

## CHAPTER 7

# THE ROLE OF MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEW IN NON-ENVISIONED ROUTINE CREATION: TAKING INITIATIVE, CREATING CONNECTIONS, AND COPING WITH MISALIGNMENTS

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### ABSTRACT

*Large corporate policy changes usually take the form of a top-down approach based on a clearly envisioned routine and an implementation plan. Yet, the authors report on a study of a bottom-up approach in which key members of a service company created a new hiring routine that supported a company-wide new human resource management (HRM) hiring policy without any prior envisioned plan. We pay particularly close attention to the perspectives of this company's HRM professionals, line managers, and middle-level managers. The authors used the literature on routine dynamics to examine in detail which actions were taken by key members in this organization to create the new hiring routine. Through in-depth interviews, the authors found that line managers, HRM professionals, and middle-level managers significantly differed in their points of view regarding their role in the new hiring routine, and how it should work best. As a result of these different points of view, the actors took different*

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*actions that nonetheless contributed to building the new routine including creating new internal and external connections, supplying expertise, and ensuring oversight of the new way of hiring. The authors also observed that the creation of this new routine also implied conflicts as a result of different points of view and actions. Nonetheless, the end result was the establishment of a new company-wide accepted hiring routine that even surpassed the expectations of top management. With this study, the authors contribute to the literature on routine dynamics by demonstrating the generative potential of multiple points of view and conflicts in creating new routines involved in large corporate policy change by showing how misalignments between the actors' perspectives do not need to hamper the creation of new action patterns but rather support it.*

**Keywords:** Routine dynamics; routine generation; multiple points of view; recruitment and selection; disadvantaged workers; HRM implementation

## INTRODUCTION

It is commonly assumed that policy change in organizations requires clearly envisioned patterns of action mostly initiated and designed by top management, which are then implemented throughout the whole organization by following the envisioned pattern. However, in this chapter we present a study of a large corporate HRM policy change to hire disadvantaged workers and promote equality at a cleaning service organization of which its top managers did not establish an envisioned routine and a clear plan of action. Instead, management decided to leave the development of the new hiring routine to the discretion of the company's HRM professionals, middle-level managers, and line managers. This bottom-up implementation approach contributed not only to achieving the overall goal of this new policy, but even surpassed it. This makes the case a suitable example for understanding that implementing a new HRM policy does not necessarily need to be planned in detail from the start, but that the new routine can develop by actually doing it, hence by using a bottom-up approach.

The literature on routine dynamics is particularly useful to examine in depth the actions involved in the creation and re-creation of organizational routines (Feldman, 2000; Feldman & Pentland, 2003) and in which the multiple points of view of the actors involved in the design of the routine play a crucial role (Pentland & Feldman, 2008). However, so far, the majority of the studies adopting the literature on routine dynamics focused on the creation of new routines from a top-down perspective. This means that the creation of new routines, however, iterative and dynamic, follows upon the envisioning of a clear plan and particular set of actions of how to perform the routine, usually initiated by top management (Berente, Lyytinen, Yoo, & King, 2016; Bertels, Howard-Grenville, & Pek, 2016; D'Adderio, 2014; Lazaric & Denis, 2005; Rerup & Feldman, 2011). To our knowledge, there are only a few studies that address how new routines come to life without the presence of an envisioned plan and action pattern, and in essence, leaving its creation to the discretionary space of those who should enact

the new routine from the bottom up (Cohendet & Simon, 2016; Feldman, 2000; Salvato & Rerup, 2017). In the creation of routines, various studies indeed make clear that routine participants may have multiple and divergent points of views about how the new routine can and should work (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013; Turner & Rindova, 2012; Zbaracki & Bergen, 2010). However, the crucial role of multiple points of view in the creation of new routines – especially when it concerns large corporate HRM policy change from a bottom-up perspective – has not been examined in depth. Therefore, our research question is: How do the different points of view of routine participants contribute to building new patterns of action in the absence of an envisioned routine?

We examined the creation of a new hiring routine at a large organization located in the Netherlands, called Dutch Cleaners. Dutch Cleaners (the name is fictitious for confidentiality reasons) is a cleaning service corporation with various subunits located throughout the Netherlands. Dutch Cleaners employs in total about 10,000 employees, most of whom conduct cleaning services for clients. In 2015, the company's board of directors stated their desire to become a so-called inclusive employer, with disadvantaged workers being given equal job opportunities as so-called "regular" job candidates. In contrast to hiring regular workers, the hiring of disadvantaged workers involves specific hiring procedures and dealing with legal and social security issues which were new to most actors at Dutch Cleaners. Despite the novel character of this policy and its strategic importance for the entire corporation, the top management of Dutch Cleaners decided to achieve the change without an envisioned pattern of action of how to accomplish it. This implied that, except for a few targets set by the top management, relevant staff members such as HRM professionals, unit leaders, and line managers were free to find the best way of hiring disadvantaged workers within the restrictions of the law. The only recognizable patterns for these actors were the ones of the existing hiring routines for regular job candidates. We started collecting the data inductively to explore the various perspectives of the routine participants, including their individual and collective actions that ensued in their endeavor to bring the new hiring routine to life. Thus, similar to Turner and Rindova (2012), we focused on the patterns of action and described the process of how these patterns came into existence. In addition, we also relied on snowballing techniques to fully understand how the patterns of actions unfolded in the development of this new hiring routine across the corporation and business units.

