



**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS SCHOOL OF COMMERCE**

**GRADUATE STUDIES**

**Practices and Challenges of Devolution of Human Resource  
Management Responsibilities to Line Managers in  
Ethiopian Electric Utility.**

**A Research Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment of the requirement for the  
Award of Masters of Art Degree In Human Resource Management**

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**GRADUATE STUDIES**

**THE PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES OF DEVOLUTION OF HUMAN  
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES TO LINE MANAGERS.  
THE CASE OF ETHIOPIAN ELECTRIC UTILITY (EEU)**

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## DECLARATION

I, the under signed, here by declare that this thesis is my own work and all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete reference.

Declared By

Yoseph Gemechu .....

Signature

Date .....

Signature: .....

## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that Mr. Yoseph Gemechu has carried out his research project on the topic entitle **“The practices and challenges of devolution of human resource management responsibilities to line managers: In Ethiopian Eleceric Utility (EEU)”**. The thesis was carried out under my supervision. In my opinion, the project is original in nature and is appropriate for submission of the award of Master of Arts (MA) Degree in Human Resource Management.

Advisor: .....

Date: .....

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## ACRONYMS

HR – Human Resource

FLM - first line managers

LM 's – line mangers

MM - Middle Management

TM - Top Management

RHRAM - Regional Human Resource Adminstration managers

WUH – Work unit heads

M&AC – Managers and areas in charge

CSM - Customer sevice managers

EEU - Ethiopian Electric Utility

EELPA - Ethiopian Electric Light and power authority

EEPCO - Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation

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## ***Abstract***

*The purpose of the study is to show the practices of delegating some of human resource management responsibilities from HR department to line managers and to identify the challenges faced. In this paper a descriptive research approach is used and designed for fifty line managers, few middle and top level managers. Structured questionnaire was used to collect the primary data interview questions were designed to get the necessary feed back with respect to the study. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and presented using tables. It was found that 80 % of the overall FLMs responded HRM activities were devolved to them, while only 20% not devolved or had no such plan at the time of this study. Based on the findings the study concluded that line managers of Ethiopian Electric Utility are involved in various activities and at the same time they had faced with some challenges. The study recommended that HR professionals should work hard to improve their performance contribution, some HRM activities practiced by line managers as shown in the response and the intention of not considering HR activities as a core component by First line managers are the weaknesses observed that shall be improved.*

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Back ground of the study

The key aspects of Human Resource Management literature as it is mentioned by different scholars, it was defined more pragmatically by Boxall and Purcell (2003) as ‘all those activities associated with the management of employment relationships in the firm’. Boxall, Purcell and Wright (2007) describe HRM as ‘the management of work and people towards desired ends, is a fundamental activity in any organization in which human beings are employed.

The HR activities aspect of SHRM was emphasized by Wright and McMahan (1992) when they defined it as: ‘The pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable an organization to achieve its goals’. Alvesson (2009) also focused on goal achievement but incorporated the role of employment relationships when he wrote that SHRM is concerned with ‘how the employment relationships for all employees can be managed in such a way as to contribute optimally to the organization’s goal achievement’.

Becker and Huselid (2006) commented that SHRM focuses on organizational performance rather than individual performance. It also emphasizes the role of HR management systems as solutions for businesses as a whole rather than individual HR management practices in isolation.

Among the major Strategic human resource management principles taken from the literature, devolution of HR responsibility to line managers is one of the key element. Abraraw Chane and Alemayehu Mulugeta, (2016:149).

The literature on HRM has addressed empowering line managers in HR, using terms such as devolution or devolvement of HR responsibilities to the line (Rimi & Yusliza, 2014). The core idea behind empowerment is the understanding that no one knows a job better than the person who does the specific task; therefore, allowing employees to make relevant decisions makes an organization more efficient (Ergeneli, Ari, & Metin, 2007). In the view of Strategic human resource management, devolvement is the degree to which HRM practices involve and give responsibility to line managers rather than HR specialists. Honey (2006) defines a line manager as a manager who directs the work of individual employees and is directly responsible for the

achievement of organizational objectives. The line manager obtains results through teams in the organization. Line managers are answerable to higher level managers in the management hierarchy of the organization (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003).

Line managers are better positioned to carry out human resource management functions by influencing the direction of teams towards the achievement strategic goals and objectives of the organizational (Townsend, Wilkinson, Allan & Amber, 2012). There are many advantages of involving first line managers in the HRM area. Even there are some challenges of transferring HR response to these people. Line involvement in HRM in recent is seen by Brewster and Larsen (2000), Renwick (2003) to have five main rationales: To reduce costs, to provide a more comprehensive approach to HRM, to place responsibility for HRM with the managers most concerned, to speed up decision making and as an alternative to outsourcing HRM functions.

The literature on devolution suggest that there are a number of challenges that can limit the performance of line managers in putting HRM policies in to practice. Bos-Nehles (2010) argues that LMs experience five possible constraints in implementing HRM practices: lack of time, lack of relevant HRM competence, lack of support from the HRM department, lack of clear policies and procedures, and lack of motivation to execute HRM responsibilities.

So far, an empirical study on the issue focusing on First Line Managers has not been done in Ethiopian Electric Utility, related empirical studies that have been conducted both in and out side Ethiopia have been tried to review. Hence, in this research paper the researcher is trying to view the practices, identify the challenges of devolving HRM responsibilities to first line managers and their role in EEU Also, trying to show how line managers understand devolution, the capability to handle HRM functions, the rationale and the support they need from upper level management.

## **1.2 Background of the case organization**

EEU is a sole state owned electric power service provider for domestic and industrial sector hence, contributing a great deal for the development of the nation economy and infrastructure. The organization is re established as Ethiopian Electric Utility (EEU) by 2014, has transformed to its current position from the former Ethiopian Electric power and authority (EELPA), Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation (EEPCO).

It has 15 regions across the country and 19,200 talented, professional permanent and fixed contract staffs and it is estimated that more than 300 Line managers are available (source EEU Corporate HR office Ref.no 68.19 / 299 / 09). EEU has envisioned “By the year 2025, To be a middle class electric power provider energizing Ethiopia’s substantiable growth and enable the country to be the power hub of Africa”. Its mission is “To provide a modernized, standardized, quality and durable power supply service to all citizens”. Since the organization has passed and transformed different reforms and structural adjustments, the organization is always working for efficiency and effectiveness of this paradigm shift has changed the sector in general and its HRM in particular by realigning and devolving its HRM system to the responsible line managers. Strategic human resource management has been formulated, implemented and delegation of authority is being practiced. In EEU, the responsibility of HRM rests on the management at all levels, particularly on the middle management and first line management. Therefore, the policy is formulated to include the active involvement of line managers of all levels in the execution of HR activities. These line managers are categorized and available in different levels of Managerial position according to the staff plan of the organization. Source: (Ethiopian Electric Utility, Delegation of Human Resource Management Authority, February 2017).

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

Ethiopian Electric Utility has devised and executed HR policies that serve the active involvement of line managers. Some of the HR activities are devolved to line managers so as to achieve the schemes on devolution. However, some of the first line managers in EEU had faced problems on the execution of HRM activities. As the detailed discussion of the review of the literature suggested, there are quite a number of issues and challenges that can make the overall progress of devolution difficult, and therefore it is very important that such issues are properly managed.

The problem that the research addressed are having often with limited resources, reputable reporting, boring meetings and committee works. Pressure on reputable works preventing line managers from spending adequate time on HR activities (Nehles et al. (2006); (Conway & Kathy, 2010); Watson et al. (2007). The pressure of the operational tasks and the increasing HR responsibilities put excessive demands on line managers' time and energy, and might result in role overload for line managers (McConville, 2006); Lack of support from the higher level Management and HR professionals to deal with staff who need re-skilling to understand the HR role and what their HR Policies and procedures implies. Without adequate training and support, line managers are always vulnerable in carrying out their HR tasks (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010; Conway & Monks, 2010; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010); Lack of desire in undertaking HR activities. The devolution literature clearly shows the apparent lack of willingness from many line managers in undertaking HR responsibilities (Hailey et al., 2005; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010; Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006; Renwick & MacNeil; and Lack of competences for managing people is another limitation. Line managers lack the necessary skills and expertise to properly carry out their devolved HR responsibilities and that the phenomenon has not changed over the years ( Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010; Nehles et al., 2006; Stanton et al., 2010). So, if this issue is not handled properly, there will be a gap of not executing the devolved HRM activities properly, resulting in work over load on HR professionals and HR department, put excessive demands on line managers' time and energy, a decrease in decision making, etc. As a result, the transformation or the adjustment made earlier on the staff plan of EEU regarding the delegation of authority may face problem.

Thus, there is a need to examine the practices and identify the challenges of first line managers involvement, the rationale, the support needed on devolution of HRM activities, which is the aim of the proposed research.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

In line with the above statement of the problem, the research is going to address the following questions:

- 1- To what extent are HRM activities devolved to line managers in EEU ?
- 2- What are the practices of devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers in EEU?
- 3- What are the challenges faced by line managers in carrying out the HRM responsibilities?
- 4- What was the organization rationale to devolve HRM responsibility to line managers?
- 5- What support do line managers in EEU need to carry out their HRM responsibility?

