# TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

*THE USE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT (LEAN) METHODOLOGIES IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS IN MULTINATIONAL ORGANISATIONS*

*Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration and Management*

*(E-2 Bilingual)*

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# INDEX

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter lays the groundwork for the thesis. It begins by presenting the research context and the relevance of studying Continuous Improvement (CI) within HR Operations. It also introduces the research questions and objectives, providing a clear roadmap for how the study will unfold across the following chapters.

## 1.1 Context and Problem Statement

Over the past few decades, the role of Human Resources (HR) has undergone a significant transformation. Previously seen mainly as an administrative function, HR is now expected to play a strategic role in shaping business performance. This includes responsibilities such as talent acquisition, workforce planning, and employee development (Ulrich and Dulebohn, 2015). As organizations continue to grow internationally, there is increasing pressure to deliver HR services that are consistent, efficient, and high-quality across regions.

To meet these demands, many companies have adopted new service delivery models. One of the most widely used is the HR Shared Service Centre (HRSS), which consolidates transactional tasks like payroll, onboarding logistics, and data management. This setup allows for the standardization of HR practices while freeing up local teams to focus on more strategic roles (Ulrich et al., 2009; Meijerink and Bondarouk, 2013). Often, these are complemented by Centres of Expertise (CoEs) and HR Business Partners (HRBPs), which are designed to better align HR activities with broader business objectives (Ulrich et al., 2013).

However, while these models offer greater efficiency, they may also reduce the personal, relational aspect of HR (Maatman et al., 2010). CoEs and HRBPs can struggle to coordinate effectively or embed a mindset of continuous improvement in everyday activities. As a result, organizations are increasingly turning to Lean Continuous Improvement (LCI) practices. Originally developed in manufacturing, LCI is now being adapted to HR with the aim of improving process efficiency and responsiveness while still enhancing the employee experience. Yet, applying Lean in HR is not straightforward. It requires careful attention to organizational culture, emotional dynamics, and structural complexity (Wickramasinghe and Chathurani, 2021).

This thesis explores how HR departments, particularly in global organizations like LinkedIn, seek to balance operational efficiency with a human-centred approach. It

focuses on the role of process excellence teams in driving this transformation and examines how HR professionals experience these efforts within shared service environments.

## 1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

This study examines how Lean Continuous Improvement principles are applied to transform HR Operations in multinational companies. Using LinkedIn as a case study, it investigates how these practices are implemented, what enables or hinders their success, and how they influence both performance and employee experience.

The main research objectives are as follows:

1. To explore how Lean and continuous improvement methods are introduced and adapted in HR Operations.
2. To analyse the role of process excellence teams in facilitating and sustaining these efforts.
3. To assess how these initiatives impact service delivery and employee experience within shared service environments.

These objectives are addressed through the following research questions:

- How are Lean and continuous improvement methodologies implemented within LinkedIn's HR Operations?
- What role do process excellence teams play in supporting and sustaining these initiatives?
- What are the perceived outcomes, benefits, and tensions experienced by HR professionals as a result of these efforts?

## 1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured to provide a clear path through both theoretical framework and empirical findings.

Chapter 2 reviews the key concepts and theoretical perspectives that inform the study, including Lean Thinking, continuous improvement, and their relevance in HR Operations and Shared Services.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach, explaining the qualitative and inductive design used, along with case selection, data collection, and analysis techniques.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings, based on interviews with LinkedIn's HR professionals and members of the process excellence team.

Chapter 5 connects these findings with the existing literature. It identifies the study's contributions and contrasts the results with previous research.

Chapter 6 provides practical recommendations for HR leaders, continuous improvement professionals, and global organizations interested in implementing Lean in HR.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarizing key insights, addressing study limitations, and suggesting directions for future research.

## 1.4 Relevance of the Study

This research contributes to current discussions on how HR can meet the dual challenge of operational efficiency and human-centric service. Although there is growing interest in applying Lean to HR, empirical studies in real-world settings remain relatively scarce. By focusing on LinkedIn, this thesis offers detailed insights into how these transformations are approached in a large, multinational company.

The findings have broader implications as well. Other organizations aiming to modernize their HR functions can draw lessons from LinkedIn's experiences, especially regarding how to embed continuous improvement without compromising on culture or the employee relationship.

## 1.5 Justification for the Case Study

LinkedIn offers a compelling case for analysing Lean in HR due to its global operations and advanced HR service structures. Its use of formal methodologies, internal consultancy teams, and cross-functional coordination makes it particularly suitable for this investigation.

Moreover, the company is recognized for prioritizing both innovation and employee experience. This dual focus provides a rich context in which to examine how efficiency and relational aspects of HR can be balanced. For these reasons, LinkedIn serves as a relevant and informative case for other organizations undergoing similar transitions.

## 1.6 Conceptual Alignment and Research Approach

This study is based on the intersection of Lean Thinking and HR Operations. It builds on a body of literature that looks at how operational models from industrial settings are being adapted for service-based, knowledge-driven functions. It also considers how these

principles are practically translated into HR activities, especially in shared service settings.

The research follows a qualitative, inductive approach. Rather than testing a specific hypothesis, it seeks to understand how continuous improvement is experienced by those directly involved. This approach allows for a deeper analysis of both strategic goals and everyday practices within HR Operations.

## 1.7 Scope and Limitations

As with all case studies, this research has limitations. Focusing on one organization limits how broadly the findings can be applied. Furthermore, the data comes mainly from individuals who are closely involved with HR Operations and continuous improvement at LinkedIn.

Even so, the richness of the interviews and the complexity of the setting offer valuable insights. Many of the dynamics identified may be relevant to other

companies pursuing similar changes, despite contextual differences.

In the end, the thesis seeks to contribute both academically and practically by showing how Lean can help evolve HR in complex, global environments.