We demonstrate how in creating a new hiring routine, organizational actors first partially built on their experience of the existing hiring routine and then went through processes of trial and error in the development of a new one. Furthermore, we show how the creation of the new hiring routine was associated with developing new connections with other parties outside the organization. It also implied contrasting role perspectives and action of the routine participants resulting into conflicts. However, instead of hampering the creation of the new routine, these unaligned perspectives and conflicts, actually contributed to developing a well-functioning hiring routine because they offered different opportunities for improving initial trials and experiments. This even led to the company attaining the managerial target earlier and with higher numbers of disadvantaged workers on the work floor than expected.

This chapter contributes to the literature on routine dynamics in various ways. First, our study demonstrates that even large-scale changes in routines in organizations do not always require an envisioned pattern of action. In fact, the study demonstrates that the absence of such plans supports the cultivation of spontaneous actions and responsibility-taking during the creation and re-creation of organizational routines. We present the nature and characteristics of the generative mechanisms and show how differing points of view of the routine participants can be beneficial instead of detrimental in building a new pattern of action. With these contributions, we expand on existing studies interested in the dynamics of routine creation through performances without prior envisioned plans (Cohendet & Simon, 2016; Salvato & Rerup, 2017).

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. First, we review the current literature on routine dynamics and particularly on the creation or recreation of routines to guide our empirical research. Next, we describe our research methods and provide more detail on the case at Dutch Cleaners. We then turn to the findings and elaborate on the specific actions as seen from the perspectives of the company's HRM professionals, line managers, and middle-level managers. Finally, we discuss our findings and contributions, followed by the conclusions.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: ROUTINE DYNAMICS AND EMERGENT PATTERNS OF ACTION**

Rather than viewing organizational routines as sources of inertia and stability only (Gersick & Hackman, 1990; Weiss & Ilgen, 1985), scholars looking at routine dynamics consider routines as potential sources of flexibility and change (Feldman, Pentland, D'Adderio, & Lazaric, 2016, p. 505). Or as Feldman (2000, p. 626) notes, "routines are not inert, but are as full of life as other aspects of organizations" where people are the central agents in routine change. Feldman et al. (2016) highlight that even though routines demonstrate recognizable and repetitive patterns of action, these patterns are temporal and can potentially change from one performance to the next. Danner-Schröder and Geiger (2016, p. 3) emphasize the role of organizational agents in routine dynamics, "Each routine performance can vary from one iteration to the next, and stability as well as change of routines is the result of an effortful accomplishment of routine participants." Routines are not only modifiable and dynamic (Bertels et al., 2016; D'Adderio, 2014; Howard-Grenville, 2005), but are also sources of change and innovation (Cohendet & Simon, 2016; Rerup & Feldman, 2011; Sonenshein, 2016).

### *The Creation and Recreation of Organizational Routines*

Various scholars have examined routine dynamics in the context of organization-wide implementation of new practices. This has led to valuable insights demonstrating the actions by which organizational actors contribute to the creation of organizational routines. In reviewing the literature, we observed that the majority of the studies examined the creation of a new routine based on an envisioned plan

that helped routine participants to design and implement new patterns of action. For instance, Berente et al. (2016) studied the implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system at NASA and their key insight was that relaxing the pre-defined requirements and allowing some deviation from the envisioned pattern of action allowed a successful implementation of the ERP system after two failed attempts. Their study suggests that the appreciation of local work practices is important in top-down coordinated organizational change, in this case, ERP implementation. In a study of a large-scale implementation of a quality management system (ISO norm) in a French Company, Lazaric and Denis (2005) show that the memorization of a task in the creation of a new routine depends on the establishment of a new state of confidence toward management rather than time and hierarchical pressures only. Similarly, Bertels et al. (2016) examined the top down implementation of a routine for operational compliance at a major oil producer to meet the environment, health, and safety regulatory obligations. A key insight from this study is that patterns of action in the enacted routine emerged from employees defaulting from the espoused routine by deliberate workarounds. In a green field organization called Learning Lab Denmark, Rerup and Feldman (2011) examined the creation of a new recruitment routine guided by an espoused schema based on a vision and found that the creation of this routine involved trial and error learning connecting both routine and schemata.

While in these studies the creation of new routines is accompanied by the presence of an envisioned plan and action patterns, some other studies focused on the creation of new routines in the absence of any plan and thus how they emerge from the bottom up. In this regard, Feldman (2000) studied how the damage assessment routine in a student house was re-created by lower-level employees based on a discomfort with students not taking responsibility for the damage caused after leaving the room. This study clearly demonstrates that lower-level employees are capable to design a new way of working without an envisioned plan that dealt successfully with the housing problems faced by the institution. Similarly, Cohendet and Simon (2016) demonstrated how an internal disruption in a large video game company turned into a reconfiguration of their existing development routines. In this case, the company's top management decided to let managers and employees freely create new patterns of action in the development of new videogames instead of imposing a plan of how to develop new games. The result was that employees felt empowered to develop their own ideas without necessary approval of their (top) managers. Instead, novel ideas for videogames were tested by their peers, through events such as weekly gaming sessions and tournaments. Later, these sessions were institutionalized by the department's producer and, instead of only allowing direct colleagues, all employees of the company were welcome to attend them. This new routine solved several issues and frustrations related to the previous routine, such as the need to explain abstract concepts to top management and the commitment of employees to new projects. Salvato and Rerup (2017) studied how designers and engineers of an Italian utensils producer coped with and contributed to conflicting goals in the emergence of a new routine. They observed how engineers made use of the formulation of a new managerial goal to reach a larger audience by allowing designers to use cheaper

materials in the design of new products. Engineers took this opportunity and started raising issues related to efficiency in the design process. They developed a new pattern of action through experimenting and trial-and-error learning, thus enlarging their role in the process.