## **1.5 Research objectives**

### **1.5.1 General objective**

The objectives of this research paper is to examine the practices and describe the challenges of devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers in Ethiopian electric utility.

### **1.5.2 Specific objective**

To identify the extent of involvement of HRM activities to line managers.

To examine the practices of devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers.

To describe the challenges faced of devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

This research study will examine practice and challenges of devolving HRM responsibilities to line managers and address how the middle and top level management look over line managers HRM role. Though, devolution is a strategic approach for HRM , there is a lack of empirical studies in Ethiopia case. Therefore, the research is expected to contribute to the existing literature

by bringing about the practices and challenges of devolution of HRM Responsibility in Ethiopia context.

Moreover, the paper will contribute new insight to similar organizations on how First Line Managers practice and face challenges in devolving HRM responsibility.

Provide insight to Middle and Top level management of EEU to check the structure, how first line managers perceive and internalized / their HR duties and level of involvement.

Serve as a supplementary input and may provide clues for other researcher who will conduct further research in similar industry.

Transfer a message to EEU middle level management, HR professionals, top level management when they deal with practice & challenges of devolution of HRM responsibility. Further, it helps the organization to discover the areas where improvement is needed and where the support line managers need.

### **1.7 Scope of the study**

The organization selected is a service provider organization which has a number of work units were first line managers involved. Moreover, few members of middle HR heads and Top level managers participation has been also considered in the target population.

For this research paper due to geographical dispersion of the study area, time and financial constraints more groups are not included. However, targeted population at Head office and Addis Ababa regions where active operational activities being performed is chosen.

Line Managers in this study would mean managers who are administering and leading the day today activities of two or more subordinates under them located in head office and Addis Ababa four regions.

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to explore the practices and identify the problems of devolving HRM activities of four categories of FLMs in the case of Ethiopian Electric Utility.

Much of the discussions were attempted based on the results provided by these group of respondents.

One of the limitations of this study is the target group which was confined or selected First line managers located in Head office and Addis Ababa four regions as there are a large number of First line managers in the remaining regions. Moreover, this was a case study focusing on a single company. In the case of Ethiopia, it is difficult to get similar companies to Electric Utility. So, the findings and the result may not be generalized across many firms.

## **1.9 Operational terms**

**Addis Ababa Region** - A region in EEU comprised of four regions (North Addis Ababa, South Addis Ababa, East Addis Ababa and West Addis Ababa regions). Source: (EEU regions Staff plan)

**HRM** (Human resource management) is the managerial utilization of the efforts, knowledge, capabilities and committed behaviors that people contribute to an authoritatively co-ordinated human enterprise as part of an employment exchange (or more temporary contractual arrangement) to carry out work tasks in a way that enables the enterprise to continue in the future Watson (2010: 919).

**SHRM** (Strategic Human resource management) is an approach which requires interpretation and adaptation by practitioners to ensure the most suitable fit between HR business strategies and plans. Thus, the overall themes of SHRM are the integration of all HRM functions, adherence to broad organization goals and responsiveness to the external environment (Armstrong, 2009).

**Devolution** - is the extent to which human resource management functions have been shared with line managers and other departments within the organization (Price, 2007).

**Regions** - geographical boundaries in EEU, (15 regions all over the country)

Source: EEU Delegation of Human Resource Management Authority manual, February 2017, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Board of directors** - A high level of government officials assignee

Source: EEU Delegation of Human Resource Management Authority manual, February 2017, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**CEO** - chief executive officer, head of the organization.

Source: EEU Delegation of Human Resource Management Authority manual, February 2017, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Process owners** - chief officers next to CEO.

Source: EEU Delegation of Human Resource Management Authority manual, February 2017, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

## **1.10 Organization of the study**

The thesis will be organized in to five chapters. The first chapter consists of Background of the study, background of the case organization, Statement of the problem, Research questions, Research objectives, Significance of the study, Scope of the study, operational terms and organization of the study.

Chapter two include two main sections, Theoretical literature review and Empirical literature review based on what other researchers found out.

Chapter three depicts the detailed methodological approach followed in this study.

Chapter four is the results and discussion part.

Chapter five is the final part of this paper composed of summary, conclusion and recommendations.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Theoretical literature review**

This part of the case study deals with definition and concepts of HRM, SHRM, line managers. In addition, it discusses about the views of different scholars to devolvement of HRM responsibility to line managers, the rationale for devolving HRM responsibilities, the perspectives about the importance, practices and the challenges line managers faced. Further, it deals with the skills, dimensions and supports required for the line managers to be successful in achieving the organization objectives.

#### **2.1.1 Human resource management (HRM)**

Human resource management is directly involved in the development and implementation of policies and practices that affect all the employees in an organization. They include organizational strategies for knowledge management, people management, talent management, recruitment and selection, employee welfare, equal opportunity, health and safety, human resource administration and statutory requirements management (Armstrong, 2008). Armstrong (2008) continues to argue that human resource management is mainly concerned with recruitment and selection, performance management, human resource planning, training and development, reward management and employee relations.

A more comprehensive definition was offered by Watson (2010: 919): Human resource management is the managerial utilization of the efforts, knowledge, capabilities and committed behaviours that people contribute to an authoritatively co-ordinated human enterprise as part of an employment exchange (or more temporary contractual arrangement) to carry out work tasks in a way that enables the enterprise to continue in the future.

It is concerned with all aspects of how people are employed, managed and developed in organizations. As Boxall (2013:13) pointed out: ‘Human resources include the knowledge, skills, networks and energies of people and, underpinning them, their physical and emotional health, intellectual capabilities, personalities and motivations.’ HRM is delivered through the human resource (HR) architecture of systems and structures, the HR functions and, importantly, line management.

### **2.1.2 Strategic human resource management (SHRM) defined**

There are many definitions of Strategic human resource management. It bridges business strategy and HRM and Human resource management focuses on the integration of HR with the business and its environment. SHRM has a clear focus on implementing strategic change and growing the skill base of the organization to ensure that the organization can compete effectively in the future (Holbeche, 2004).

According to Armstrong (2009), strategic human resource management (HRM) emphasizes the need for the HR plans and strategies to be formulated within the context of overall organizational strategies and objectives and to be responsive to the changing nature of the organization's external environment. It is an approach which requires interpretation and adaptation by practitioners to ensure the most suitable fit between HR business strategies and plans. Thus, the overall themes of SHRM are the integration of all HRM functions, adherence to broad organization goals and responsiveness to the external environment (Armstrong, 2009).

Strategic HRM is crucial in today's business world. When implemented successfully, strategic HRM translates human assets into shareholder value. Effective HRM acquires quality employees, motivates them to maximize performance and helps meet their psychological and social needs. This leads to long term relationships with skilled and happy employees (Stewart & Brown, 2011). In addition, good human resource practice create more satisfied employees (Stewart & Brown, 2011). From this point, it is possible to say that good HRM practice can improve work and efficiency in organizations by motivating employees.

The strategic human resource management field has emphasized human and social capital as key resources for firms, yet focused primarily on organizational-level conjectures such as the configuration of high-performance work practices and their 'fit' with the organizational strategy (Mäkelä, Sumelius, Höglund & Ahlvik, 2012). Improving the competence of workforce through training and development activities is seen as a way of creating a competitive advantage. From the strategic perspective, training is employed not only to improve an employee's current skills, but also to prepare each employee for future responsibilities. In the process of learning within an organization, human capital becomes increasingly firm-specific and cannot readily be reproduced by its competitor (Chen&Hung, 2010).

‘The central premise of strategic human resource management theory is that successful organizational performance depends on a close fit or alignment between business and human resource strategy’ (Batt, 2007).

### **2.1.3 Defining line managers**

The traditional roles of line managers include providing technical expertise, managing operational costs, measuring operational performance, monitoring work processes, planning work allocation and dealing with customers or clients (Dalziel & Strange, 2007).

First-line managers are the lowest level in the organisation’s management team: they oversee and supervise the work of operating employees. Hales (2005, p. 473) defines a first-line manager as a manager “to whom non-managerial employees report”. He addresses the increasing responsibility given to first-line managers as a change from being operational supervisors to becoming ‘team-leaders/co-ordinators’ or ‘business unit managers’.

Line managers are a type of managers to whom individual employees directly report to. Line managers on the other hand report to higher level managers on behalf of the employees and teams they are responsible for (Renwick, 2003). Honey (2006) defines a line manager as a manager who directs the work of individual employees and is directly responsible for the achievement of organizational objectives.

The line manager obtains results through teams in the organization. The line manager’s level of accountability is higher in comparison to that of subordinates’. He or she is accountable to senior management in the organization the work done by individual employees. Line managers are answerable to higher level managers in the management hierarchy of the organization (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003).

Line managers play an important role in practicing HR initiatives, because they are the responsible managers for implementing HR practices in the production or the provision of services (Qadeer, Shafique & Rehman, 2011; Watson, Maxwell & Farquhason, 2007).