To conclude, this chapter has established the foundations of the research. It has clarified the purpose and scope of the study, as well as the organisational and theoretical background. This sets the stage for the conceptual and methodological exploration developed in the next chapters.

## 2. LEAN CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN HR

This chapter develops the theoretical framework that supports the study. It defines key concepts such as Lean Thinking and Continuous Improvement, explores their evolution and application in HR, and discusses the main tools and challenges linked to their implementation in large organisations.

## 2.1 Defining Continuous Improvement and Lean Thinking

The concept of continuous improvement is grounded in the idea that organisations should pursue ongoing, incremental efforts to enhance their processes, systems, and results. Originating in post-World War II Japan and formalised through the Toyota Production System, this philosophy has become a foundational element of operational excellence

strategies across multiple industries (Antony et al., 2016). Essentially, it proposes that frequent, modest changes can lead to substantial gains in performance and customer satisfaction.

Academic literature often connects continuous improvement to two key frameworks: Total Quality Management (TQM) and Lean Thinking. TQM promotes a culture of quality, focusing on customer orientation and staff involvement. In contrast, Lean Thinking prioritizes the elimination of waste, improving workflow, and delivering maximum value. Womack and Jones (1996) articulated five core principles of Lean: understanding value from the customer's viewpoint, mapping the value stream, ensuring smooth flow, adopting pull systems, and striving for perfection.

Over the years, Lean Thinking has expanded beyond industrial environments and has been applied to healthcare, public services, and corporate functions. It encourages organizations to identify activities that do not contribute to value (referred to as "waste") and redesign their processes accordingly. According to Distel et al. (2023), Lean should be viewed not only as a set of tools but as a broader management philosophy that integrates process discipline with organizational learning and cultural adaptation.

Frameworks like DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, Control) and Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) are frequently used to support continuous improvement initiatives. These methods prioritize data analysis, identifying root causes, engaging stakeholders, and implementing iterative enhancements. Within HR, they provide a structured and evidence-based way to redesign processes, including those that involve qualitative, people-focused activities.

Moreover, Lean Thinking in business settings is typically linked to wider organisational transformations, such as digital innovation, process maturity, and agile methodologies. However, its success is not solely based on technical tools. It also depends on committed leadership, employee involvement, and aligning improvement efforts with strategic goals (Boersma et al., 2019).

This section lays out the theoretical foundations required to understand how LinkedIn's HR transformation is shaped by continuous improvement and Lean Thinking.

## 2.2 Application of Lean in HR Functions

Although Lean originally emerged in manufacturing, its principles have been increasingly applied to administrative and service functions like Human Resources. This shift reflects the growing expectation for HR departments to offer strategic value while remaining efficient. Scholars argue that Lean allows HR teams to simplify processes, remove redundancies, and become more responsive to internal needs (Andersson et al., 2015).

In practice, Lean is usually applied to transactional HR activities such as recruitment, onboarding, payroll, performance reviews, and employee data management. These areas often involve routine processes, making them suitable for methods like value stream mapping and process redesign. By applying Lean tools, HR teams can pinpoint inefficiencies and reshape workflows to improve both speed and quality (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2022).

However, Lean's application in HR is not without complications. HR processes frequently involve interpersonal dynamics, discretionary decisions, and cultural or legal sensitivities. This means that Lean must be tailored carefully, maintaining a balance between standardization and empathy. Wickramasinghe and Chathurani (2021) highlight that excessive standardization in HR may harm trust and reduce employee engagement.

Another important feature of Lean in HR is its emphasis on cross-functional coordination and clear communication. Effective implementation typically involves strong leadership, clear guidance, and continuous training. In many firms, internal teams dedicated to process excellence support this effort by organising improvement workshops, defining targets, and nurturing a culture focused on progress (Boersma et al., 2019).

As more organisations adopt shared service models and digital HR platforms, the relevance of Lean continues to grow. These developments create new opportunities to embed continuous improvement principles into HR routines. Still, empirical studies on this topic remain scarce, and much of the discussion in the literature remains conceptual.

This section offers a foundation for understanding how Lean principles are tailored for HR environments, setting up the discussion of LinkedIn's specific approach.

## 2.3 Business Process Management and Level of Maturity

Business Process Management (BPM) refers to a structured approach to designing, executing, and refining business processes so that they align with organisational

objectives. It aims to enhance efficiency and ensure that each function contributes meaningfully to strategic priorities. In the realm of continuous improvement, BPM acts as both a mindset and a set of tools for sustaining long-term change (Trkman, 2010).

In HR, BPM helps map out complex workflows, detect inefficiencies, and foster consistency across departments or geographies. By visualising full processes (such as hiring, onboarding, or managing performance), organisations can identify pain points, eliminate delays, and improve coordination. This approach supports not only productivity but also greater transparency and accountability in HR service delivery (Meijerink and Bondarouk, 2013).

To enhance this approach, organisations often rely on maturity models. These models evaluate current process capabilities and guide the design of future improvements. Examples include the Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI), the Business Process Maturity Model (BPMM), and specialised models for HR (Hammer, 2007). Such models serve as useful benchmarks to help prioritise actions, allocate resources, and measure progress over time.

When applied to HR, maturity models act as diagnostic tools to evaluate progress in areas like standardisation, use of data, integration of technology, and employee involvement. At LinkedIn, for instance, maturity models have been used to assess the state of HR operations and to define future objectives in line with continuous improvement goals.

Nonetheless, some limitations exist. Critics argue that maturity models can sometimes oversimplify complex organisational realities or imply a linear path to improvement. Yet, if used thoughtfully alongside BPM and Lean practices, these tools can provide important insights for navigating change.

This section introduces BPM and maturity models as valuable tools for promoting continuous improvement in HR, establishing the analytical context for LinkedIn's operational strategy.

### 2.4 Enablers and Barriers for Implementation of Continuous Improvement

The success of continuous improvement initiatives depends heavily on a range of enabling and limiting factors. These influences operate at multiple levels, including individual, team, organisational, and environmental domains. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing appropriate and context-sensitive interventions.

