lay grounds for effective HRM implementation to target both business performance and employee well-being. Knowing line managers' reasons to deviate from intended HRM on behalf of employees would allow HR departments to better respond to line managers' needs with employee-targeted and practice-informed HRM process designs (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017). Managers with better people management skills can exercise discretionary freedom for the benefit of employees through effective implementation of HR practices, while restraint of their freedom can have negative consequences for employees' well-being. Conversely, when managers lack people management skills, they can apply HR practices to the detriment of employees.

Managers are suggested to pay more attention to the needs of their subordinates and to flexibly use HR tools at their disposal. When managers apply HR practices selfishly, employees may expect HR department intervention and rely more on HR

practices, or other work rules set by their company rather than trust on their line managers. This study shows a range of caring activities which could be adopted by line managers' in HRM implementation and which could be used as guidelines for line managers' people management skill training.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore the manifestation and the role of line managers caring for their subordinate well-being through HRM implementation.

1.The analysis of literature on line managers' caring in HRM implementation revealed that caring may manifest in HRM implementation through line managers' people management, which includes the application of HR practices, supportive leadership behaviours and tailor-made arrangements.

2.The analysis of literature on caring and care-related concepts revealed that:

2.1. caring has many forms; therefore, a number of caring and care-related constructs exist, all of which refer to activities concerning the well-being of the cared for;

2.2. caring is difficult to define and distinguish from numerous care-related conceptualisations; however, all approaches to caring share several commonalities:

- caring is particularistic and situational, which means it is specifically appropriate in addressing the immediate needs of employees;
- caring has such distinctive features as authenticity, orientation to and interest in another person, responsiveness to others' needs;
- caring is embedded in relationships among individuals, i.e. caring is relational;
- caring is a manifold phenomenon: it is more than a moral value, an attitude and disposition. Caring as a behaviour, an activity and a practice is a constituent part of management;
- caring can evoke caring, it is mutual and those who are caring for others can become cared for in another situation - this assumes agency of caring for all parties.

3. Results of the empirical research are as follows:

3.1. in regard to the *integration of caring and HRM implementation*:

- HRM implementation and caring are compatible and reinforcing;

- incorporation of caring for employees into HRM motivates line managers to engage in HRM implementation.

3.2. in regard to HRM implementation:

- line manager caring for employee well-being manifested through multiple forms of *proactive* manager behaviour;
- caring was initiated by managers or employees, and was instrumental and relational;
- caring was *first and foremost a manager's discretionary behaviour*, i.e. not regulated by the company's HRM policy, such as showing an interest in and doing something extra for employees, which generally does not contradict HRM policy;
- caring highlighted *managers' communication* activities towards employees and upper management/HR department.

3.3. Theoretical and empirical investigations of this dissertation revealed that:

- caring is *multidimensional* and related to many other established organisational behaviour and leadership constructs;
- caring through HRM implementation *is a combination* of applied HR practices, supportive leadership behaviours and tailor-made HRM arrangements.

4. Theoretical and practical implications and contributions of this research are as follows:

- through caring line managers can implement HR practices in a way that allows them to improve or safeguard employee well-being. HR practices can serve as tools to do this;
- line managers may deviate from intended HR practices aiming to bring value to employees; thus line managers' caring for employee well-being is a solid *reason for modifying intended HRM* and may be an important variable worth to investigate further in the relationship between HRM and employee well-being;
- caring for employees is what motivates line managers to engage in HRM implementation more actively;
- caring is as a *broad area of study for humanistic management research* and an umbrella term for all of care-related constructs, including the construct of caring;
- line managers' caring for employees in HRM implementation entails building networks of relationships to influence important others in the organisation to make decisions in favour of an employee;

- line managers' caring for employees may manifest through *proactive* forms of behaviour;
- caring for employees may manifest in a high performance-oriented organisational context, such as retail organisations, not only caregiving or non-profit organisations as shown by prior research;
- managerial implications for business practice on the application of line managers' caring for employees are provided.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflicts of interests was reported by the author.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1**.** Interview guide with Heads of HR departments

A. **Introduction to the study participant and familiarise with his organisation -** to understand organisational context including caring on organisational level (HR policy, philosophy) from participant's view.