HR initiatives such as training have always been considered as one of line managers’ job (Papalexandris & Panayotopoulou, 2005). Line managers are also expected to create a synergy between human, financial and physical with the allocation of time, money, and energy to enhance the development of their subordinate (Larsen & Brewster, 2003).

#### **2.1.4 Devolution of HRM responsibility to line managers**

The discussion and research into devolvement of HR to line managers came into prominence in the mid 1980's. The literature on HRM has addressed empowering line managers in HR, using terms such as devolution or devolvement of HR responsibilities to the line (Rimi & Yusliza, 2014). The core idea behind empowerment is the understanding that no one knows a job better than the person who does the specific task; therefore, allowing employees to make relevant decisions makes an organization more efficient (Ergeneli, Ari, & Metin, 2007). As line managers are in a position to know their subordinates, devolution empowers them to make HR decisions that affect those they supervise.

Although the HR department is typically considered to be solely responsible for HRM, in practice, line managers often are in the best position to take primary responsibility for effectively adopting and delivering HR policies and practices (Gilbert et al., 2011). Line managers have been found to have a greater influence on improving employee job satisfaction, commitment, and extra-role behaviors than HRM managers (Harney & Jordan, 2008). Thus, both HR managers and line managers are important to the success of an organization's HRM efforts. As agents of HRM, line managers and HR managers need to work together to unify the organization's HRM goals. Previous research has suggested that HR and line managers should work jointly on problem solving and other business related issues (Khan, 2011). Power, Milner, and Garavan (2008) found that strategic HR builds a partnership in which line managers and HR managers jointly improve team performance and foster the well-being of employees. Bos-Nehles (2010) believes that more focus should be given to how HR professionals can assist line managers to achieve an effective partnership between them. Similarly, Chen, Hsu, and Yip (2011) reported that HR and line managers should collaborate with each other to strike a balance between the devolution and centralization of HR tasks.

##### **2.1.4.1 Devolvement of HRM activities**

Devolvement is the degree to which HRM practices involve and give responsibility to line managers rather than HR specialists. According to proponents of the concept, devolvement makes line managers responsible for the management of the HR of their unit. The works of Neil suggests, the line managers role in HRM literature shows the level and degree of HRM responsibility which are devolved to line managers (Christian Mary Mac Neil . 2004)

At the same time, Cunningham and Hyman (1997) noted that the devolution of responsibility to the line and to HR consultants promises liberation of HR professionals from the burdensome toil of conducting routine techniques., allowing them to become more involved in strategic business decisions.

Devolvement is the extent to which human resource management functions have been shared with line managers and other departments within the organization (Price, 2007). Traditional human resource management functions include rewards and recognition, payment of salaries, employee performance appraisal and training and development. As a result of the shared functions, human resource experts are focusing more on strategic aspects of human resource management such as industrial relations and long term personnel planning (Njau, 2012).

Line managers are directly involved with realizing business goals and objectives by supervising individual employees and teams to ensure that performance standards are maintained. As a result, the responsibility of line managers to carry out functions of human resource management is perceived as critical to the success of the organization. Since line managers interact with employees on a daily basis, they can directly motivate and influence positive behavior and attitudes of employees better than human resource experts (Andersen, Cooper & Zhu, 2007).

#### **2.1.4.2 Responsibilities of the Line Manager**

HRM is an aspect of all management jobs because it is an essential organizational process. Line managers, those who directly supervise employees engaged in the operations of the firm, are closely involved in HRM and almost always accountable for the performance of their team (Boxall & Purcell, 2008).

Some of the responsibilities of the typical line manager include in HR: Recruiting and hiring talent to fill team positions, providing training and support to new hires, cross training employees to ensure job rotation and minimize assignment coverage gaps, providing coaching and performance feedback to all team members, communicating and ensuring understanding of functional or departmental goals, monitoring individual and team metrics and performance versus targets, identifying the need for corrective actions, ensuring quality standards for all processes, evaluating overall team and individual performance and delivering the performance

reviews, engaging with other line managers across the organization, providing reports on productivity and other performance indicators to management.

The general background to line manager involvement in HRM in this literature is outlined, as is their involvement in specific aspects of HRM.

### **2.1.5 The rationale for devolving HRM responsibilities to line managers**

The responsibility to ensure that the strategic vision of the organization is enacted on the line managers and the organizations' HR are the most important resources to achieve the organizations' visions. Hence, to achieve the strategic vision of the organization, line managers need to have the authority and responsibility on HRM decision-making, which requires both a devolvement of power on behalf of a central HR function and an increase in the skills and understanding of the line managers with respect to HR activities.

As evidenced, literature studies from different area describe the following as rationale for devolving HRM activities to line management Abraraw Chane and Alemayehu Mulugeta (2016): Certain issues are too complex for top management to comprehend, local managers are able to respond more quickly to local problems and conditions because line managers operate at the workplace alongside the people they manage, it is suggested that their reactions can be more immediate and appropriate and, their solutions are more likely to tie in with business realities and, therefore, contribute more overtly to organizational goals and performance. Hutchinson and Purcell (2008), says that there are clear advantages to involving first line managers in people management by arguing that these managers are best placed to deal with such issues, being closest to front line employees, communicating with them regularly, and with direct responsibility for the management of employees on a day to day basis; It results in motivating employees and effective control, as line managers are in constant contact with employees, also enhance line management ownership of issues, and so increase their commitment to integrating HR with other objectives; It helps to prepare future managers (by allowing middle managers to practice decision-making skills) and results in higher levels of motivation and more effective control of employees and sharpens line managers' decision-making skills and thus prepares them for higher level positions. The drive to place responsibility for HRM to the line, in an attempt to increase

the speed of decision making, and using the line as an alternative to outsourcing the HR function (Renwick, 2003:272). Finally, it helps to reduce costs. It is one of the reasons for devolving HR to the line are cost-cutting imperatives. Renwick (2003) discussed that the results of his study confirms the findings made in Brewster and Larsen's (2000) work, as the line managers acknowledge that they shared the completion of HR work with HR (in grievance handling for example), that there was a drive to reduce costs.

### **2.1.6 The importance in devolving HRM responsibilities to line managers**

Most contributors in the research of the line management involvement in human resource management (HRM) argued that the devolution of HRM activities to line managers (LMs) is an important practice in the modern organizations. The LMs' prominent role is justified through their influence on employee attitudes and behavior (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Employee attitudes and behavior are essential to connect HRM with organizational performance. LMs are in the best position to take responsibility for converting HRM policies into practice, and for influencing the direction of work teams to achieve organizational goals (Townsend, Wilkinson, Allan, & Bamber, 2012). As employees are more likely to rely on the actions and support of their LMs, their attitudes and behaviors can be guided to achieve real improvements in unit level outcomes, potentially contributing to overall organizational performance (McConville, 2006; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

Line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness is defined as the degree of satisfaction to which HRM practices are enacted or put into practice as judged by employee experience (derived from Gratton & Truss, 2003). Employees can evaluate line managers' HR performance utmost, since they experience how line managers implement HRM practices on a daily basis.

In literature there is emerging growing support for assessing HRM from the employee perspective (Gibb, 2001; Bowen & Ostrof, 2004; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). The work of Mary Mac Neil gives support to the importance of line managers for the successful implementation of HRM strategy and processes, and helping to achieve the designed strategic outcome of superior organizational performance Mac Neil . (2004).

This reallocation of tasks from HR department to line managers is referred to as HR devolution and is considered crucial to an effective implementation of HRM in the organization because of line managers central position in realizing core business objectives and their direct impact on subordinates motivation, commitment, and discretionary behavior. Caroline Gilbert , Sophie De winne and Luc Sels (2011).

### **2.1.7 The practices of Devolving HRM activities to line managers**

Practitioners and academics alike acknowledge that Line Managers (LMs) are responsible for the execution and implementation of HRM practices in the organization (Bos-Nehles, 2010). Indirectly, LMs have been regarded as key for the effectiveness of HRM and the achievement of positive employee and organizational performance (Soens, 2012).

HRM implementation is defined as the application and execution of HRM practices in the organization (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). “HRM content consists of specific implemented bundles of HRM practices and policies. It refers to the set of practices adopted, preferably largely driven by the strategic goals and values of the organization.” (p. 12, Vigna, 2012).

Effective implementation of HRM practices is seen as the result of a fit between strategic choice and the HRM architecture (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). On the other hand Bowen and Ostroff (2004) argue that the HRM process and conditions under which HRM practices are (not) effective, need to be taken into account. The authors state that the degree of implementation of HRM practices in the organization depends on the ‘strength of the HRM system’.

HRM practices typically include the empowerment, motivational, and skill domains and are likely to influence business performance by simultaneously providing employees with the opportunity to contribute to the organization’s success, motivating them to perform, and increasing the skills of the workforce (Subramony, 2009).

### **2.1.8 The challenges of devolving HRM responsibilities to line managers**

Experience as well as research in the field of devolution of HR responsibilities to the line has shown that the implementation of HR tasks by LMs is not always executed the way HRM policy makers intended it initially. This may be caused by several factors. Bos-Nehles (2010) argues that LMs experience five possible constraints in implementing HRM practices: lack of time, lack of relevant HRM competence, lack of support from the HRM department, lack of clear policies and procedures, and lack of motivation to execute HRM responsibilities.