Key enablers of continuous improvement include visible leadership support, employee participation, adequate training, access to data and technology, and the presence of process improvement experts. Leadership is particularly critical, as it signals the strategic importance of improvement efforts and secures the necessary resources (Boersma et al., 2019). Similarly, when frontline employees are engaged, they can offer valuable insights and propose workable solutions, given their proximity to daily operations (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the use of formalised methods, open communication channels, and structured knowledge sharing mechanisms reinforces improvement efforts. When organisations promote a culture of learning and feedback, they cultivate resilience and create space for experimentation, which in turn supports sustained progress.

Conversely, several barriers can hinder improvement. These may include change resistance, limited capacity, inadequate training, lack of strategic alignment, or problems with data integrity. HR contexts can be especially challenging, given the interpersonal nature of many activities, regulatory variability, and the risk of over-standardisation.

Cultural factors also play a pivotal role. Organisational cultures that are hierarchical or risk-averse may suppress dialogue and discourage initiative. In contrast, cultures that prioritise transparency, accountability, and employee empowerment are more likely to support continuous improvement over the long term (Wickramasinghe and Chathurani, 2021).

At LinkedIn, both enablers and constraints have shaped the implementation of continuous improvement within HR Operations. The company has benefited from committed leadership and dedicated process excellence teams. Nonetheless, it has also faced challenges related to scaling practices, managing inter-team coordination, and balancing global consistency with local flexibility.

This section provides a framework for examining how contextual factors influence the trajectory of improvement initiatives in complex HR environments.

## 2.5 Lean and Continuous Improvement in HR Shared Services

HR Shared Service Centres (HRSS) are a common model for delivering consistent and efficient HR services in large organisations. By consolidating tasks such as payroll, onboarding, and data administration into centralised teams, HRSS aim to improve both

quality and scalability. These process-heavy environments are particularly well-suited to Lean and continuous improvement methodologies (Meijerink and Bondarouk, 2013).

There are several advantages to applying Lean within HRSS. First, HRSS typically operate under well-defined workflows and service level agreements (SLAs), which provide clear metrics for evaluating performance. Second, these centres handle large volumes of repetitive tasks, making them ideal candidates for techniques like process mapping and root cause analysis. Third, as internal service providers, HRSS are under pressure to demonstrate value through metrics such as turnaround time and user satisfaction (Cooke, 2006).

Nevertheless, challenges persist. Because HRSS interact with various internal and external stakeholders, coordinating improvements across systems and regions can be complex. Moreover, efficiency must be balanced with responsiveness to employee needs. Standardised processes should not compromise service quality or user experience.

Recent studies suggest that fostering a culture of continuous improvement within HRSS is essential. This involves enabling staff to identify inefficiencies, offering Lean training, and developing specialised roles (such as process excellence leads) to guide transformation (Boersma et al., 2019). Effective implementation also depends on robust data capabilities and the use of dashboards and feedback loops to monitor performance.

At LinkedIn, the HR Operations team has embedded Lean practices through internal consulting, performance metrics, and collaboration across functions. Interview insights indicate that tools like DMAIC and maturity models are routinely used to drive improvements. However, maintaining a balance between global optimisation and regional adaptability remains a critical concern.

This section positions HR Shared Services as a strategic context for applying Lean and continuous improvement, reinforcing their value in delivering scalable and high-quality HR solutions in multinational settings.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The third chapter outlines the methodology adopted in this research. It explains the qualitative, inductive approach, introduces the case of LinkedIn, and details the procedures followed to collect and analyse the data. This section aims to ensure rigour and transparency in how the study was conducted.

## 3.1 Qualitative Inductive Approach

This study employs a qualitative, inductive research design to examine how Continuous Improvement (CI) methodologies are implemented within HR Operations across multinational firms. A qualitative approach is especially valuable when analysing complex organisational changes, as it helps capture the depth and nuances of emerging practices. This is particularly useful when studying how CI is interpreted and applied in HR contexts. As Saunders et al. (2019) explain, qualitative methods are well suited to uncovering the meanings individuals or groups attach to organisational processes.

Following an inductive approach, the study does not begin with a fixed hypothesis. Instead, it develops concepts directly from the data. This strategy is consistent with the methodology proposed by Gioia et al. (2013), where first-order codes derived from participants' own words are gradually grouped into broader second-order themes and theoretical dimensions.

The choice of an inductive framework also responds to the limited academic research on the use of CI in HR. Since there are no established models in this specific area, an open-ended exploration allows for a grounded understanding of how CI takes shape in real-world HR settings. This is particularly relevant for multinational corporations, where operational complexity and cultural diversity often make standardisation more difficult.

Ultimately, this approach makes it possible to generate insights that are firmly rooted in practice. It addresses a gap in the academic literature and offers a more contextualised understanding of how HR professionals navigate and implement CI globally.

## 3.2 Case Study Context: LinkedIn

The case study analysed in this research focuses on LinkedIn, a global digital platform based in Sunnyvale, California, which specialises in professional networking and employment-related services. Positioned at the intersection of technology and talent management, LinkedIn provides tools for recruitment, learning, and career development. As of 2024, the company supports over 900 million users in more than 200 countries and territories.

LinkedIn was acquired by Microsoft in 2016 for $26.2 billion. Although now part of the Microsoft group, it has retained operational autonomy, while also benefiting from Microsoft's resources and infrastructure. The company employs more than 20,000 people

worldwide, with regional hubs located in the United States, Ireland, India, and Singapore. LinkedIn is frequently recognised for its employee-centred culture and its forward-thinking approach to HR.

The HR Operations (HR Ops) team at LinkedIn has taken a central role in driving efficient, scalable, and employee-focused services. In recent years, the company has integrated Lean-based CI practices into HR Ops as part of a broader transformation strategy. These initiatives are led by the Process Excellence team and aim to improve internal processes and enhance employee experience. This ongoing transformation provides a valuable opportunity to examine how CI is implemented and maintained within a corporate HR setting.