1. Introductory questions
2. Describe HR policy/philosophy of your company.

B. **Investigation of context of line management caring.** To assess the scope of caring at the organisational level, HRM practice content oriented to employee well-being

3. How does your company care for its employees?
4. What does your company do to care for employees? Tell about the specific practices, actions, means, tools or traditions fostering employee well-being that you use in your organisation.
5. Why does your company care for employees?
6. What you do in your organisation about each practice from the following HR practices in the list. To what extent does your organisation apply the practices you indicated? Tell more about those practices which you apply for employees in the retail units.

HR practice list presented on a separate sheet with explanations:

- Work –life balance:
- Training and development;
- Emloyee career development;
- High salaries;
- Extras and benefits;
- Flexible benefits (ala carte and similar);
- Employee participation;
- Performance asesment oriented to development;
- Mentoring;
- Safety and health improvement (above law regulations);
- Prevention of bullying and harrasment.

C. **Line management caring in implementation of HRM practices in their units**

7. Do line managers take any role in the implementation of the HR policy and practices discussed above (or in general)? If yes, what role? How are unit managers involved in the implementation of these practices in their work units? Ask about each practice separately
8. How do line managers manage their subordinates? To what extent do they need to use the HR practices and stick to precedure?
9. Are there differences between managers according to how they implement HR policy and practices? If yes, which are these differences?
10. How carefully do line managers implement the practices x? Why? /Why not?
11. What are the reasons for line managers to deviate from the intended practice and modify it?
12. What do line managers need to simultaneously implement the practices in high-quality and ensure their subordinate well-being?
13. Repeat 7, 10-12 questions about each practice.
14. In what way does the company provide assistance to LM's on the issues of people management? What kind of assistance?

Appendix 2. Interview guide with line managers

A. **Introduction to the study participant and familiarise with his organisation -** to understand organisational context including caring on organisational level (HR policy, philosophy) from participant's view.

1. Intro questions, including demographics and a manager's functions in the studied organisation, previous work experience, number of direct reports.
2. Describe how your company treats employees.
3. Comparing with other retail companies how does your company care for employees?
4. How does your company take care of employees? What does the company do?
5. What else could your company do to make employees feel the organisation cares for them?
6. In what way does your company care for you? What are you missing?
7. How does your direct manager care for you? What are you missing?
8. How do you manage your subordinates? To what extent do you need to use the HR practices and stick to procedures?

B. Line manager role in the implementation of HRM practices in their work units, organisational context: the extent of well-being practice content implementation

9. There are some major practices (procedures, systems, traditions, tools) of personnel management, set up by your company upper management. Which do you know? How are you involved, if you are, in their implementation?
10. If involved, how precisely do you implement them? Try to be very specific. (The list of practices only indicated by the HR is presented). Ask about each practice separately.
11. What do you do (if is involved) in the implementation of these practices?
12. Is your autonomy in implementation of these practices regulated? If yes, in what ways and to what extent?
13. Do you care for employees during the execution of the HR practice x (e.g. performance appraisal)? Ask about each practice separately
14. If yes, how do you care for employees during the execution of the HR practice x? Ask about each practice separately
15. What do you need to simultaneously relate the high-quality and proper implementation of these practices and caring for your subordinates' well-being (needs and interests)? Ask about each practice separately
16. What do you do on your own discretion when caring for employees, i.e. what has not been devolved to you "top down" by HR practices discussed before (what you have not mentioned earlier)?
17. Why do you do that?
18. Do you think you can care for employees by using these practices? Is it enough, do you need to do more, different things? Is it working against or for the caring idea?
19. How is this practice in line with employees' needs, concerns, problems, expectations at this point? And in general? About each practice separately.