The literature discusses areas of challenges line managers faced in practicing the HRM activities: Having often with limited resources and playing role in the operation of many businesses preventing line managers from spending adequate time on HR activities. (Nehles et al. (2006); (Conway & Kathy, 2010); Watson et al. (2007), lack of the higher level Management to deal with staff who need re-skilling and lack of training to understand their HR role (Bond & Wise, 2003; Conway & Monks, 2010; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010).

Lack of training and continuous refreshment on HR role. Without adequate training and support, line managers are always vulnerable in carrying out their HR tasks (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003), Pressure from middle and top level management on reputable works. The pressure of the operational tasks and the increasing HR responsibilities put excessive demands on line managers' time and energy, and might result in role overload for line managers (McConville, 2006)., lack of desire or willingness to execute their HR responsibilities. The devolution literature clearly shows the apparent lack of interest from many line managers in undertaking HR responsibilities (Hailey et al., 2005; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010; Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006; Renwick & MacNeil, Capacity is another limitation that can hinder line managers in implementing HRM successfully (Brewster & Larsen, 2000). , not having the right competences for managing people. There is evidence that line managers generally lack the necessary skills and expertise to properly carry out their devolved HR responsibilities and that the phenomenon has not changed over the years (e.g. Currie & Procter, 2001; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010; Nehles et al., 2006; Stanton et al., 2010), They are experiencing difficulties because of a lack of support from HR department and higher level management. Some researchers suggest that the amount of support HR professionals provide to the line will be very important in determining whether a devolution strategy will result in effective people management (Gennard & Kelly, 1997, Perry & Kulik, 2008). The research of Whittaker and Marchington (2003) reports that line managers themselves express concern that a lack of support from HR professionals during the executing of an HRM practice can detract from their overall effectiveness, lack of support on what their HR Policies and procedures implies, on how to execute their HRM responsibilities. Case studies reveal there is significant perceptual divergence between line managers and HR professionals on aspects of line manager involvement in HRM (Maxwell & Watson, 2006; Harris et al., 2002). This implies that line managers are

unclear about their HR role and responsibilities. According to McConville (2006), line managers can perceive role dissonance and ambiguity when their role is not clearly defined.

So far, empirical study on the issue of exploring the practices and identify the challenges faced on FLMs' has not been done in EEU and first line managers involvement, the rationale, the support needed on devolution of HRM activities was not also measurably and clearly known in the case organization. Related empirical studies that have been conducted outside and some cases studies in Ethiopia have been reviewed and discussed in the literature. However, all of them were different from this study in terms of their objective and focus area.

### **2.1.9 Level and the dimensions of Devolution to line managers**

Devolvement of HRM responsibility to line managers is a principle of SHRM, devolvement of HRM activities to line managers is among the key debatable issues in the SHRM theory and which is unlikely for Ethiopian business as HR Departments are traditional and line managers are less skilled. In Ethiopia, there is low level of HRM responsibilities' devolution to line managers (*Abraraw, 2015*). While HRM specialists have higher level of sole responsibility for decisions over labor relations, employee health, security and safety, employee placement, recruitment, training and development, compensation, and reward; line managers have a higher level of sole responsibility for decisions over executing employee performance appraisal and designing job role. However, all of the responsibilities for HR practices are jointly held by HR specialists and line managers in consultation with each other. Strategic Human Resource Management (*Abraraw Chane and Alemayehu Mulugeta, 2016, p.163, 164*) Thus, there is no devolved rather shared HR responsibility in large business organizations in Ethiopia. The level of devolvement of HRM responsibilities to line management in large business organizations in Ethiopia can be predicted by: HRM budget, relative HR Department size, relative organization size, HR Director's involvement in key decisions, and intensity of industry competition.

There is increasing evidence to suggest that the human resource management functions have been devolved to line managers in many organizations (*Kulik& Bainbridge, 2006*). Devolvement is the extent to which human resource management functions have been shared with line managers and other departments within the organization (*Price, 2007*). As a result of the shared functions, human resource experts are focusing more on strategic aspects of human resource management such as industrial relations and long term personnel planning (*Njau, 2012*).

Line managers interact with employees on a daily basis, they can directly motivate and influence positive behavior and attitudes of employees better than human resource experts (Andersen, Cooper & Zhu, 2007).

Management skills and leadership is another important aspect of human resource functions undertaken by line managers in organizations (Budhwar, 2000). Both management and leadership skills influence change in attitudes and behavior of employees thus are critical to effective application of human resource functions by line managers (Purcell & Kinnie, 2007).

The involvement of line manager's in human resource management roles was measured through their engagement in resolving conflicts between senior management and employees (Brandl et al., 2009) by setting objectives, organizing, and employee motivation and communicating organizational strategies, measurement of performance and establishing employee development strategies.

Budhwar (2000) noted six aspects of human resource managements that line managers were increasingly involved in. These were found to be workforce expansion and reduction, recruitment, pay, training, health and safety, industrial relations. Dalziel and Strange (2007) pointed out that there is increasing evidence that line managers are being trained to perform human resource functions, which emphasizes the involvement of line managers in human resource functions. Honey (2006) indicated that very little research has been conducted regarding the involvement of line managers in the human resource function of employee training and development. Boxall and Purcell (2011) opined that line managers have been involved in employee career development together with human resource specialists. Human resource specialist provides critical support to identifying and planning for employee career development. This fact has led some researcher to conclude that the human resource specialist should shoulder the responsibility for poor human resource management in organizations especially in the area of career development (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank & Ulrich, 2012).

With regard to the human resource function of employee discipline, studies shows that line managers have been increasingly involved in resolving employee conflicts and ensuring discipline. Jayawardana and O'Donnell (2009).

The involvement of line managers in employee grievance and disciplinary cases requires that they have both supervisor and managerial handling styles. The study established that most human resource managers were directly involved in disciplinary and grievances meetings to ensure that good decisions prevailed (McConville, 2006). One of the main reasons for little involvement of line managers in grievance and discipline duties include the fact that the work is time consuming and complex. In addition, most line managers fear that their weaknesses in handling grievances and discipline issues will be exposed (McConville, 2006).

#### **2.1.10 Essential supports to line managers**

Line managers are central to the successful implementation of a health and well-being strategy. They also have a crucial role in creating the culture necessary to support a healthy workplace. Many managers are only trained to focus on the specific tasks relating to their job. However they are in a position to implement the breath of policies and practices that make up a well-being strategy.

Line managers requires full support from upper level managers, from departments and employees. Nancy papalex, andrid and leda panayotopoulou (2005) other support departments are responsible to offer the necessary support and advice to line managers.

Understanding the health culture also help line managers identify the risks that are effecting productivity by looking beyond a specific sickness or incident. Professor Dame Carol Black's (2008) report "Working for a healthier tomorrow" suggests that small changes in the workplace by line managers and supervisors can make a significant contribution to the health and well-being strategy.

## **2.2 Empirical literature Review**

This section will discuss what other researchers found out, some of the key practice that organizations reportedly experienced, what challenges they faced and the interventions taken as a remedy following devolution.

An MA thesis by Lubaba D. (2014) whose main objective was to examine the effective implementation of strategic human resource management in the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia was also reviewed. In this study, devolvement was used as an important element to measure the effective implementation of strategic human resource management in the Bank; and the result, according to the finding, show slightly above moderate devolution. This result was based on the data gathered from line managers in the bank unlike the purpose of this study which focused on exploring first line managers' views on devolution.

A working paper by Sakib Imran Khan (2011) with a title "HR Devolution: Rhetoric or Reality?" contributes to the understanding of how the HR devolution practice is taking place in organizations by questioning what are some of the potential gains from devolution, how the various challenges could possibly be addressed, or whether organizations that devolved the function were satisfied. The study also aims to analyze the issues and consequently present a thorough understanding regarding how and why devolution is taking place, how organizations are coping with the strategy and what are the outcomes.

Annelies Buddingh, Master Thesis (2014), in title "The devolution of HRM practices - Does HRM add value from the perspective of line management?" This particular study focuses on the link between the intended HRM practices (initiated by the HRM department) and the perceived practices (experienced by employees) where the degree and way of execution of HRM practices by the Line Manager determines the degree of implementation. It also defines Line managers' HRM practices and effectiveness is defined as the degree of satisfaction to which HRM practices are enacted or put into practice. Further, the research underlined that some limitations are expected to reduce HRM implementation or there are a number of limitations that can limit the performance of line managers in putting HRM policies into practice.

The finding of a study by Tigist, T. 2013 "Devolution of HRM functions, The perspectives of line managers". An MA Thesis submitted to Addis Ababa University School of commerce has

been reviewed. The aim of the study was to explore line managers' perspective about the devolution of HRM functions. Its finding revealed that there is a perception of line managers under the study HRM functions are was devolved. According to her finding Line managers have a good understanding about devolution. The challenges cited in the literature are not perceived as a barrier by most of the respondents. The research participants and the research setting were different from this study.