This case forms part of a larger research project titled "The role of continuous improvement and data analytics in the global transformation of HR in multinational companies." The project is co-directed by Professor María Jesús Belizón Cebada (Universidad Pontificia Comillas) and Professor Linda Dowling-Hetherington (University College Dublin). Adopting a longitudinal qualitative methodology, the research explores how CI and data analytics shape HR transformation in complex organisational settings. One of its main goals is to build a process model to support scalable and culturally adaptive HR change.

LinkedIn was chosen for this case study due to its size, global presence, and its structured approach to CI within HR. Importantly, the company has developed a dedicated CI function within its HR Operations team. With the support of Amanda Philips, Global Director of HR Operations and HR Transformation, access was granted to employees across global locations. Between August 2023 and early 2024, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in Dublin, San Francisco, Beijing, Bangalore, and São Paulo. Additional internal documents were reviewed. Plans are also in place for ethnographic observation in mid-2025, followed by a second round of interviews during the 2025–2026 academic year.

This case offers an opportunity to explore the real-world dynamics of CI in a global HR context. It contributes not only academic insights but also practical relevance, particularly in understanding the challenges and success factors involved in institutionalising CI within HR.

## 3.3 Research Design

The research design adopted in this thesis follows a qualitative, inductive approach that seeks to understand how Continuous Improvement (CI) is interpreted and applied within a real organisational setting. Although the dataset was originally gathered as part of a larger international project, this study builds its own analytical path, using a selection of ten interviews to develop an independent line of inquiry.

These ten interviews were not chosen at random. Instead, they were selected based on three practical and conceptual criteria: first, their relevance to the topic of CI implementation; second, the geographic variety they represent (including voices from Dublin, San Francisco, São Paulo, and Bangalore); and third, the direct involvement of participants in HR Operations and transformation initiatives. All the interviews had already been transcribed by the time they were shared with me, which allowed me to begin working immediately on the analytical framework.

While I had no direct role in the initial data collection, every stage of coding, theme construction, and interpretation has been carried out independently. The conclusions presented here do not reflect the collective position of the wider research project, but rather my personal understanding of the material, shaped through a close reading of the interviews and a systematic process of thematic analysis.

## 3.4 Data Collection

The empirical material analysed in this thesis consists of ten semi-structured interviews, selected from a larger dataset of thirty interviews conducted as part of the international research project described above. These interviews were carried out between August 2023 and early 2024, focusing specifically on the application of Continuous Improvement (CI) practices in HR transformation at LinkedIn.

The selection of the ten interviews was guided by both thematic and geographic criteria. My academic tutor, Professor María Jesús Belizón Cebada, provided access to those interviews that involved participants with direct experience in CI implementation and represented a wide geographical spread, including informants based in Dublin, San Francisco, Bangalore, and São Paulo. All of them were active members of LinkedIn's HR Operations or Process Excellence teams.

The interviews varied in duration, ranging from approximately 35 to 65 minutes. All were conducted in English and had already been transcribed by the research team before they

were made available to me. Once I received the transcripts, I began an independent and systematic process of data preparation. I read through each transcript multiple times to familiarise myself with the content, paying close attention to sections that aligned with the research questions.

To ensure transparency in the analysis, a summary table was created to present anonymised information about each participant. This includes their general role, geographic location, and the length of their respective interviews.

| Interview | Interviewee Role | Region | Interview Duration |
|---|---|---|---|
| CI1 | Director, HR Process Excellence | Director (EMEAL) | 55 minutes |
| CI2 | Global Senior Director, HR Ops | Sr. Director (EMEAL) | 55 minutes |
| CI3 | Senior Manager, HR Operations | IC (EMEAL) | 62 minutes |
| CI4 | Senior HR Process Excellence Specialist | IC (EMEAL) | 57 minutes |
| CI5 | Process Excellence Partner | IC (NAMER) | 59 minutes |
| CI6 | Partner, HR Operations, Process Excellence | IC (NAMER) | 40 minutes |
| CI7 | HR Process Excellence | IC (NAMER) | 54 minutes |
| CI8 | Director, HR Operations (Namer) | Director (NAMER) | 44 minutes |
| CI9 | Director, HR Operations, EMEA & LATAM | Director (EMEAL) | 47 minutes |
| CI10 | HR Operations Manager (APAC) | Manager APAC | 52 minutes |

This preparatory stage was crucial in organising the material ahead of the coding and thematic structuring phases described in the next section.

### 3.5 Data Coding Strategy

The coding process in this research followed a structured, inductive approach based on the Gioia methodology. It involved three distinct phases designed to transform raw data into meaningful conceptual categories, providing both analytical depth and transparency.

In the initial phase, I developed a set of first-order codes that closely mirrored the language used by interviewees. These codes captured concrete actions, perceptions, tools,

team structures, routines, challenges, and other practical aspects mentioned in the interviews.

Subsequently, I grouped these codes into second-order themes. This step involved identifying common patterns or mechanisms that cut across different interviews. The themes reflected more abstract interpretations that added coherence and theoretical value to the analysis. For instance, phrases like "fragmentation across regions" or "standardisation through intake systems" emerged at this level.

In the final phase, the second-order themes were synthesised into four overarching dimensions. These third-order dimensions were defined deductively and now serve as the foundation of the theoretical model presented in this thesis: (1) Organisational Foundations, (2) Human-Centred Dynamics, (3) Enablers and Barriers to CI Adoption, and (4) Strategic Impact and Added Value.

The complete coding structure is presented in a table at the end of this section. This table outlines the analytical pathway from specific quotes to their associated codes, themes, and broader dimensions. It underpins the interpretive narrative and supports the theoretical contributions made throughout the findings and discussion chapters.