Appendix 3. Interview guide with non managerial employees.

A. **Introduction to the study participant and familiarise with their organisation's caring for employees in general and for him/her in particular -** to understand participant's view on organisational context including caring on organisational level (HR policy, philosophy).

1. Intro questions, including demographics, employee functions in the studied organisation, previous work experience (job position, sector).
2. Describe how your company treats employees.
3. Comparing with other retail companies how does your company care for employees? Why do you think so?
4. How does your company take care of employees? What does the company do?
5. What else could your company do to make employees feel the organisation cares for them?

B. **Line management role in the implementation of HRM practices in their work units, the extent of well-being in implementation of HRM practices**

6. Where from does your manager know how to manager employees? To what extent does he need to use the HR practices and stick to procedures?
7. There are some major practices (procedures, systems, traditions, tools) of personnel management, set up by your company senior management. Which of the following practices does your company apply? (The practices only indicated by the line managers as implemented by them are presented).
8. Who implements them? Ask about each practice separately that the employee recognised
9. How is your manager involved in their implementation? Ask about each practice separately
10. Does your manager care for employees by using these practices?
11. If yes, how does your manager care for employees during the execution of HR practices (e.g. performance appraisal)?
12. If yes, why does your manager do that (cares for you) while executing practice x, e.g. performance appraisal? Ask about each practice separately
13. Is it possible to care for employees by using the practice x? (If yes), how exactly? Ask about each practice separately
14. Are these practices in line with employees' needs, concerns, problems, expectations? Ask about each practice separately
15. If yes, how is this practice in line with employees' needs, concerns, problems, expectations?

Appendix 4. Representative quotes of perceptions of line manager caring in HRM implementation from line management and employee perspectives

Second order themes	**Aggregate dimensions**
	Stimulating promotion
Informing - informing employees about promotion possibilities	„I spoke to everyone in person [about a vacancy] …. If I don't see potential, it doesn't mean they don't have potential". (A_LM_1.1.) „There are those assessments during which I keep an eye on an employee's category and tell them every 9 months that their time has come …" (A_LM_2.2.) „I tell the staff [about the career programme] ... I feel sorry for young people. And I want to do more". (B_LM_2.1.) "Ads are placed [on the notice board] in our room, and she [shop manager] says: „Here it is, please take a look, anyone can try"". (B_Emp_2.1.2) "We have ads. They are regularly printed out and put on the notice board so that everyone can see them. And also, at appraisal meetings, [the name of shop manager] once told me, „would you like to try out a career?" (B_Emp_1.1.2). "When I started work, I learnt about categories: you have to pass a test, the manager told me about it" (A_Emp_1.3.1) "It is discussed directly; we have normal communication about qualification rising" (A_Emp_2.2.3.)
Guiding promotion - channelling employee promotion by motivating them to seek for it and consulting them on career opportunities	„If they secretly expect it, think it's only a step forward, believe they can really do it; and those who doubt, think they are not competent - then you wish to learn more, to engage harder into work. I can say it from my own experience that encouragement, noticing are needed…" (B_LM_1.2.) "… I motivated her to do it, I told about clients there, etc. And she took that position" (A_LM_2.2.) "We encouraged her to apply. We didn't believe they will select her, but they did…" (B_LM_2.2.) „ [I encourage those who think they don't want to apply] as they may not know it yet themselves, maybe they need to try, change the environment…" (B_LM_2.2.) „I have to do it and to notice in time… A salesperson doesn't stay long" (B_LM_2.1.) „It is your duty as a manager to motivate the person. If you see that a person may upgrade his category ahead of time, you say it [to chain manager]…" (A_LM_2.1.) "As far as she [shop manager] knows, she would find a possibility to try it here, she will suggest it in the same shop" (B_Emp_1.1.2).