In general, despite their relevance in terms of guiding source literatures, clarifying concepts, none of them have been studied in the same industry paying emphasis to First Line Managers. All are different from this study in terms of their subject matter. Therefore, this study topic relating to devolution is new and I hope it is an important attempt.

## 2.3 Conceptual frame work

To conduct this research, an HR devolution framework (see Fig. 1) which has been adapted by Khan, 2011 was basically used to develop (by the researcher) as a further study framework.

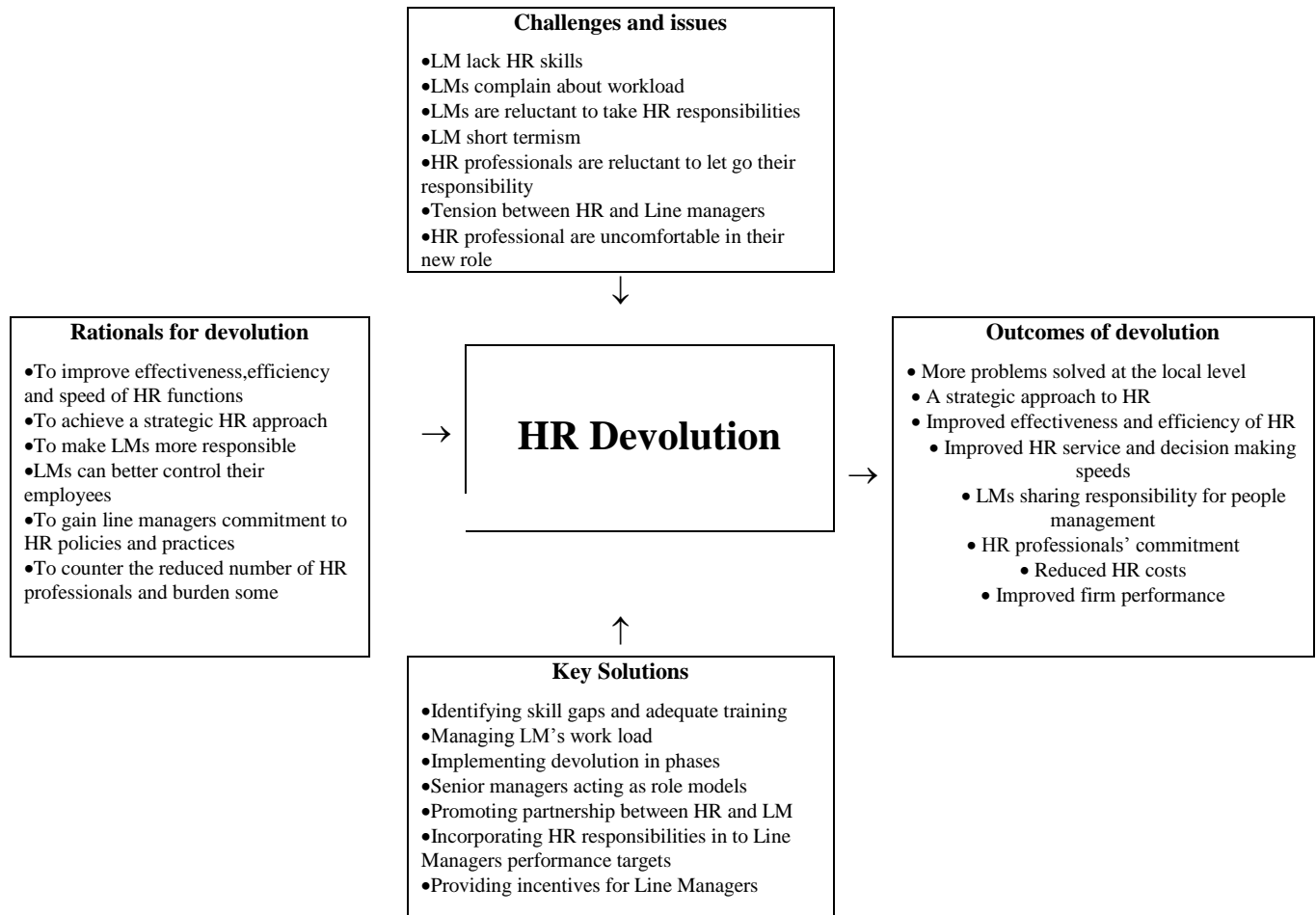
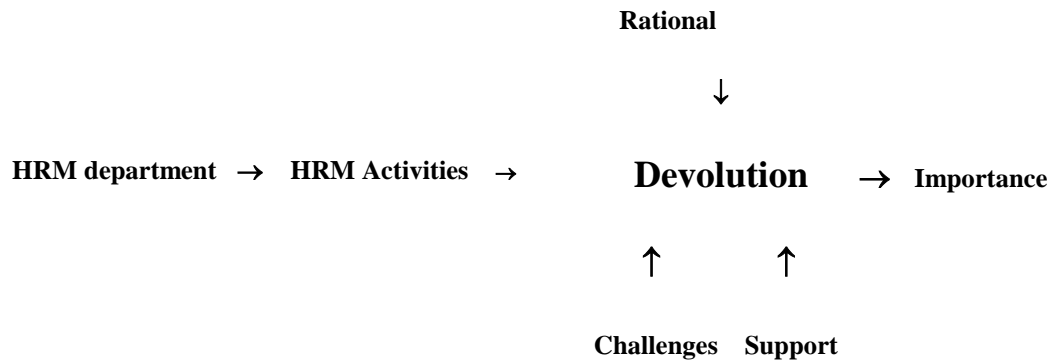


Figure 1: The HR devolution framework: Derived from the literature by Khan 2011

Based on this framework, a questionnaire for FLMs and interview questions for key middle HR people and Top level managers of EEU are developed to explore and identify the practices and challenges using various variables of HRM activities.



Frame work (developed by the researcher, 2018) based on the literature and Khan's, 2011 HR Devolution framework (see Figure 1).

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This research paper is designed and will try to follow descriptive research approaches.

First: By assessing the existing situation in Ethiopian Electric Utility with respect to selected FLM's with managerial position that are chosen through self administered questionnaire designed to get the necessary feed back on the issues or with respect to the case study.

Second: Analysis tools like formal & informal structured interviews will be conducted to check the findings. The designing of the questionnaire is based on the responsible managers with managerial position, Middle - level managers (who are considered to be the immediate managers to FLM 's) and few Top - level managers from a selected work processes and their response will be checked by the help of Statistical package for social science (SPSS).

### **3.2 Target population**

The population of this study is the selected First line managers that are engaged in practicing HR activities with a total number of 50 (fifty), 8(eight) middle HR professionals and 2 (two)Higher level managers.

<b>Population</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
First line managers	50
Middle HR professionals	8
Higher level managers	2

Table 3.1 Number of target population

### **3.3 Data gathering instrument**

In this survey instrument, a self-completed questionnaire was developed referring to the previous studies. A total number of 43 questions were prepared & distributed.

**PART-1** Will have questions relating to personal and organizational profile like Gender level of education, number of staff report to the respondent, etc. **PART (2 – 6)** Will have several questions listed horizontally on a Likert scale.

Besides, interviewing of HR professional and higher level management under the study is conducted. Further, EEU HR policies, procedures and HR manual was conducted and assessed.

### **3.4 Procedure of data collection**

It has tried to get the respondents in Districts, work units and Head office in Addis Ababa regions and surroundings by visiting them physically and it was also intended to interview HR professionals at the middle level and two higher level managers of different processes to get the status of practices and challenges.

Moreover, the questionnaire were distributed through selected Four regional HR and Administration offices ( North Addis Ababa Region, South Addis Ababa Region, West Addis Ababa Region and East Addis Ababa Region ) as they are in frequent contact with all work units and districts enclosed with envelope. Further, follow up through telephone and e - mail has been made to gather data as much as possible to meet the schedule.

### **3.5 Validity and reliability**

According to Kothari (2004), the term validity indicates the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure whereas reliability shows if an instrument provides consistent result.

## Validity

To enhance the validity of instruments, related literatures were reviewed. That is questionnaire items that were used related to previous studies were customized to the context of this studies.

## Reliability

In this method, the most widely used method called cronbach's alpha was used as a measure of reliability using SPSS whose value varies from 0 to 1 is applied. However, satisfactory value is required to be more than 0.6 for the scale to be reliable (Malhotra, 2002; Cronbach, 1951) cited in Robert, 2013.

The result of the reliability testing is shown in the table below. From the table, reliability values ranged between  $\alpha = 0.6$  to 0.9 the overall alpha being 0.75. When compared with standard value of  $\alpha = 0.6$ , the scale of the study was reliable for data analysis.

**Table 3.2 Reliability Testing**

<b>Dimension of devolvement/scales</b>	<b>Number of items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha(<math>\alpha</math>)</b>
Level /extent of involvement	12	0.9
The Rationale to devolve HRM responsibilities	7	0.73
The practices of devolution of HRM responsibility	6	0.62
The challenges of devolution	12	0.9
The support needed to carryout HRM activities	6	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>0.75</b>

Source: Researcher's survey, 2018

## 3.6 Data processing and Analysis

After data collection, data was entered and analyzed using *SPSS* package to counter check against the questionnaire to sort out invalid response, to correct errors that was done in the process of data entry so as to check the consistency of the data. Gathered quantitative data will be analyzed by descriptive statistics and frequency table; The profile of respondents will be

present in table; and the Data on devolvement of HR activities in the case organization and the information obtained from interviews and documents will be analyzed using SPSS package.