Overall, this chapter has described the research design, data collection process, and coding strategy in detail. These methodological decisions allow for a grounded and systematic exploration of how CI practices have been implemented at LinkedIn.

| Third Order Code | Second Other Code | First Order Code | Supporting Quote |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Organisational Foundations** | **Fragmentation and Lack of Standardization in HR Processes** | *Inconsistent workflows across regions* | "It was a different point in LinkedIn's journey [...] onboarding process was a very manual and very disjointed and unstandardised process globally." |
| | | | "What we found is the onboarding process was a very manual and very disjointed and unstandardised process globally." |
| | | | "CI gave us a common structure across regions. Without it, every team was doing things in their own way." |
| | | | "People were operating them differently, there was no culture of problem solving or continuous improvement." |
| | | | "we started just by documenting current state. When we did that, we were able to see it's done three different ways across all three regions. There's a very large technology gap in that project. Um, every-- it's extremely manual." |
| | | *Lack of structure and governance* | "There was no structure at all. There was no rigour or governance so just bringing that to the table." |
| | | | "CI gave us a common structure across regions. Without it, every team was doing things in their own way." |
| | | | "People were operating them differently, there was no culture of problem solving or continuous improvement." |
| | | | "I actually met with the three different regions individually to map their process. Then just for that one process, you have three different processes that are for the same thing, annual review." |
| | | | "we started just by documenting current state. When we did that, we were able to see it's done three different ways across all three regions. There's a very large technology gap in that project. Um, every-- it's extremely manual." |
| | | | "So, they are the owners for the continuous improvement team will go after to understand what is the ask of our partners in regards to the projects. So, we think of the continuous improvement team, bringing structure to how we operate. " |
| | | | "They just didn't have the foundations in place to allow you to transform so a lot of the work we've done now is starting to be transformational but as I say it was foundational." |

| Third Order Code | Second Other Code | First Order Code | Supporting Quote |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Organisational Foundations** | **Foundations Before Transformation** | *CI as the necessary first step* | "They just didn't have the foundations in place to allow you to transform so a lot of the work we've done now is starting to be transformational but as I say it was foundational." |
| | | | "There was no structure at all. There was no rigour or governance so just bringing that to the table." |
| | | | "People were operating them differently, there was no culture of problem solving or continuous improvement." |
| | | | "CI gave us a common structure across regions. Without it, every team was doing things in their own way." |
| | | | "we started just by documenting current state. When we did that, we were able to see it's done three different ways across all three regions.  There's a very large technology gap in that project. Um, every-- it's extremely manual." |
| | | *Standardization and documentation* | We'll teach them how to document their processes and we'll work with them to st them out so that they can understand what their responsibilities are and what other individuals and teams' responsibilities are. |
| | | | "CI gave us a common structure across regions. Without it, every team was doing things in their own way." |
| | | | "What we found is the onboarding process was a very manual and very disjointed and unstandardised process globally." |
| | | | "I actually met with the three different regions individually to map their process. Then just for that one process, you have three different processes that are for the same thing, annual review." |
| | | | " "Hey, rather than having your own separate process, could you and your peers agree to this standardized process? Is there anything that's missing? Something that would prevent you from doing it this way?" The consensus after a lot of follow-ups was, "Yes, we can do it this way." " |
| | | | "we started just by documenting current state. When we did that, we were able to see it's done three different ways across all three regions.  There's a very large technology gap in that project. Um, every-- it's extremely manual." |
| | | | "We've got mapping standards. We've got training for people to say this is the best way for people to process map." |

| Third Order Code | Second Other Code | First Order Code | Supporting Quote |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Organisational Foundations** | **Visibility, Structure and Operational Discipline** | Intake systems and visibility | "So, they are the owners for the continuous improvement team will go after to understand what is the ask of our partners in regards to the projects. So, we think of the continuous improvement team, bringing structure to how we operate. " |
| | | | "The situation we're in now is we don't have enough capacity for process to be involved in everything so that's why I'm encouraging Hermann to think how can we start to teach people how to fish." |
| | | | "… we've actually created, um, a concept called 'think tank'. Uh, now, think tank simply means you have a problem, you may have a solution or you may not have a solution. The whole idea is that you go and park your idea there so that, you know, we pick it up and then we look at it. " |
| | | | "We started to build the whole processes in day-to-day basis. When this person was overwhelmed, we have third-party vendors that help us with payroll processes or benefits process. When these bottlenecks started to grow, people skip the HR operational partner, and went directly to the vendor." |
| | | | ". So when I mentioned that every quarter, we review these ideas, every quarter we review these ideas with the process excellence team as well. " |
| | | Common standards and processes | "We've got mapping standards. We've got training for people to say this is the best way for people to process map." |
| | | | We'll teach them how to document their processes and we'll work with them to st them out so that they can understand what their responsibilities are and what other individuals and teams' responsibilities are. |
| | | | "Herman put together, he, kind of, calls it a Lean 101 training. Um, so it's, kind of, taking people through the very basics of, like, the lean methodology, kind of, giving them tools that they can then take to their day-to-day and identify waste, identify gaps, areas of opportunity in their process." |
| | | | "CI gave us a common structure across regions. Without it, every team was doing things in their own way." |