The findings from the studies above inform our study in the sense that the (re)formulation of an organizational goal without envisioning how to reach it can lead to a shift in the actors' relationships and responsibilities, as well as their daily routines. For example, in the case of Cohendet and Simon (2016), employees became involved in the feedback delivery of gaming projects and decisions on pursuing novel projects were also made on team level. Furthermore, the tournaments became institutionalized events at which projects could be tested and evaluated instantly, by all employees of the company. The studies also show that the absence of an envisioned routine leaves routine participants sufficient space for experimentation and interpretive flexibility in the creation of a new routine.

## **MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEW IN THE CREATION OF ROUTINES**

The multiple points of view of routine participants in the change or creation of routines cannot be excluded when it comes to understanding the routine dynamics involved in the creation and recreation of organizational routines (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013; Nigam, Huising, & Golden, 2016; Pentland & Feldman, 2008; Turner & Rindova, 2012; Zbaracki & Bergen, 2010). What these studies suggest is that multiple points of view typically lead to divergent understandings which can produce conflict (e.g., Zbaracki & Bergen). Thus, existing studies suggest that multiple points of view need to be aligned (Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013) or balanced (Turner & Rindova, 2012) and thereby become important drivers of the creation or recreation of organizational routines. Therefore, in our empirical work, we explore the various points of view and actions of organizational actors and also how new connections are established in the creation of a new corporate-wide hiring routine. In other words, this chapter explores how different experiences in day-to-day work (Nigam et al., 2016) and the functional expertise of organizational actors (Zbaracki & Bergen, 2010) matter in understanding the dynamics involved in the emergence of a new routine from a bottom-up perspective. In the next section, we explain the setting and data collection.

## **METHODS**

We conducted a qualitative study at Dutch Cleaners which is a large cleaning service firm in the Netherlands with multiple regional business units providing cleaning services to schools, hospitals, large companies and small offices. In total, Dutch Cleaners employs approximately 10,000 people nationwide. The company has six regional offices, each of which is managed by a regional manager.

An HRM professional is assigned to each regional office to take care of employee-related issues in their region. To ensure proximity and provide excellent cleaning services to the customers in the region, there are multiple subunits from which the daily service operations are coordinated. These are managed by middle-level managers. The line managers are responsible for daily operations on location, as well as the hiring and firing of cleaners in the offices of the company's clients.

Our research involvement started in June 2016, roughly one year after Dutch Cleaners decided to become a so-called inclusive organization. This means that a substantial part of the company should consist of disadvantaged workers. The reason for aiming to become an inclusive organization was that Dutch Cleaners wishes to be a diverse organization which is a reflection of society and stimulates equal opportunities, regardless of the employee's cultural, social, and ethnical background. Disadvantaged workers are defined as people who are considered to have a distance from the labor market due to reasons such as physical and/or mental disabilities, a basic educational level, or a migrant background. Instead of designing an organization-wide implementation plan to set up this new way of hiring, top management decided to leave it to the regional offices and subunits and let the managers decide on what works best. As indicated by the company's HR director, earlier implementation processes at Dutch Cleaners were also executed by making use of a similar, bottom-up approach. Hence, the organizational actors were already experienced with developing new routines in a non-envisioned way.

The original goal of Dutch Cleaners' senior management was to have all of their subunits reach the highest score on the so-called Participation Scale – a measurement tool that determines the inclusiveness of organizations and their units – in 2018. With a workforce of almost 10,000 employees, it is necessary for at least 3.7% of employees to be disadvantaged to achieve the highest score. The company exceeded its expectations by fulfilling this goal already in 2017. These achievements kept on growing, and in June 2018 the total number of disadvantaged employees at Dutch Cleaners was 1,377, which is equal to 14% of the total workforce.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

We followed Turner and Rindova's (2012) suggestion to familiarize ourselves with the research setting in order to understand the existing routines. We conducted interviews with HRM professionals who are viewed as experts in legal issues, and with line managers who are responsible for the hiring and firing of employees. We enquired about how hiring and firing takes place in that particular unit and who else is involved. We asked the regional HRM professionals about the general HRM policy at Dutch Cleaners and in what instances their help was required for local HRM-related matters.