	"If she finds out that someone of us is willing to become [the name of position], etc., she will always encourage. She will say "go and try". This happened to my colleague" (B_Emp_1.2.5) "In my case, the manager urged me and explained to me where I stand with my knowledge and experience, and she did it earlier as I wanted to apply for that category after a year and a half or two years, and I was urged after six months to learn more about it, to try, as she saw some potential in me, she simply wanted me to get higher" (A_Emp_2.2.3) "the manager encouraged doing it: "go, try out"" (B_Emp_2.2.1) "…always encourages if you wish to take part. She says there is a vacancy for this position and maybe you'd like to take part [in the selection], or on the contrary voices her opinion that I'd better not go there: "Think if you need it, you'll have to do this and that" (B_Emp_2.2.2) "She always encourages. If there is a vacancy, she tells to take part [in the selection]" (B_Emp_2.1.3) "The employee discussed the offer [changing the employer] with the manager. … To consult if it is good, if the company is interested" (B_Emp_2.2.1.) "…she approached our department manager and told her: „send [the application], it suits your personality"" (B_Emp_2.4.2.) "You may be pointed to the right direction, [the manager] sees that you are this and that, you can try in that sphere, and you can try sending your CV" (B_Emp_2.3.1
Recommending for promotion – managers' behaviour directed at those who were in the position to accelerate employee promotion	"I kept whining to the HR that she must work in [name of the shop] and that she will quit her job if her efforts are not recognised" (B_LM_2.1.) „It is your duty as a manager to motivate the person. If you see that a person may upgrade his category ahead of time, you say it [to chain manager]…" (A_LM_2.1.) "When we have an opportunity, we make a referral, even if there is no vacancy at the time" (A_LM_1.2.) "I have noticed that one employee was doing better in communicating with people, while the other was better at repairing, so I voiced my opinion [to my manager] about it, and then it is up to them to decide" (A_LM_1.2.) "[Shop manager] talks to the HR department if the employee would like [to move to a higher position]" (B_Emp_2.1.3.) "When she spots a gifted person, she tells the chain manager" (A_Emp_1.3.2.) "I think she [shop manager] says some praise, but I don't know if they [HR] pay attention to it". (B_Emp_2.3.2.)

	Engaging with employees
Inquiring – managers' behaviours focused on getting to know more about employees	"You ask a person what he would like to do, and what he would not…" (A_LM_2.1.) "When I spot her, I try talking to her to find out how she feels about it [new assignment]" (B_LM_1.2.) "I use more open-ended questions from my side: 'How are things going on, did you have any problems in the past year, and what problems did you have?' which I use and which are not included in the form" (B_LM_1.2.). „I don't want the [appraisal] interview to be like an obligation, but a means to find out what's important for an employee" (B_LM_2.4.). "You ask questions and get answers, and then you have to do your best for that employee." (A_LM_2.1.) „I ask what we need, what is better for the unit [staff]. [There are no those questions in the form]. Questions arise in conversation" (A_LM_2.1.) „You can learn much more about a person through conversation" (B_LM_2.2.) "I always ask, as I perfectly understand that there is another side - not work, but personal life, public holidays, birthdays, and all the rest". (A_LM_2.1.) "The conversation always starts from how I am doing. This relates not to how I am doing in general, but at work, always asks what I like, what I don't like, what I would like to change. How I am getting on with colleagues, doing the job…" (B_Emp_1.1.1.) "this depends on the employee, how openly they speak out, as they have an opportunity to voice what they are satisfied / dissatisfied with, how they are doing, how they are feeling" (B_Emp_2.4.2.) "The manager ask how you are feeling in the company anyway. You can say everything, what you lack, if you would like something" (B_Emp_2.1.3)
Talking with employees - developing a rapport and two-way communication with an employee.	"If we do not engage in conversation, we will not be able to find a common language" (A_LM_2.1.) "Every employee is happy when given attention. They feel good because the manager talks to them.... A dialogue is, in itself, caring" (B_LM_1.1.) „I personally have a lot of opportunity to talk to [the name of the shop manager], but there are a lot of employees who don't. This makes annual appraisal meetings a great thing for them to speak out their opinion, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, or their desires, expectations … … It's a good thing for me too, even if we discuss many things, there are many things we do not talk about every day". (B_Emp_1.2.5.) "Sometimes we do talk. ... We have individual [meetings] during which the work plan [is discussed]. I find it interesting to discuss this. The conversation is more official then, it's not that we just talk to each other. The manager