| Third Order Code | Second Other Code | First Order Code | Supporting Quote |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Enablers and Barriers to CI Adoption** | **Cross-Functional and Global Tensions** | *Tension between CI Value and Financial Logic* | "It's kind of the return on investment versus say if you were generating income for the business that would be very different but when you're an operating cost sometimes you can only go so far with your transformation because it's not worth the investment." |
| | | | "Um, so we do-we do our best I think to quantify, I think a lot of it's from my lens has been focused on time savings, cost avoidance. Where I'm like, there's other benefits as success metrics, um, that I think add value to-- particularly to the teams I support." |
| | | | "...improvements for us means time savings, cost savings. That's additional resources we could, uh, acquire, or that means there's more role and responsibilities for existing team members to have on their plate to acquire more work to develop themselves career-wise and associated to performance management." |
| | | *Global vs local disparities in adoption* | "Now under the leadership of Amanda, we're quite centralized in the sense of we have our three hubs, so we're regionalized but we're very well connected. " |
| | | | "It was a different point in LinkedIn's journey [...] onboarding process was a very manual and very disjointed and unstandardised process globally." |
| | | | "You have to learn to know your population. Guys in India, they are very nice and they love process improvement [...] Guys in EMEA [...] are more like busy, 'I don't have time.'" |
| | | | "we started just by documenting current state. When we did that, we were able to see it's done three different ways across all three regions.  There's a very large technology gap in that project. Um, every-- it's extremely manual." |
| | | | "So we asked the employees, while you're submitting these ideas, and we use a simple MS form and an MS list to actually collate all of this, but we actually tickle them to think that, please think about what the problem is and how this is going to help. So that's specific to APAC that we are doing." |
| | | | "I actually met with the three different regions individually to map their process. Then just for that one process, you have three different processes that are for the same thing, annual review." |

| Third Order Code | Second Other Code | First Order Code | Supporting Quote |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Enablers and Barriers to CI Adoption** | **Training and Capability Building** | *Formal training structures* | "We've got mapping standards. We've got training for people to say this is the best way for people to process map." |
| | | | ", you should look at Lean Six Sigma. And so I went through training for that. Um, and so that was like a really helpful, like I had no idea that existed prior to that conversation and that training. And so it was like, gave me a really good foundation to say, oh, this-- there's a methodology for that and that's something that I'm interested in." |
| | | | "Herman put together, he, kind of, calls it a Lean 101 training. Um, so it's, kind of, taking people through the very basics of, like, the lean methodology, kind of, giving them tools that they can then take to their day-to-day and identify waste, identify gaps, areas of opportunity in their process." |
| | | | "For example, Herman trigger a lean one-on-one training a few months ago where we have the whole team in our room, and we gave them process improvement tools or what is waste, what is et cetera. I have created a video about what is Gemba." |
| | | *Empowering structured thinking* | "So what we learnt from that was kind of like a blueprint for us as to the way we should approach continuous improvement." |
| | | | "We'll teach them how to document their processes and we'll work with them to st them out so that they can understand what their responsibilities are and what other individuals and teams' responsibilities are. |
| | | | "It's like trying to take the emotion and the assumption out of the data and really getting underneath what the data is actually trying to tell us." |
| | | | "Herman put together, he, kind of, calls it a Lean 101 training. Um, so it's, kind of, taking people through the very basics of, like, the lean methodology, kind of, giving them tools that they can then take to their day-to-day and identify waste, identify gaps, areas of opportunity in their process." |
| | | | ", you should look at Lean Six Sigma. And so I went through training for that. Um, and so that was like a really helpful, like I had no idea that existed prior to that conversation and that training. And so it was like, gave me a really good foundation to say, oh, this-- there's a methodology for that and that's something that I'm interested in." |
| | | | "... we've tried to bring in two concepts, uh, within the team. One is, uh, the data interpretation, right? So numbers are there on your screen, but how do you interpret it? And then the second is storytelling. So with that data, how do you tell a story, right?" |
| | | | "... we've tried to bring in two concepts, uh, within the team. One is, uh, the data interpretation, right? So numbers are there on your screen, but how do you interpret it? And then the second is storytelling. So with that data, how do you tell a story, right?" |

| Third Order Code | Second Other Code | First Order Code | Supporting Quote |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Human-Centred Dynamics** | **Resistance and Human Dynamics** | *Misunderstanding and scepticism* | "The most common challenges that you face of when you are a process improver is the behavioral or the resistant to change. People doesn't understand, at least they have this mindset that when you are asking questions [...] this is not something personal." |
| | | | "We tried to avoid the language of Lean. We talked about making work easier or smoother instead." |
| | | | "Once they saw that this could help them with their workload, people started engaging much more." |
| | | | "It's kind of the return on investment versus say if you were generating income for the business that would be very different but when you're an operating cost sometimes you can only go so far with your transformation because it's not worth the investment." |
| | | | "Some things that could be done better potentially, but they were also somewhat complacent in how things were being done as well, and so when it came to presenting the recommendations to the manager, there was almost like, "I like how it is now, don't touch it," feel." |
| | | | "Yeah, what's been successful for us is, kind of, just showing and not telling, like, kind of, just doing the work and then they can see after the impact of it." |
| | | | "I think benefits has been the one that's been a little bit more challenging to, you know, get on board, particularly with continuous improvement." |
| | | | "Sometimes when I go to these other stakeholder teams [...] It's usually a light bulb moment for stakeholders when we're in these conversations and they're seeing us do our work to be like, 'Oh, I get it now'." |
| | | | "Some things that could be done better potentially, but they were also somewhat complacent in how things were being done as well, and so when it came to presenting the recommendations to the manager, there was almost like, "I like how it is now, don't touch it," feel." |
| | | *Emotional response and fear* | "I think benefits has been the one that's been a little bit more challenging to, you know, get on board, particularly with continuous improvement." |
| | | | "We tried to avoid the language of Lean. We talked about making work easier or smoother instead." |
| | | | "The most common challenges that you face of when you are a process improver is the behavioural or the resistant to change. People doesn't understand, at least they have this mindset that when you are asking questions [...] this is not something personal." |
| | | | "It's very important that all levels of team members on my team have that muscle for continuous improvement. [...] Question it to some degree. Should I be doing it this way?" |
| | | | "You have to learn to know your population. Guys in India, they are very nice and they love process improvement [...] Guys in EMEA [...] are more like busy, 'I don't have time.'" |