### **3.7 Ethical consideration**

For ethical considerations the following issues will be considered: The purpose of the research will be clearly communicate and discuss to the participants, oral or written approval will be asked from EEU (Ethiopian Electric Utility) body, information obtained in the research process will be maintained confidentially, voluntary participation is appreciated and the data will be used for research purpose and final report will also present for the case organization for perusal.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the data obtained from the respondents. Document review and interview have also been conducted to get an insight of the devolution of human resource management status in EEU. Self complete questionnaire were distributed to fifty line managers and ten respondents interview questions were received back. The response rate was 100%.

### 4.2 Profile of respondents

Demographic variables of the participant						
1	Gender	Male		Female		
2	Age	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	Above 60
3	Highest level of education	PhD	Post Graduate	First degree	Diploma	Certificate
4	Number of staff currently reporting to you	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	Above 20
5	Field of study	Management and related Disciplines	Accounting & Finance	Engineering	Business Administration	
6	Total staff management work experience in EEU	1-5 Years	5-10 Years	10-20 Years	20-30 Years	>20

**Table 4.2.1 Profile of respondents**

The following tables present the profiles of respondents. Their gender and age, level of education and number of staff currently reporting (they supervised), field of studies and staff management work experience.

**Table 4.2.2 Respondents gender and age.** Note: FLMs = First line managers

Characteristics of responsibility		FLMs (Total = 50)		Mean	Standard deviation
		Freq.	%		
Gender	Female	12	24		
	Male	38	76		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>		
Age	20-30	5	10	5.92	0.944
	31-40	19	38		
	41-50	21	42		
	51-60	5	10		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5.92</b>	<b>0.944</b>

Gender and Age distribution presented in Table 4.2.2 above indicate out of 50 respondents 12 or (24%) of the respondents are female, 38 or (76%) were male and 5% of the respondents are between the age of 20 - 30, 19% are between 31 - 40, 21% between 41 - 50, and 5% are between the age of 51 - 60 respectively. Therefore, the data implies the highest number of the respondents are male line managers and the highest number of the respondents lie between 31 - 40 age category.

**Table 4.2.3 FLM's level of education and number of staff they supervised.**

Note: FLMs = First line managers

Characteristics of responsibility		FLMs (Total =50)		Mean	Standard deviation
		Freq.	%		
Highest level of education	Diploma				
	1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	50	100	3.24	0.683
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree				
	PhD				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3.24</b>	<b>0.683</b>
Number of staff they supervised	1 - 10	8 per LM	14	3.24	0.683
	11 - 20	28 per LM	48.3		
	21 - 30	22 per LM	37.9		
	> 30	0			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>58 per LM</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3.24</b>	<b>0.683</b>

As shown in Table 4.2.3, all of the respondents are with in the education of First degree level. And the number of staffs they supervised are different according to their staff plan.

**Table 4.2.4 FLM's field of studies and employee management experience in EEU**

**Note:** FLMs = First line managers

Characteristics of responsibility		FLMs (Total=50 )		Mean	Standard deviation
	Field of studies	Freq.	%		
FLMs field of studies	Management and related Disciplines	30	60	5.64	0.598
	Accounting & Finanace	6	12		
	Engineering	9	18		
	Business Administration	5	10		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>		
	Employee management experience in EEU	1-5 years	21	42	5.64
6-10years		26	52		
11-15years		3	6		
> 15years		-	-		
<b>Total</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5.64</b>	<b>0.598</b>

Table 4.2.4 above demonstrates that 52% of the respondents between (6-10) service years have staff management experience above average. Where as 6% of FLMs have (11-15) years experience.

### 4.3 Devolution of HRM activities

Before examining the extent of First line managers involvement in HRM activities, respondents were asked whether they were performing some HR activities. The purpose of this question was to assess how many of the First line managers believe that some HRM activities were devolved to them. Thus, as the result indicates in the following table, the overall 80% of the FLMs respondents answer that some of the HR activities are devolved to them. 20% answered that they were not involved. The result from middle HR professionals, key process owners, EEU HR policy & procedure and HR manual also confirmed devolvement is adopted. LMs are in the best position to take responsibility for converting HRM policies into practice, and for influencing the direction of work teams to achieve organizational goals (Townsend, Wilkinson, Allan, & Bamber, 2012)

**Table 4.3 Devolvement of HRM activities (employee management issues)**

**Note:** FLMs = First line managers

Item	FLMs (Total = 50)	
	Yes%	No%
First line managers involvement in HRM activities	80	20

Source: Adopted from various Researcher's survey.

### 4.4 The level / extent of First line managers involvement in HRM activities

As depicted in table 4.4 below, the average mean score is 3.7 which can suggesting from the possible scale of 5 point FLMs provide an overall response at moderate extent which can reflect that these managers have a better involvement. According to Zaidaton and Bagheri (2009) the mean score below 3.39 considered to be low, score from 3.40 up to 3.79 moderate and score above 3.79 huge/great. From the interview, it was found that FLMs are involved in all activities mentioned in table. This situation could be resulted in moderate extent. Moreover, among the HRM activities mentioned below the two highest mean scoring were Communication and Emoloyee engagement & motivation. Hutcinson and Purcell, as cited in Armstrong (2006), noted that the most commonly used people manangement activities handled by front line managers were; Communication, absence management and Emoloyee engagement which can confirm the findings of this study.

**Table 4.4 The extent of First line managers involvement in HRM activities**

Note: FLMs = First line managers; M = mean; SD = standard deviation

No	HRM activities/variables	Very Great extent %	Great extent %	Moderate extent %	Some extent %	Little extent%	FLMs (Total = 50)	
							M	SD
1	Staff attendance management	0	80	8	12	0	3.6	0.68
2	Communication	28	54	18	0	0	4.1	0.68
3	Employee performance management	0	100	0	0	0	4.0	0.0
4	Disciplinary & grievance management	12	56	32	0	0	3.8	0.64
5	Employee engagement & motivation	18	68	14	0	0	4.0	0.57
6	Training & Development	2	58	24	16	0	3.4	0.79
7	Health & safety	11	15	24	0	0	3.7	0.8
8	Reward management (pays & benefit & compensation)	0	82	12	6	0	3.7	0.6
9	Staff promotion	44	14	6	36	0	3.7	1.4
10	Defining roles of job description activities	8	44	42	6	0	3.6	1.0
11	Selection	8	44	42	6	0	3.5	0.73
12	Recruitment	12	42	38	8	0	3.5	0.81
<b>Average mean</b>							<b>3.7</b>	<b>0.73</b>

Source: Researcher's survey, 2018

#### 4.5 The Rationale to devolve HRM responsibilities to line managers

The purpose of this questionnaire was to know the reasons why some of the HRM activities were devolved to line managers. Accordingly, respondents were asked as to what extent they agree with the list of rationale items of devolution. As presented in Table 4.5 below, FLMs provided an overall response of a “great extent” with a mean score of 3.7 indicating that , all FLMs accepted the reasons above moderate extent. The reason provided by interviewees in relation to devolving the activities implies the very reason of manual and technical nature of EEU work processes, and to empower line managers for decision making and to delegate routine and burden some responsibilities from HR staffs. As cited by Oladipo and Abdulkadir (2011) to make HR

managers more available for participation in strategic decision process, the responsibility of routine execution and administration practices should be delegated to line managers as they are in direct contact with employees.

**Table 4.5 The Rationale to devolve HRM responsibilities to line managers**

**Note:** FLMs = First line managers; M = mean; SD = standard deviation

No	Items or Variables	Very Great extent %	Great extent %	Moderate extent %	Some extent %	Little extent %	FLMs (Total = 50)	
							M	SD
1	Line managers are responding quickly to problems than higher level management	36	46	18	0	0	4.1	0.71
2	Line managers are motivating and in effective control	0	54	36	10	0	3.4	0.67
3	Devolving HR functions helps in cost-cutting	0	46	32	22	0	3.2	0.8
4	Devolving helps first line managers to prepare for future middle managers.	22	32	46	0	0	3.7	0.8
5	Certain issues can be complex for top management	2	92	6	0	0	3.9	0.28
6	Helps first line managers to practice for decision-making skills.	12	32	56	0	0	3.6	0.7
7	HR professionals are criticized by line managers due to the lack of performance contribution	34	46	18	2	0	4.1	0.77
Average mean							3.7	0.7

Source: Researcher's survey, 2018

#### 4.6 The practices of devolution of HRM responsibility to line managers

This questionnaire was aim to identify some of the HRM activities that were devolved to line managers. Accoringly, respondents were asked as to what are their practices they engaged to devolution. As presented in Table 4.6 below, FLMs provided an overall response of 'above moderate extent'' with a mean score of 3.7 indicating that , they practiced the HRM activities that were devolved to them. Line managers often are in the best position to take primary responsibility for effectively adopting and delivering HR policies and practices (Gilbert et al., 2011).