	needs to chat [with employees]; it's a short talk, and that's it. And that is initiated by the organisation. It's about work, nothing else". (A_Emp_2.2.1.). "[the former manager simply did what had to be done according to the plan, and that's it]: she had to talk, and she did it. ... It can be used as a means for caring. [The name of the current manager] is a manager who cares ...." (A_Emp_2.2.2.)
	Responding
Considering individual needs –more tangible and proactive managers' actions taken to find suitable solutions in the best interest of a particular employee.	„There are those assessments ... and [I ask] do you want it…" (A_LM_2.2.) „You don't send them [upper management] for approval [schedules]. First of all, I ask [employees]: 'Does it suit you, do you approve of what's been done, and is there anything we can change?'" (A_LM_1.3.). "You make it [the work schedule] adequate, so that it is acceptable for everyone. Well, you make it in a way that suits everyone [employee and senior management]" (A_LM_2.1.) "A person may bring their important dates to me and I adjust their work schedule. " (B_LM_2.3.) „It's not so much satisfying their desires but taking them into consideration. As other shops don't do that… no work time switching or anything of the kind is tolerated… Weekends are made free without them being informed about it, and so on. Thus we do take their opinion into consideration when making schedules, planning vacations, etc." (B_LM_1.2.) „It does happen that they come and tell me that they need a day-off and we find some solution in those cases" (A_LM_2.1.) "You ask questions and get answers, and then you have to do your best for that employee. You then decide if they need to attend some seminars, or it concerns some changes in their workload" (A_LM_2.1.) "[The manager] tries to distribute it equally, so that same girls do not always work till 10.pm., unless they want it, no matter if you work half year of five years" (B_Emp_2.1.1.) "Leaves the schedule blank, and then we sign into it. And only then she confirms it with the HR". (B_Emp_1.2.5.) "…asks who wants a day off and when, and then makes the schedule to give the equal number of hours as per one's workload" (A_Emp_2.2.1) "You can even write when you need a day off or so. And always takes it into consideration. And for instance if you need an hour or so off you can take it in advance; you will compensate for it later; it's not that you need to go somewhere and you can't". (B_Emp_2.1.1) "She sees a person and can sense what they can learn (e.g. if they want to work in the storage room and learn how to manage it, if they want to learn everything, if they want to merchandise the [name of goods] - you can see what they are inclined for, and you take it into consideration at your own disposition, you do take notice of those people" (B_Emp_2.3.1.)