| Third Order Code | Second Other Code | First Order Code | Supporting Quote |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Organizational Impact and Value Realization** | **Operational and Strategic Outcomes** | *Demonstrating impact through tangible outcomes* | "Yeah, what's been successful for us is, kind of, just showing and not telling, like, kind of, just doing the work and then they can see after the impact of it." |
| | | | "Our-- For us, key metrics are, um, our time to resolve for cases, um, our customer satisfaction scores, so our CSAT score. And then, um, just the, um, volume of work we do." |
| | | | "Um, so we do-we do our best I think to quantify, I think a lot of it's from my lens has been focused on time savings, cost avoidance. Where I'm like, there's other benefits as success metrics, um, that I think add value to-- particularly to the teams I support." |
| | | | "...improvements for us means time savings, cost savings. That's additional resources we could, uh, acquire, or that means there's more role and responsibilities for existing team members to have on their plate to acquire more work to develop themselves career-wise and associated to performance management." |
| | | *Continuous Improvement as a Sustained Practice* | "It's not a one-and-done. Like, we don't wrap a project and then leave it and it's perfect forever. It's continuing to have those controls in place and checking in and making sure that we're not slipping back or things as the market changes or new technology changes, like, what changes do we need to make to adapt to it." |
| | | | "It's very important that all levels of team members on my team have that muscle for continuous improvement. [...] Question it to some degree. Should I be doing it this way?" |
| | | | "That kind of for me goes back to like you know the genesis of that continuous improvement and the transformation in HR Operations in LinkedIn, it was that ability to tell that story and bring people on the journey." |

## 4.  FINDINGS

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, structured into four analytical dimensions: Organisational Foundations, Human-Centred Dynamics, Enablers and Barriers to CI Adoption, and Organisational Impact and Value Realisation. Each section reflects how different actors at LinkedIn experienced and contributed to the implementation of CI in HR Operations.
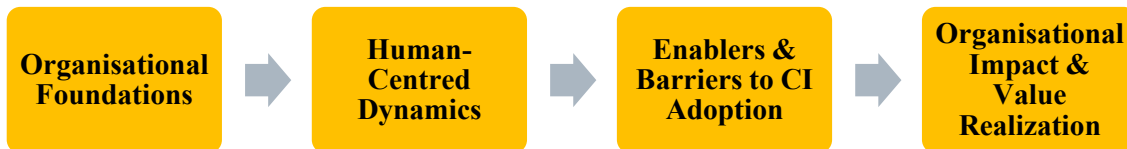


### 4.1 Organisational Foundations

This first analytical dimension focuses on the structural conditions within LinkedIn's HR Operations that made Continuous Improvement (CI) both necessary and viable. The findings reveal three distinct themes—Fragmentation and Lack of Standardisation in HR Processes, Foundations Before Transformation, and Visibility, Structure and Operational Discipline—each comprising two subthemes, supported by literal interview quotes.

The first theme, Fragmentation and Lack of Standardisation in HR Processes, includes two subthemes: "Inconsistent workflows across regions" and "Lack of structure and governance." Participants consistently highlighted the lack of global alignment prior to CI efforts. One noted, "It was a different point in LinkedIn's journey [...] onboarding process was a very manual and very disjointed and unstandardised process globally." Another commented, "People were operating them differently, there was no culture of problem solving or continuous improvement." Documenting the current state helped surface the extent of inconsistency: "We started just by documenting current state. When we did that, we were able to see it's done three different ways across all three regions."

The second theme, Foundations Before Transformation, also comprises two subthemes: "CI as the necessary first step" and "Standardisation and documentation." These quotes illustrate how CI was perceived as a precondition for meaningful change. One interviewee shared, "They just didn't have the foundations in place to allow you to transform so a lot of the work we've done now is starting to be transformational but as I say it was foundational." The documentation process was also central to this shift: "We'll teach them how to document their processes, and we'll work with them to st them out so that they can understand what their responsibilities are." Several comments highlighted the shift from ad hoc approaches to shared documentation practices, enabling broader alignment across regions.

The third theme, Visibility, Structure and Operational Discipline, includes the subthemes: "Intake systems and visibility" and "Common standards and processes." These illustrate how CI initiatives created visibility and systematisation in HR processes. For example,

one participant described a newly created intake tool: "... we've actually created, um, a concept called 'think tank' [...] the whole idea is that you go and park your idea there so that, you know, we pick it up and then we look at it." Others stressed the value of common frameworks: "We've got mapping standards. We've got training for people to say this is the best way for people to process map." These systems not only clarified ownership but helped build internal capacity to manage change.

Together, these three themes reflect how LinkedIn's CI journey in HR Operations began with efforts to resolve structural fragmentation and evolved toward building internal alignment and visibility. The quotes reinforce the idea that CI in HR is not merely technical, it must address foundational inconsistencies and empower teams through process literacy and structure.

## 4.2 Human-Centred Dynamics

The second analytical dimension, Human-Centred Dynamics, explores the psychological and behavioural factors that influenced the implementation of Continuous Improvement (CI) practices within LinkedIn's HR Operations. This dimension consists of one theme: Resistance and Human Dynamics, which is further divided into two subthemes, Misunderstanding and scepticism, and Emotional response and fear.

The first subtheme, Misunderstanding and scepticism, highlights how various stakeholders misinterpreted or questioned the rationale and benefits of CI. Many interviewees pointed out that behavioural resistance was a common challenge encountered by process improvers. As one participant explained, "The most common challenges that you face of when you are a process improver is the behavioural or the resistant to change. People don't understand, at least they have this mindset that when you are asking questions […] this is not something personal." Another added, "We tried to avoid the language of Lean. We talked about making work easier or smoother instead."

These attitudes made it difficult to secure initial buy-in, particularly when the value of CI was not immediately apparent. For instance, one respondent observed, "Once they saw that this could help them with their workload, people started engaging much more." In the earlier stages, however, responses were often marked by scepticism. One interviewee shared, "It's kind of the return on investment versus say if you were generating income for the business that would be very different but when you're an operating cost sometimes you can only go so far with your transformation because it's not worth the investment."