**Table 4.6 The practices of devolution of HRM responsibility to line managers**

**Note:** FLMs = First line managers M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

No	Items/Variables	Very Great extent %	Great extent %	Moderate extent %	Some extent %	Little extent %	FLMs (Total=50)		
							M	SD	
1	Recruiting and hiring talent to fill team positions	0	64	0	36	0	3.2	0.4	
2	Providing training and support to new hires, cross training employees to ensure job rotation	64	30	0	6	0	4.5	0.78	
3	Communicating to all team members and ensuring understanding of departmental goals	0	42	46	12	0	3.3	0.67	
4	Monitoring individual and team performance versus targets	0	64	36	0	0	3.6	0.48	
5	Identifying the need for corrective actions	54	0	36	10	0	3.9	1.15	
6	Ensuring quality standards for all processes,	18	46	36	0	0	3.8	0.72	
Average mean								3.7	0.7

Source: Researcher’s survey, 2018

### 4.7 The challenges of devolution of HRM responsibility to line managers

This questionnaire was prepared to identify the challenges that were faced during devolvement of some of the HRM activities to line managers. Accordingly, respondents were asked as to know the extent of the problems with the list of items of devolution. As presented in Table 4.7 below, the mean results for the question asked to FLMs under this challenge items indicate 3.4. The most severe problems and issues revealed by FLMs in this item were: Dealing with HR issues takes time, not considering HR activities as a core component , HR people were not responding to problems raised by line managers and not being happy in dealing with employee management activities. Bos-Nehles (2010) argues that LMs experience possible constraints in implementing HRM practices: lack of time, lack of relevant HRM competence, lack of support from the HRM department, and lack of motivation to execute HRM responsibilities. According to the interview, the main challenges relating to HRM responsibilities of FLMs were they don’t consider HR activities as a core component of their responsibilities. The devolution literature clearly shows the apparent lack of desire or interest to execute their HR responsibilities. (Hailey

et al., 2005; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010; Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006; Renwick & MacNeil. Totally, FLMs provided an overall response of a “moderate extent” with a mean score of 3.3

**Table 4.7 The challenges of devolution of HRM responsibility to line managers**

**Note:** FLMs = First line managers ; M = mean; SD = standard deviation

No	Items/Variables	Very Great extent %	Great extent %	Moderate extent %	Some extent %	Little extent %	FLMs (Total =50 )	
							M	SD
1	Dealing with HR issues takes significant amount of my time	0	60	40	0	0	3.6	0.24
2	My subordinates prefer to deal with HR performance to solve their HR issues	0	64	36	0	0	3.6	0.48
3	I am not receiving support from HR department to address HR related issues .	18	2	0	80	0	2.6	1.2
4	There are constant pressures from upper level to minimize expenses and maximize output	0	46	36	18	0	3.3	0.76
5	I give greater priority to my short term functional goal than HR issues	10	38	28	0	24	3.1	1.32
6	I haven't got adequate skills and knowledge that can help me in dealing with HR activities.	6	18	74	2	0	3.3	0.61
7	I don't consider HR activities as a core component of my responsibilities.	18	82	0	0	0	4.2	0.39
8	I am not receiving recognition for my good employee management performance	0	6	68	26	0	2.8	0.53
9	I don't feel there is sufficient support from Top level management	0	2	82	16	0	2.7	0.40
10	Responsibility and duties relating to HR activities are not included in my job/role description	0	2	62	36	0	3.7	0.52
11	HR people are not capable enough to respond to problems raised by line managers.	0	78	22	0	0	4.1	0.42
12	I am not happy dealing with employee management activities	12	86	2	0	0	3.8	0.36
<b>Average mean</b>							<b>3.4</b>	<b>0.6</b>

Source: Researcher's survey, 2018

## 4.8 The support needed to carryout HRM responsibilities

When we look at the average mean score for the support needed, respondents were asked as to what extent they agree or disagree with the list of supports needed to carry out HRM activities.

The finding is summarized in Table 4.8 below. As a result, the average mean score of 3.8 for FLMs indicates that the majority of the respondents need support with an overall response of above huge level or FLMs accepted the suggested support for the problems they encountered in implementing their HRM responsibilities.

**Table 4.8 The support needed to carryout HRM responsibilities**

**Note:** FLMs = First line managers; M = mean; SD = standard deviation

No	Items/Variables	Very Great extent %	Great extent %	Moderate extent %	Some extent %	Little extent %	FLMs (Total = 50)	
							M	SD
1	Induction on the concept of devolution is necessary.	0	80	20	0	0	3.8	0.4
2	I need continuous support from HR personnel.	0	38	44	18	0	3.2	0.73
3	Recognition from top level management about my HRM responsibility would motivate me.	0	20	52	28	0	3.6	1.1
4	I need continuous induction on HR roll , procedure and labour law.	28	30	42	0	0	3.8	0.83
5	The upper level management should decrease the line manager's span of control.	0	98	2	0	0	4.0	0.14
6	I believe there are Areas Line Managers Need HR Support To Deliver A Healthy Workplace	36	64	0	0	0	4.4	0.49
<b>Average mean</b>							<b>3.8</b>	<b>0.62</b>

Source: Researcher's survey, 2018

**Table 4.8 Summary of descriptive statistics of the questionnaire items**

Questionnaire on practices and challenges of HRM responsibilities to line managers on the reviewed literature and devolution frame work are described as follows:

**Note:** FLMs = First line managers

<b>Dimensions/aspects of devolution</b>	<b>Average mean score</b>
	<b>FLMs</b>
Level / extent of First line managers involvement in HRM activities	<b>3.7</b>
The Rationale to devolve HRM responsibilities to line managers	<b>3.7</b>
The practices of devolution of HRM responsibility to line managers	<b>3.7</b>
The challenges of devolution of HRM responsibility to line managers	<b>3.4</b>
The support needed to carryout HRM responsibilities	<b>3.8</b>

Source: Researcher's survey, 2018

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the practices and describe the challenges of devolution of HRM activities to line managers on the level/extent of involvement, the rationale, the challenges, and the support needed mentioned in this case study.

The total target group selected were **50** line managers composed. Interview was conducted with **8** middle level managers including HR professionals and **2** higher level managers to qualify the quantitative findings in Addis Ababa regions and Head office. Using a self completed survey questionnaire quantitative data were gathered and analysed using frequencies, means and percentages (on a 5 point likert scale).

According to the research questions that were introduced, the findings of the study are presented as follows:

The first objective of this study was to assess how many of FLMs believe that some of the HRM activities are devolved to them. From the finding it has been observed over all of FLMs show 80% were responded “YES ” and 20% responded “ NO ”with an overall response of Mean =3.7 which can serve as a strong basis to conclude that under this study FLMs in Addis Ababa regions and head office of Ethiopian Electric Utility are involved in the HRM activities.

With regard to the Rationale to devolvement FLM’s provided an overall responses of nearly a great extent, with a mean score of 3.7 which indicate FLM’s accepted above moderate extent the reason to devolve the HRM activities.

When we come to the problems / challenges faced, the average mean score of 3.4 which shows that FLM’s provided a response between moderate and great extent implying that the mentioned challenges or issues are available and somehow sever to them.

Regarding the support needed to carryout HRM responsibilities, FLMs provided a response of an average mean score (M=3.8) above a great extent which indicates that respondents agree to a

great extent that the mentioned items need support for the problems they encountered in practicing or implementing the HRM responsibilities.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The following conclusions are derived from the findings based on the specific objectives set:

The first objective of this study was to examine the level/extent of First line managers involvement in HRM activities. From the finding it was observed that overall FLMs have above moderate extent of involvement in HR activities which can be generalized to all FLMs of the target group of this study. In addition, the information from the interview revealed that, though some HR activities were devolved to Line managers much of the activities were performed by HR staffs or with little involvement of Line managers. Therefore, it can be concluded the average mean scores provided implied that FLMs of the target population had almost a great extent of involvement in HR activities of communication, employee performance management, engagement and motivation and disciplinary and grievance handling.

The next objective of this study was to assess how many of FLMs believe that some of the HRM activities are devolved to them. From the finding it has been observed that out of 50 participants 80 % of FLMs believe that they are involved in some employee management activities which can serve as a basis to conclude that FLMs in Addis Ababa regions and Head office of EEU are involved in some employee management activities.

The final objective of this research was to identify the extent of the challenges of devolution. From the average mean score of 3.4 provided by First line managers responses, it can be concluded that the mentioned challenges and issues are existed of the target group under the study in executing the people management responsibilities. As can be seen from the result, Dealing with HR issues takes time, not considering HR activities as a core component, HR people were not responding to problems raised by line managers and First line managers not being happy in dealing with employee management activities are among the challenges which could strengthen the presence of the problem.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The finding showed that 80% of the target population had involvement in HR activities. The organization EEU should work more to delegate HRM responsibilities to the remaining FLMs as they are involved to the day to day activities related to performance of employees.

In the rationale of devolution FLMs level of acceptance on the concept of devolution is above average extent. As indicated in the response, Line managers are responding quickly to problems than higher level management. In contrary, HR professionals are criticized by line managers due to the lack of performance contribution. So, these people should work hard to improve their performance contribution.