Based on the previous stage, we developed a research design aiming to obtain data providing insights into ways in which organizational actors developed new patterns of action for hiring disadvantaged workers. We began by collecting and studying relevant documents from the company's intranet, promotional leaflets and internal newsletters in which the new hiring practice, including its benefits for the company and their customers, was announced to all organizational

**Table 1.** Overview of Data Sources Dutch Cleaners.

Data Sources	
Key informants	Middle-level managers, line managers, HRM professionals
Document analysis	10 Documents: policy documents
Number of people interviewed	28 (23 hours in total)
Observations	Walking-the-floor notes

members as well as to other organizations like clients and other companies. Then we focused on the actions involved in the enactment of the new hiring routine. In doing so, we mainly drew on semi-structured interviews with organizational actors who played a key role in bringing the new routine to life. Most respondents were identified through a snowballing technique (Flick, 2009) in which respondents connected us to other actors in their region or unit. In total, we interviewed 28 participants: 4 HRM professionals, 1 higher manager, 1 regional manager, 8 middle-level managers, 10 line managers, 1 supervisor, and 3 “disadvantaged” workers. For an overview see Table 1.

All of our interviews were recorded, transcribed, and verified by the interviewees to increase the trustworthiness of the data (Flick, 2009). The first and second authors hand-coded the interview transcriptions independently. The coding system was straightforward: we coded the actions of each actor first and later how they were connected with each other internally at Dutch Cleaners, and externally with third parties who contributed to the emergence of this new hiring routine. To boost the credibility of our findings, the first and second authors compared their independent analyses of the coding and identification of patterns of action. Any irregularities or differences in their classifications were discussed and a consensus reached by all authors. This led to the identification of several different patterns of action from the different points of view. For an overview of these action patterns see Table A1. Below, we first describe in more detail the existing hiring routine at Dutch Cleaners, and then continue with the actions involved in the new hiring routine.

## FINDINGS

Before we turn to our findings, we first describe the original hiring routine at Dutch Cleaners that is utilized at the regional subunits. For regular employees at Dutch Cleaners, most managerial responsibilities are performed by the line managers, such as the hiring and firing of employees, managing and assessing their performance, as well as several administrative tasks. Since workforce demand often fluctuates rapidly in the cleaning business due to the acquisition and loss of clients, Dutch Cleaners has chosen to create a database of job candidates. The candidates can upload their CV to the company’s website, after which it is stored in its database. Whenever a line manager needs to hire a new employee, he or she can consult the database and invite candidates to apply or invite them directly for a job interview. The interview itself, as well as the final decision regarding who will



be the new employee, is also the responsibility of the line manager. The role of the HRM professionals is restricted to several administrative tasks and providing support to the line managers if they ask for it. The role of the middle-level managers is limited to the approval of vacancies. However, in practice, this is a formality, with the middle-level managers relying on the line managers' discretion.

The company's wish to become a more inclusive organization meant that many elements of these existing hiring routines would not work for the new target group. For instance, when recruiting, it is unclear whether a candidate is listed as disadvantaged or not, as most candidates do not state whether they are disadvantaged on their CV. Line managers and HRM professionals indicated that if they have a mix of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged candidates, the choice would in most cases fall on the non-disadvantaged candidates. Their reasoning is that, in general, disadvantaged candidates have less work experience and need more supervision from their line manager. Additionally, for legal reasons, it is not possible to place a job ad in which the company announces that they are looking for a "disadvantaged employee." This means that to give disadvantaged employees a better opportunity to be hired by Dutch Cleaners, the company's existing routines needed to be replaced by new ones.

#### *The Emergence of a New Hiring Routine*

In a discussion with the first author of this chapter, the company's HR director indicated that he prefers to empower the company's professionals by allowing them to create their own approaches. He also opted for this approach in the case of developing a new hiring routine. He made the regional offices' HRM professionals responsible for creating new approaches to hire disadvantaged workers. Ultimately, not only the local HRM professionals, but also line managers and middle-level managers began developing their own ways to hire disadvantaged people. In some cases, they relied on the existing hiring routine, but mostly they reinvented it because the new HRM policy was perceived as substantially different from the previous approach.

Below, we describe the actions of these members to bring the new HRM hiring routine to life as viewed from their own perspective. We start with the actions of the HRM professionals, followed by the line managers and, finally, the middle-level managers.

#### *HRM Professionals' Perspective*

The first step the HRM professionals took was to set up an infrastructure that would allow line managers to find candidates of the new target group and start the hiring process. In the Netherlands, certain organizations specifically aim at creating databases with disadvantaged workers who are looking for a job. These databases contain their CVs and specific information regarding their (dis)abilities. Examples include the Dutch employee insurance agency (an autonomous administrative authority responsible for implementing employee insurance), employment agencies, and municipalities. Instead of leaving the acquisition of

new employees to the line managers as happened in the previous routine, the HRM professionals indicated that they themselves would establish contact with these agencies. As an HRM professional remarked, by doing so, he increased the possibility that a new employee will be a disadvantaged worker:

All new job vacancies have to be reported to me, after which I contact the agencies that have a database [of disadvantaged workers]. We then give those le candidates with whom the [line managers] can schedule interviews. So basically, I have increased the likelihood that a new employee will be [a disadvantaged worker] by manipulating the recruitment process. (HRM Professional 1)

Another HRM professional described a similar approach and provided the argument that she perceived the line managers' network as well as their knowledge to be insufficient for finding enough suitable disadvantaged candidates:

Vacancies have to be reported to me first, so that there is no other way for the line managers. So, I start by placing the job ad, and then the line manager gets into contact with a number of candidates. So, in that sense, they receive support in finding disadvantaged workers. It would have been different if they had to look for these connections themselves, because where do they find disadvantaged workers? That is an area where line managers lack some knowledge. (HRM Professional 2)

These two HRM professionals indicated that by getting themselves involved in the recruitment process, the probability that a new employee will be disadvantaged is larger, as the line manager has more disadvantaged candidates to choose from. Hence, even though the line manager still chooses who will be the new employee, HRM professionals have taken up a bigger role in the hiring process, compared with the previous hiring routine.