	"Takes into consideration those with kids: if they need some days off, or if the kid gets ill. If she sees you are worried about something and there is not much work, she gives you time off, offers a few days off. She says you have some time unused" (B_Emp_2.3.1.) "If she can see in advance that an employee suits some position, not only when they come to an interview [performance appraisal], she shows the ad to you and says that this is what you want" (B_Emp_2.3.2.) "Really takes into consideration where employees live, so that someone will get home late, someone will…" (B_Emp_1.1.1.)
Differentiating - taking uniqueness of certain employee groups into consideration	"… if a person is comfortable in their current position, I don't urge them too much". (B_LM_2.2.) "If a person is young, or they need to advance, I recommend them [to the HR]". (B_LM_2.2.) „So that a person does not stay in the same position for too long, for when it becomes a routine, one's well-being is then [affected]". (A_LM_1.2.) „I try to make it [appraisal interview] be less of an appraisal. Instead we talk about how they feel… However, the younger ones need appraisal … … They appreciate that feedback and see it as a possibility to attain something" (B_LM_2.4.) „Schedule development is the most relevant thing for them, as all of them are students; … I want them all to be able to match their studies with work" (B_LM_1.1.) "She may spend more time on some issues depending on the employee; otherwise, she simply follows the procedure" (B_Emp_1.2.5.)
Voicing employee interests - seeking support from those who were in the position to meet employee interests in situations beyond managers' discretion	„We talk to our Head of the HR and tell her about our employees … At least I do it. For instance, this employee may be in this or that position in the future, and that one in …. " (A_LM_1.2.) „We have yearly result discussions; HR looks through the forms and I tell them things. It's caring, as the expectations they employees voiced are then taken into consideration". (B_LM_2.3.) "When the [chain] manager asks what and how in particular about employees [in respect to schedules] … [That's caring]." (A_LM_1.2.) "We then discuss it [employee concerns] with the HR people…It is of utmost importance for them [employees] to be heard" (B_LM_2.1.) „[Shop manager] didn't know if she will be able to adjust the schedule, but she arranged it and informed me about it". (B_Emp_1.2.5) "If a person needs something, she will try to do it, if it is possible. For instance, a person needs a day off and there is nobody to swap your work and you badly need it, so she calls the upper management" (B_Emp_1.2.5.)

	"She [shop manager] has told the chain manager something needed to be done in my regard. They said I should wait a little more. She would then keep reminding something needed to be done. She said she would look for possibilities to raise my salary. There are no vacancies at the time " (A_Emp_2.2.1.) "I want to emphasise one more time that shop managers do not have as much competence to meet the needs as you now put into that meaning. It may be more related to the needs if one has some specific needs related to work [clarifies later: related to work conditions, pay, work schedule, vacation]. They are raised to the chain manager. I then tell [names of two shop managers] [works at two shops], I say this and that… She then says, "I'll call the chain manager or the HR manager". Or they tell whom to talk to, but I know it myself in most cases. I say that this and that needs to be done, and they then coordinate it among them…laughing" (A_Emp_1.2.5.) "It is then discussed with the HR of chain manager. In colloquial words, she cadges for our work conditions and she is not afraid to explain our position, what inhibits us doing work well. … She talks a lot to the chain manager, finds out about pay in other companies and says, gives arguments on how much our basic pay should be increased, so that we do not leave the company, as we are already valuable employees" (A_Emp_2.2.3.) "She spoke to the management, but they said it was not possible doing it at the time… And the former manager, she kept promising, promising… … the shop manager cannot say that from today you will be a junior manager, and that's it… There are another thirty-fifty issues to solve and then pass onto lower levels… The shop manager can only inform [HR] and suggest that this and that person would like, so could they?... and she, you understand, promised, not suggested, and that's the most a manager may be not specific." (A_Emp_2.2.2.).
	Acting compassionately
Acting compassionately - showing emotional presence by displaying warmth, affection and kindness	„ [They] speak up, and I tell them they shouldn't feel bad; they have learnt what they still need to develop... I explain it to them„ (B_LM_2.1.) „We discussed it with her, how it went, how she feels after it [the talent identification] interview..." (B_LM_1.2.) „I do my best to make an employee feel good during the interview" (B_LM_2.3.) „I changed the environment [interview venue] on my own initiative. I don't want the person to feel stressed before the interview. " (B_LM_2.3.) "We can simply sit [and talk]" (A_LM_2.1.). „I try to make it [appraisal interview] be less of an appraisal. Instead we talk about how they feel…" (B_LM_2.4.) „I make it less formal, and it's then more friendly. " (B_LM_2.4.) "Because everyone starts panicking when something new is introduced. So I then calm them down by saying that we will do as much as we can, and we'll let the rest go astray" (B_LM_2.1.)