When we come to the practices of devolution, FLMs provided an overall response of 'above moderate extent' indicating that they practiced the HRM activities or it can be suggested they are in the best position to take responsibility for adopting and delivering HR policies and practices. But there are some variables like Recruiting and hiring talent to fill team positions, Communicating to all team members and ensuring understanding of departmental goals as shown in the response to be improved.

As the challenges perceived by First line managers, the average mean score of 3.4 imply there are some problems to be considered relating to the implementation of HRM activities. The intention of not considering HR activities as a core component by First line managers and the weakness observed by HR people in responding to problems raised by line managers shall be improved to execute employee management activities. Finally, as can be seen from the result decreasing the line manager's span of control and to assess areas in order to deliver a healthy workplace to line managers are among the support line managers need of devolution of HRM responsibility.

Though it is hoped that the results of this study will provide useful information to HR professionals and researchers, it was conducted in a single organization and limited geographical area of focus having its own limitations. Therefore, a further study using a greater sample from the case organization as a whole is recommended.

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## **APPENDIX – I: Questionnaire to be filled by Line Managers**

**Addis Ababa University College of Business and economics School of commerce**

### **Questionnaire to be filled by Line Managers**

Dear respondents:

I am a postgraduate student at Addis Ababa University College of Business and economics School of commerce perusing my MA in Human Resource Management, for my final thesis. I am doing a research on “ **Practices and Challenges of Devolution of HRM responsibility to line managers: In the case of Ethiopian Electric Utility**”. The purpose of the study is to explore the practices of delegating Human resource management activities to Line Managers and to identify the challenges faced on their involvement. You are therefore, selected to participate in this study by responding the questions in this instrument. I assure you that any information gathered from you will be treated strictly confidential. Please put an “ X” mark in the appropriate space provided corresponding to each item / question.

#### **Note:**

Devolution means delegating or transferring HRM activities from HR professionals to line managers. Therefore, please try to answer the following questions in line with this concept of devolution.

#### **For the purpose of this study:**

- First Line Managers (FLM) are heads who are managing the day today activities of two or more staff under their supervision.
- HRM professionals are people in HR process of the organization.

If you have any question, please call me: 0911-216857

Thank you for taking the time to assist me.

Sincerely,

Yoseph Gemechu

## Data collection instrument APPENDIX - I

### Practices and challenges of Devolution of HRM Responsibilities to Line Managers ( The case of Ethiopian Electric Utility ) – Questionnaire.

*P/S* Attempt the following questions and give comments based on devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers, and challenges faced during devolving or delegating the activities.

#### KEY words

**Devolution** means the transfer of Power or Authority or delegating the activities.

**Line managers** managers who are responsible to direct the work of subordinates or a position which has the delegation to administer two or more staffs under his/her supervision.

#### PART-1

Demographic profile of the participant ( <i>make ✓ mark on the box</i> )						
1	Gender	Male		Female		
2	Age	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	Above 60
3	Highest level of education	PhD	Post Graduate	First degree	Diploma	Certificate
4	Number of staff currently reporting to you	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	Above 20
5	Field of study	Management and related Disciplines	Accounting & Finance	Engineering	Business Administration	
6	Total staff management work experience in EEU	1-5 Years	5-10 Years	10-20 Years	20-30 Years	>20

**PART-2** 5 = very great extent, 4=great extent, 3=moderate(average) extent, 2=some extent, and 1= little or no extent.

The level / extent of involvement of HRM responsibilities to line managers in EEU ? ( make " X" mark in the space provided)		5	4	3	2	1
1	Staff attendance management					
2	Communication					
3	Employee performance management					
4	Disciplinary & grievance management					
5	Emoloyee engagement & motivation					
6	Training & Development					
7	Health & safety					
8	Reward management (pays , benefit & compensation)					
9	Staff promotion					
10	Defining roles of job description activities					
11	Selection					
12	Recruitment					

**PART-3** 5 = very great extent, 4=great extent, 3=moderate extent, 2=some extent, and 1= little or no extent.

What was the organization rationale to devolve HRM responsibility to line managers? ( make " X" mark in the space provided)		5	4	3	2	1
13	It is line managers that are responding quickly to problems addressed than higer level management					
14	The reason line managers being in constant contact with employees, results in motivating and effective control					
15	Devolving HR functions to first line managers helps in cost-cutting					
16	Devolving helps first line managers to prepare for future middle managers & practice decision-making skills					
17	Certain issues can be complex for top management to be understand					
18	Devolving helps first line managers to practice decision-making skills					
19	I believe right , HR professionals are criticized by line managers due to the lack of performance contribution					

**PART- 4** 5 = very great extent, 4=great extent, 3=moderate(average) extent, 2=some extent, and 1= little or no extent.

What are the practices of devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers in EEU? ( make “ X” mark in the space provided)		5	4	3	2	1
20	Recruiting and hiring talent to fill team positions					
21	Providing training and support to new hires, cross training employees to ensure job rotation and minimize assignment coverage gaps					
22	Devolving means providing coaching and <u>performance feedback</u> to team members, communicating and ensuring understanding of departmental goals					
23	I am happy dealing with HR issues in my current role in order to monitor individual and team performance versus targets					
24	If Line managers perform HR functions, they can identify the need for corrective actions easily.					
25	HRM functions are necessary for successful organization to ensuring quality standards for all processes,					

**PART-5** 5 = very great extent, 4=great extent, 3=moderate(average) extent, 2=some extent, and 1= little or no extent.

What are the challenges faced by line managers in carrying out the HRM responsibilities? ( make “ X” mark in the space provided)		5	4	3	2	1
26	Having often with limited resources preventing line managers from spending adequate time on HR activities.					
27	Dealing with HR issues takes significant amount of my time.					
28	I am not receiving support from HR department to address HR related issues .					
29	There is a lack of the higher level Management to deal with staff who need re-skilling and training to understand their HR role.					
30	I give greater priority to my short term functional goal than HR issues					
31	There is a lack of interest from many line managers in undertaking HR responsibilities					
32	Responsibility and duties relating to HR activities are not included in my job/role description					
33	I am not receiving recognition for my good employee management performance					
34	I don't feel there is sufficient support from Top level management to line managers on the HR Policies and procedures how to execute their HRM responsibilities.					
35	HR people are not capable enough to respond to problems raised by line managers.					
36	There is limitation on capacity that can hinder line managers in implementing HRM successfully.					
37	I am not happy dealing with employee management activities					

## **PART – 6**

5 = very great extent, 4=great extent, 3=moderate(average) extent, 2=some extent, and 1= little or no extent.

		5	4	3	2	1
	What support do line managers in EEU need from middle and top level management to carry out their HRM responsibility? <i>( make “ X” mark in the space provided)</i>					
37	Induction from middle level management (middle level HR people) on the concept of devolution is necessary.					
38	I need continuous support from HR personnel.					
39	Recognition from top level management about my HRM responsibility would motivate me.					
40	I need continuous induction on HR roll , procedure and labour law to undertake my HRM responsibility efficiently.					
41	The upper level management should work to decrease the line manager's span of control.					
42	I believe there are Areas Line Managers Need HR Support To Deliver A Healthy Workplace					

Additional comment

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**Thank You**

## **APPENDIX – II: Interview cover letter and questionnaires**

**Addis Ababa University College of Business and economics School of commerce**

### **Interview cover letter**

Dear respondents:

I am a postgraduate student at Addis Ababa University College of Business and economics School of commerce pursuing my MA in Human Resource Management, for my final thesis. I am doing a research on “ **Practices and Challenges of Devolution of HRM responsibility to line managers: In the case of Ethiopian Electric Utility**”. The purpose of the study is to explore the practices of delegating Human resource management activities to Line Managers and to identify the challenges faced on their involvement. You are therefore, selected to participate in this study by responding the interview questions. I assure you that any information gathered from you will be treated strictly confidential.

#### **Note:**

**Devolution** means delegating or transferring HRM activities from HR professionals to line managers. Therefore, please try to answer the following questions in line with this concept of devolution.

#### **For the purpose of this study:**

- First Line Managers (FLM) are heads who are managing the day today activities of two or more staff under their supervision.
- HRM professionals are people in HR process of the organization.

If you have any question, please call me: 0911-216857

Thank you for taking the time to assist me.

Sincerely,

Yoseph Gemechu

**APPENDIX- II Interview questions for HR Professionals & Middle level managers.**

*(Please comment / answer in the space provided)*

1. What is your roll / position in the organization? .....
2. How long have you worked in your current position? .....
3. What is the status of devolution in EEU? underline from the given choice.  
*( Fully devolved, partially devolved, being devolved, not devolved )*
4. What was the reason for devolution?  
.....  
.....  
.....
5. How are you practicing devolution of HRM activities in your office?  
.....  
.....  
.....
6. What do you think about the benefit of devolution?  
.....  
.....  
.....
7. What challenges have been observed in devolving HRM responsibility?  
.....  
.....  
.....
8. What support has been provided to help line managers in carrying out their responsibility? .....

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