There was another reason why HRM professionals took initiatives to be more involved in the hiring process. As the hiring of disadvantaged workers involves several complicated legal issues, the HRM professionals indicated that they were afraid that line managers would be unaware of such issues, or at least would struggle with them. They were also reluctant to let line managers decide whether someone should be counted as a disadvantaged worker. As one HRM professional explained:

Everyone always gives a different definition of "disadvantaged workers," and therefore everyone may be looking for different candidates. (HRM Professional 3)

This HRM professional explained that hiring disadvantaged people is also more complicated because people who are unable to find a job with an adequate salary, whether this is due to a disability or not, have the right to apply for social benefits, that is, a monthly allowance. Finding a paid job can have negative consequences for the right to those benefits. Candidates can risk losing their monthly benefits by accepting work, or even having to pay part of it back. This could lead to a substantial financial loss for those candidates. Some HRM professionals felt that this was too complex for line managers to take into account and decided to become more involved in the hiring process of disadvantaged workers. Thereby, the HRM professionals considered their knowledge and expertise with legal issues to be of great importance in the process of hiring disadvantaged workers. An HRM professional made this clear by giving a practical example of a case that she had recently encountered:

Yesterday I went to a location and had a talk with a disadvantaged worker who now has a contract for 12.5 to 15 hours per week. The employee insurance agency has all these rules that state that "if you have to do extra work, then we will cut your benefits." So, even though she is working, she doesn't have more income per month than when she only had her benefits. That is not very motivating. (HRM Professional 4)

Here, the HRM professional felt the need to interfere in the hiring process by involving him or herself and adopting a more hands-on approach in order to protect the financial situation of the candidate. HRM professionals expressed a similar proactive stance in developing the new routine and their actions improved the hiring of disadvantaged workers. In contrast to their previous role, in which they were mere advisors and administrators, the HRM professionals now saw themselves as active intermediaries in hiring new people at the work floor level.

#### *Line Manager's Perspective*

Even though the HRM professionals had claimed their role as experts in hiring disadvantaged workers through their actions, the company's line managers perceived those actions somewhat differently. They were less convinced of the substantial involvement of HRM professionals in the hiring process of disadvantaged workers. Nevertheless, they acknowledged the expertise of HRM professionals regarding legal issues and providing more detailed HRM services:

When I start with a new trial period, or the disadvantaged worker will be the first placed at that location, then I ask the HRM professional to check the trial agreement. I do so because I don't know the legal terms. (Line Manager 1)

The following line manager describes a similar process by indicating that the HRM professionals' legal knowledge and expertise regarding subsidies for disadvantaged workers are very valuable in the hiring process. However, HRM professionals were not asked to intervene in the hiring itself:

I have a contact at the employee insurance agency and tell her that I am looking for a disadvantaged worker with these and these competencies. Then I receive e-mails from candidates, do the talks, and inform the HRM professional about the new employee. She can then give me information about financial models, the type and magnitude of "how disadvantaged" a candidate is, the potential subsidy connected to that percentage, really providing deeper knowledge of disadvantaged workers. (Line Manager 3)

Another line manager explains how she was able to make the hiring routine more efficient. Instead of going through the HRM professional's network, she has decided to create her own networks outside of Dutch Cleaners:

If I ask the HRM professional to do it, then I will receive 12 letters from people who do not meet the requirements that we have. Now we have decided to invite people from those agencies [with databases of disadvantaged workers] to the locations so they can see the work place and learn what kind of people we are looking for. That approach is so much more effective than going through the HRM professional's network first. We can work with these parties structurally. I also see the same approach by my colleagues, and they have become very involved in creating their own networks. The HRM professional can give us updates of how the outside world is doing this and negotiate financial matters. (Line Manager 2)

Importantly, by inviting representatives of employment agencies to Dutch Cleaners work floor, the line manager was able to improve the hiring routine by showing these agencies what Dutch Cleaners is looking for. Her operational expertise allowed her to observe this opportunity for improvement.

We also observed that at some units and locations, line managers were performing most of the recruitment and selection tasks. They felt empowered to initiate contacts with external employment agencies maintaining databases of disadvantaged candidates. At these locations, the HRM professionals seemed to be less involved in the actual hiring process than they themselves explained. An illustrative example was given by a line manager who explained that employment agencies approach her directly to offer suitable candidates to her. This way, the employment agencies could find employment opportunities for their disadvantaged workers more quickly:

Since I have worked a lot with disadvantaged workers, and have created a lot of contacts with employment agencies with databases of disadvantaged workers, they now know what I am looking for and what my demands are. So nowadays they call me, "I have found a suitable person. Do you have a place to accommodate him?"