	Capacitising employees
Recognising employee strengths - noticing and recognising employees' strengths and potential and striving to use them	"If I see that [name of the person] is good at displaying [name of goods], I assign taking care of [name of goods] displays to her" (B_LM_1.2.) "I have noticed that one employee was doing better in communicating with people, while the other was better at repairing, so…." (A_LM_1.2.) „It's important to find out what the employee likes, some, e.g. like working with the computer, others with visualisation" (B_LM_1.2.). „When I talk to an employee, I say that you are good at this and that; for instance, that in the future there is a possibility to study to become [name of a profession]" (A_LM_1.2.). „My aim is to spot a person who has potential. Otherwise, if anyone [not potential] gets that development plan, it is a waste of time. ..." (B_LM_2.4.) „ [telling HR about employees] … For instance, this employee may be in this or that position in the future, and that one in …. " (A_LM_1.2.) "And if you see that initiative, that positive disposition, so that the manager can see something in you (potential), that you are capable of doing something more, it provides you lots of internal motivation, which can be called caring about you". (B_Emp_2.1.2.) "Well a girl came, and after three months she is being prepared for the position of an expert. It means the manager could see something in her, she can spot a stronger personality" (B_Emp_2.4.2) „she likes a person, and then she approaches him and makes an offer. And it could be done so that everything is formalised. When you need an employee for a position, you look at the list of your current employees and you can see. … Now if there are some possibilities, you have to go and ask, propose yourself for it, or the manager selects the one she considers most worthy it, the best. To put it simple there should be some kind of a table with all employee aspirations or desires… what each employee could possibly attain, it would be easier to take them all into into consideration" (B_Emp_2.1.2). "If she spots a potential employee, she talks to her to find out if she'd like it – she can become an expert with us [in the same shop], then she can go higher still" (B_Emp_2.1.3.)
Mentoring - sharing one's personal experience with employees and providing onsite training	„I teach them, show [how to do it] … quite a number of employees left my shop [were promoted in the company]…" (B_LM_2.1.) „We then assigned her additional duties and she started putting effort… That trust helped a lot" (B_LM_2.2.) "You can always share your experience with the employee" (A_LM_2.1.) "She started teaching me making 'ten days'. … The young lady also wanted to do something else, so she was given more responsibilities too. … '"I want

	you to learn, I don't want you to be bored, I want you to aspire for something, not to stay in the same position all the time'" (B_Emp_1.1.1) "I said, [the name of manager], I want something else to do. So she says: 'it's great you told me, I was thinking of teaching you doing this and that'". (B_Emp_1.2.5.) "It depends on the position the person seeks to get … if it is at the shop level, so the shop manager gives it more attention, [the name of manager] teaches you then. … The manager shares the experience she has to share." (B_Emp_1.2.5.)
	Validating employees
Validating employees - communicating positive regard, respect, and appreciation to an employee	"You ask a person what they would like to do, and what he would not, encourage them if they are interested in that." (A_LM_2.1.) "I say: [the programme] is a great step even when a position you try out is not available. You move ahead towards it, nevertheless. When the possibility arises [again], you can say "I can do it and I know it"". (B_LM_1.2.) "I may encourage [an employee], as they are usually open [during performance review] and may speak out more freely what they would wish and strive… they say "I would like this and that", and I say "it's great". I support them, as I consider it highly relevant" (B_LM_2.1) "I had just started working there, but I sent my CV nevertheless, so she called me, gave advice, said it was great I went [to the interview], as it will be easier next time" (B_Emp_1.1.1.). "And I think that she thinks high of my work. … We discuss it at annual appraisal meetings: "You are doing well", she keeps saying it. I cannot say I feel not valued". (B_Emp_2.4.2.)

Eglė Poškienė

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Išleido ISM Vadybos ir ekonomikos universitetas, Aušros Vartų g. 7A, LT-01304 Vilnius
Spausdino leidyklos „Technologija” spaustuvė, Studentų g. 54, LT-51424 Kaunas
2 leidyb. apsk. Tiražas 50 egz. Užsakymas …