A middle manager took part in this interview, and he spontaneously remarked that:

The system has turned upside-down. First, we would go to them [employment agency] and tell them we need people, but nowadays, they say: we need to talk to ["name of the line manager"].  
(Middle-level Manager 1)

Apart from working with these specific employment agencies, we also observed that line managers began looking for alternative sources to find suitable candidates. As a line manager explained, many graduates from lower educational levels experience difficulty finding a suitable job and have a rather large distance from the labor market. As such, these graduates can also be seen as disadvantaged candidates. The following line manager explains:

I needed new employees, and got hardly any support from the company itself. So, I started looking myself, and identified an opportunity at the lower secondary professional education level. I started thinking about how to approach them, because our line of business is not really "sexy." I went to their school and asked them "who likes to start early in the morning?" Nobody responded positively. So I asked "Who likes to finish early? Because then you should start working for me." Well, all of them were enthusiastic about that prospect. So you constantly have to look for ways to make it interesting for them to work for Dutch Cleaners.  
(Line Manager 2)

It was clear that HRM managers and line managers both had their own perspectives of certain actions. Although opposing each other to a large extent, it seemed that new patterns have emerged which are important for the success of the new routine for hiring disadvantaged workers. In particular, the liberty that these line managers took upon themselves in seeking for sources and ensuring a match between worker and requirements appeared to be important.

We now turn to the perspective of the middle-level managers and highlight their contributions to creating this new hiring routine.

### *Middle-level Manager's Perspective*

The company's middle-level managers described how their actions contributed to building the new hiring routine. For instance, the decision to fill a vacant position with either a regular employee or a disadvantaged one was taken by middle-level managers in some cases:

When a vacancy opens up, I analyse whether we could fill it with a disadvantaged worker or not. If there are already some disadvantaged workers at that location, I think that we should provide the opportunity for a regular candidate, a housewife for example. You should have a mix, not all employees should be disadvantaged. (Middle-level Manager 3)

Another middle-level manager explained how he tried to motivate line managers to hire disadvantaged workers by highlighting the possible financial benefits:

I tell my line managers, "If you are looking for someone, you first contact one of the employment agencies." There you can get employees free for two or three months, or for a low hourly wage. So, I always discuss the financial consequences of their choice with them. That should be an incentive to put time and effort into making the policy succeed. (Middle-level Manager 5)

Here, the middle-level manager's strategic overview helped line managers to become aware of financial advantages from the new routine. These financial benefits could assist the line managers in completing their units' budgets.

Another middle-level manager explained that a recent negative experience regarding a disadvantaged worker had caused him to become more involved in future hiring processes of disadvantaged workers, hence showing an opposite trend to what the previous manager had reported:

Next time I want to be more involved. The introductory interview [the line manager and the HRM professional] can do without me, but when it becomes concrete, I want to get a seat at the table. Supervising those employees costs a lot of time and energy, so I think we should make a well-considered choice. (Middle-level Manager 2)

The middle-level managers' influence does not end there. A middle-level manager explained that he continues to play a role in the process even after the disadvantaged worker has begun working at Dutch Cleaners:

I keep monitoring: How is the coaching going? Do the disadvantaged workers receive guidance? Do they get appraisal talks? I also have a consultant training the line managers. And gradually you see that if we organise it this way, that we can decentralise responsibilities and it becomes just like regular employees. (Middle-level Manager 4)

The middle-level manager strictly monitors the hiring process, as well as other HRM practices such as training and development and appraisal talks, until he can decentralize it, leaving the responsibility to the line managers themselves. Thus, the middle-level manager claims to have a larger role in the new hiring routine, but he also decreases his involvement once line managers have adopted it to his satisfaction. This indicates the evolutionary and temporal character of routines, as it suggests that the routine will continue to evolve in the future.

### *Conflicting Perspectives*

Throughout this section it has become clear that the three groups of organizational actors have all played a vital role in the development of a new hiring routine at Dutch Cleaners. Their perspectives have provided new insights into how to hire disadvantaged workers and thereby contributed to building a well-functioning routine. Interestingly, we found that the different participants contributed to creating the new routine while at the same time maintaining significant differences in their perspectives and understandings. For instance, even though the company's HRM professionals claim their central role in the hiring routine, most line managers claim to be the lead actors in this as well. Also, between HRM professionals and middle-level managers some diverging perspectives seemed to emerge. For instance, the following middle-level manager explains that he feels that HRM professionals were too distant from the work floor to understand which disadvantaged workers are suitable for which jobs and which ones are not:

You should consider when you need an HRM professional. Do you need her as a contact person with job agencies? Not really. What you need them for is to motivate the line managers to actively look for disadvantaged workers. In addition, their role can be relevant when it comes to legal issues, what can I do, what can't I do? In that, the HRM professional has a clear role, but managing on the shop floor, I think that this should be organised as low as possible – on the shop floor level. (Middle-level Manager 1)

He added that the process of hiring disadvantaged workers by going through the HRM professional would take far too long:

If I call the HRM professional to tell her that I have a vacancy, then she will discuss that with an agent at the national level, who connects her to a regional agent, who connects her to a local agent, who tells her that her or she will have a suitable candidate in 6 to 8 weeks. That is too late.

A further difference in interpretation between HRM professionals and the middle-level managers is found in the degree of freedom assigned to the line managers in hiring suitable candidates. While HRM professionals explained that the line managers were free to choose the best candidate, in practice this differed between locations. Some middle-level managers indicated that the final decision was taken by the line managers and themselves, while at other locations, the HRM professional or the supervisor was also part of this process:

I pick five candidates, after which the line manager and I have interviews with them. Then we discuss "he qualifies, but he doesn't." Later, the line manager makes a follow-up appointment with two of them and invites them to the work place, so they can see what they would be doing. So I definitely influence the hiring process by deciding which five candidates we will interview in the first place. (Middle-level Manager 4)

Another middle-level manager offered a different interpretation of the process:

I make the final choice together with the line manager. I state my preference, and he or she can do the same. Usually, we agree. (Middle-level Manager 3)

Taken together, our findings demonstrate that, despite the internal conflicts about roles and responsibilities that also resulted from the differences in perspectives, the differences contributed to creating a well-functioning and successful hiring routine.

## DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we have observed how members of an organization create a new routine aimed at hiring disadvantaged workers. We observed a remarkable range of actions and perspectives regarding the way in which the desire to become an inclusive organization by adding a large number of disadvantaged workers to the company's workforce was translated into new practices.

Given that no envisioned pattern of action was created at the moment of taking the decision to become an inclusive organization, the policymakers' approach was largely bottom-up, aiming for practice to create policy rather than the other way around. We should take into consideration that the top managers of Dutch Cleaners deliberately chose a bottom-up approach. They took the role of an "invisible policy setter," who decided to devolve the actual sense-making of the hiring routines to organizational actors like HRM professionals, middle-level, and line managers. The result was that several groups of actors – HRM professionals, line managers, middle-level, managers and even external employment agencies – contributed to the generation of the new routine.

The HRM professionals were supportive in making this new routine work. They tried to establish an infrastructure first as they were aware of the legal issues and peculiarities of hiring disadvantaged workers and did not consider the line managers to be experts in this regard. The concern of the line managers was that aspects of the new routine, such as the time between identifying a vacancy and being able to fill it, would not fit the requirements on the shop floor. As a consequence, the line managers established their own relationships with special employment agencies and even schools to attract suitable candidates while leaving the financial and legal issues to the HRM professionals. They contributed to the development of the new hiring routine by establishing relevant networks with organizations which could bring them into contact with suitable disadvantaged workers. In turn, the middle-level managers acted to ensure that the right balance is maintained between the number of advantaged and disadvantaged workers at the local level. They also contributed by pointing out to line managers the financial benefits of hiring disadvantaged workers and monitoring the overall experience of employing disadvantaged workers. As a result, the multiple points of view of Dutch Cleaners' actors together developed the new hiring routine as actors were able to create opportunities that were overlooked by other actors.

Our findings also uncovered how the multiple points of view led to diverging understanding of participants' contributions and roles in hiring disadvantaged workers. Basically, each of the groups of actors claimed that they were somehow in control of the recruitment and selection process. HRM professionals got involved in the recruitment part, middle-level managers decided whether a vacancy should be filled by a disadvantaged candidate or not, and line managers were the operational specialists and created their own external networks. These findings are interesting as they clearly differ from those noted by Dionysiou and Tsoukas (2013), who proposed that joint understanding and alignment of actions are key in the (re)creation of routines. This alignment was not present in all aspects of the creation of the hiring routine at Dutch Cleaners. Thus, our

findings suggest that even though conflicts occurred they did not hamper the creation of the new routine. In fact, the company managed to exceed its expectations and generate a broadly supported HRM hiring routine.

The creation of new connections by the actors involved also provided valuable additions to the routine dynamics literature. Both the HRM professional and the line manager created new connections through which they were able to find disadvantaged candidates. Notably, creating new connections between different routines was not limited to the organization itself but also involved routines outside the organization (e.g., the routines of the employee agency). This supports the conclusions of Sele and Grand (2016) that the process of creating new connections has generative potential for routines.

We have also shown, as suggested by Berente et al. (2016), that a certain flexibility in local work practices is needed, in this case to realize an HRM policy change in organizational routines. This also implies changes in the specific roles of organizational members involved in the execution of a new HRM practice. As indicated by the middle-level manager who started monitoring the observation of HRM activities, such as the delivery of appraisal talks and training opportunities, for disadvantaged workers, this temporary involvement would lessen over time once line managers could do those tasks satisfactorily. This suggests that routines continue to evolve, since organizational actors develop their roles over time. This agrees with Berente et al. (2016), who stated that “routines continue to adapt ... , and this dynamic adjustment can be expected to continue” (p. 567).

By means of our in-depth case study, we have contributed to the literature on routine dynamics by providing empirical evidence about the process in which organizational members create, maintain, and transform organizational routines (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Instead of policy and practices that are created by people far from the shop floor, the bottom-up emergence of routines has created organically grown and fitting practices for hiring disadvantaged workers. This led to relatively little resistance to the new policy and the new group of employees, because the organizational actors who were responsible for hiring disadvantaged workers were involved intensively in the entire process.

Our findings also contribute to the HRM implementation literature by demonstrating the dynamics involved in bringing the HRM policy to life, and we have shown that there is more to this than a straightforward top-down process. We have provided empirical insights into the process in which new HRM policies and practices develop from an idea into fully working organizational HRM instruments or tools (Van Mierlo, Bondarouk, & Sanders, 2018). In most of the HRM implementation literature, the implementation of HRM policy is largely conceived as a top-down initiated, linear process (e.g. Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Wright & Nishii, 2013), suggesting that HRM implementation can be planned and enacted by following pre-defined stages with actors having clearly defined roles (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Based on this premise, scholars have proposed clearly demarcated roles and responsibilities for a variety of actors during the HRM implementation process (Valverde, Ryan, & Soler, 2006), suggesting that they are in charge of the HRM implementation process rather than also being a part of it. Such an assumption dictates that without a predefined implementation



plan, HRM practices do not survive in organizations. We have demonstrated that the creation of new HRM practices is not solely the task of policy makers or HRM professionals; middle-level and line managers can also be involved. This bottom-up creation of HRM makes sense; after all, line managers are often made responsible for the introduction of most HRM practices. We particularly revealed that implementing a new HRM policy does not necessarily need to be planned in detail from the start, but that it can develop by actually doing it, hence by using a bottom-up approach. In this way, organizational actors at Dutch Cleaners who were involved in hiring disadvantaged workers managed to meet – and even exceed – their company's objectives.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

We are fully aware that even though our study has provided empirical insights into the way in which organizational routines can be developed without an envisioned pattern of action, it also has its limitations. At the same time, these limitations provide opportunities for future studies.

Since we mainly relied on interviews instead of observations, we were unable to observe the emergence of routine dynamics in real time. Through the use of retrospective questioning during the interviews, we were able to reconstruct the actions to bring a new routine to life. Future studies could contribute to this exploration by incorporating observations and maybe other techniques like diary-keeping in the data collection process. Another limitation of this study is that we executed it in an organization in which a culture of non-envisioned policy implementation was already present to some extent. Thus, some organizational actors might have obtained experience with this kind of policy change prior to the one aimed at hiring disadvantaged workers. Therefore, we encourage scholars to study the emergence of non-envisioned routines in different contexts in which this approach is less common, like governmental organizations and large companies. We also believe it would be valuable to study routine emergence in single-unit organizations, instead of in decentralized business units, as was the case in this study. Lastly, it would be very valuable to further explore the generative potential of multiple points of view in the development of routines.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

We analyzed the emergence of a new hiring routine by asking how the perspectives of routine participants contribute to building new patterns of action without an envisioned routine. We found that the freedom granted by the absence of an envisioned routine allows actors to try out new avenues. The development of new connections and the appropriation of new roles demonstrated how actors make use of such freedom. For example, the HRM professionals saw and took the opportunity to create a central position for themselves by making use of their expertise regarding legal issues and their knowledge of the labor market; middle-level managers used their hierarchical authority to intervene and stabilize the new routine; and the line managers appeared to be creative in engaging

parties outside Dutch Cleaners to seek for the right match, a task that they took upon themselves without the consent of the HRM professionals. Although all of these actors maintained their own perspective on the responsibilities and actions needed by others to make this new hiring routine work, the end result is that they still managed to create a well-functioning routine and achieve outcomes beyond the expectations of their top managers.

The lack of formal aspects of a new HRM policy at the start of its implementation can lead to misunderstandings and misalignments, but at the same time, it provides the opportunity to depart freely from existing routines whenever deemed necessary in the pursuit of realizing the goal of the organization. This contributes to well-fitting and broadly supported routines.

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## APPENDIX

*Table A1.* Action Patterns Identified at Dutch Cleaners.

Topic	Subtopic
Hiring routine for “regular” employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Line managers identify a vacant position, or the need for a new employee.</li> <li>• Line managers access Dutch Cleaners’ database in which candidates have uploaded their CVs.</li> <li>• Line managers make a selection of candidates and invite them for interview.</li> <li>• HRM professionals can provide support with this if the line manager asks them.</li> <li>• Line managers choose the new employee and conduct the onboarding process.</li> <li>• HRM professionals do all the administrative tasks concerning new employees.</li> </ul>
New routine for hiring disadvantaged workers from the point of view of HRM professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Line managers inform HRM professionals of any new vacancies.</li> <li>• HRM professionals communicate job vacancies to an employment agency or municipality unit that is specifically focused on employing disadvantaged workers.</li> <li>• Line managers carry out job interviews and decide which candidate to hire, and HRM professionals support them in this process.</li> <li>• HRM professionals create support for vacancies in the business unit.</li> <li>• HRM professionals build a network among employment agencies and municipalities.</li> <li>• HRM professionals are always present at complex interviews.</li> </ul>
New routine for hiring disadvantaged workers from the point of view of line managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Line managers create their own direct contacts with labor supply organizations when they urgently need to fulfill a vacancy.</li> <li>• Line managers have instituted different actions to attract job candidates:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Certified on-the-job training.</li> <li>◦ Providing information for school-leavers about possible internships at Dutch Cleaners.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Line managers contact HRM professionals only for labor-related legal issues and external relations with social partners.</li> </ul>
New routine for hiring disadvantaged workers from the point of view of middle-level managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle-level managers take the decision to fill a vacancy with either a disadvantaged worker or a regular candidate.</li> <li>• Middle-level managers participate in preliminary talks with line managers and HRM professionals about different candidates.</li> <li>• Middle-level managers monitor the process in order to avoid difficulties in the hiring process.</li> <li>• Middle-level managers consult line managers to contact the Dutch employee insurance agency or employment agencies. Through such agencies, workers can come to Dutch Cleaners for two-three months at zero cost and can be dismissed without needing to go through the extensive bureaucratic processes.</li> </ul>