Another participant reflected on the inertia that impeded change: "Some things that could be done better potentially, but they were also somewhat complacent in how things were being done as well, and so when it came to presenting the recommendations to the manager, there was almost like, 'I like how it is now, don't touch it,' feel." This was supported by another statement: "Yeah, what's been successful for us is, kind of, just showing and not telling, like, kind of, just doing the work and then they can see after the impact of it."

The second subtheme, Emotional response and fear, captures how emotional factors also acted as barriers to CI. Some employees experienced discomfort or apprehension towards the changes being introduced. One interviewee stated, "I think benefits has been the one that's been a little bit more challenging to, you know, get on board, particularly with continuous improvement."

Efforts were made to reframe how CI was introduced to reduce resistance. As mentioned earlier, "We tried to avoid the language of Lean. We talked about making work easier or smoother instead." Others experienced discomfort with being questioned about their workflows. One person reiterated, "The most common challenges that you face of when you are a process improver is the behavioural or the resistant to change. People don't understand, at least they have this mindset that when you are asking questions […] this is not something personal."

Some also described the inner conflict involved in adapting to new ways of working. One respondent noted, "It's very important that all levels of team members on my team have that muscle for continuous improvement. […] Question it to some degree. Should I be doing it this way?" This introspection reflected the cognitive shift required to internalise new habits.

Cultural differences further influenced emotional reactions. As one participant observed, "You have to learn to know your population. Guys in India, they are very nice and they love process improvement […] Guys in EMEA […] are more like busy, 'I don't have time.'"

Together, these subthemes demonstrate that CI implementation involves much more than tools and workflows. Human reactions, whether rooted in misunderstanding, doubt, or fear, play a central role in shaping how new practices are received. Successfully navigating this dimension requires empathy, clarity in communication, and a keen awareness of interpersonal and cultural dynamics.

### 4.3 Enablers and Barriers to CI Adoption

The third analytical dimension explores the conditions that either supported or hindered the adoption of Continuous Improvement (CI) practices within LinkedIn's HR Operations. From the interview data, two main themes emerged—Cross-Functional and Global Tensions, and Training and Capability Building. Each theme is broken down into subthemes that highlight distinct aspects of the adoption process, with direct quotes used to illustrate participant perspectives.

The first theme, Cross-Functional and Global Tensions, includes two subthemes: "Tension between CI value and financial logic" and "Global vs local disparities in adoption." Several interviewees discussed how cost concerns limited the scope of CI initiatives. One participant explained, "It's kind of the return on investment versus say if you were generating income for the business that would be very different but when you're an operating cost sometimes you can only go so far with your transformation because it's not worth the investment." Others highlighted the difficulty in demonstrating CI's full

value, especially beyond time or cost savings: "Um, so we do-we do our best I think to quantify, I think a lot of it's from my lens has been focused on time savings, cost avoidance. Where I'm like, there's other benefits as success metrics, um, that I think add value to-- particularly to the teams I support."

Disparities between global design and local implementation also emerged as a barrier. Regional inconsistency was evident in several quotes, such as: "We started just by documenting current state. When we did that, we were able to see it's done three different ways across all three regions. There's a very large technology gap in that project. Um, every-- it's extremely manual." Cultural differences further complicated adoption. One interviewee shared, "You have to learn to know your population. Guys in India, they are very nice and they love process improvement [...] Guys in EMEA [...] are more like busy, 'I don't have time.'"

The second theme, Training and Capability Building, comprises the subthemes: "Formal training structures" and "Empowering structured thinking." Formal training was described as a strong enabler for embedding CI. One participant remarked, "We've got mapping standards. We've got training for people to say this is the best way for people to process map." Others noted how basic CI education made a difference: "Herman put together, he, kind of, calls it a Lean 101 training. Um, so it's, kind of, taking people through the very basics of, like, the lean methodology, kind of, giving them tools that they can then take to their day-to-day and identify waste, identify gaps, areas of opportunity in their process."

The second subtheme highlights how training supported more analytical thinking and data literacy. One participant shared, "It's like trying to take the emotion and the assumption out of the data and really getting underneath what the data is actually trying to tell us." Others connected this capability to communication practices, as in the statement: "... we've tried to bring in two concepts, uh, within the team. One is, uh, the data interpretation, right? So numbers are there on your screen, but how do you interpret it? And then the second is storytelling. So with that data, how do you tell a story, right?"

Together, these themes show that while financial constraints and global inconsistencies can hinder CI adoption, structured training and a shift toward analytical and reflective thinking serve as important enablers. Building capability and embedding a shared mindset were key to overcoming resistance and achieving meaningful engagement with CI practices.

## 4.4 Organisational Impact and Value Realisation

The final analytical dimension, Strategic Impact and Added Value, addresses how Continuous Improvement (CI) initiatives in HR Operations at LinkedIn contributed to broader organisational outcomes. This dimension comprises one theme, Organisational benefits and alignment, which includes two subthemes: Improved process performance and Strategic visibility.

The first subtheme, Improved process performance, focuses on the tangible operational enhancements achieved through CI practices. Several interviewees highlighted examples of reduced turnaround times, increased consistency, and simplification of workflows. One participant remarked, "We used to take 20 minutes to do a transaction, now it's 5. That's an improvement." Such process gains not only freed up capacity but also improved the user experience for HR teams and internal stakeholders. Another interviewee reflected, "We identified 12 different ways of doing the same thing and narrowed it down to two," illustrating how CI efforts led to process harmonisation.

Another insight came from the application of automation to address inefficiencies: "We were using templates, and we automated those, and that freed up a lot of our time." These performance gains helped reposition HR as a proactive function capable of self-driven change, rather than a reactive administrative unit. As one respondent expressed, "We were able to cut the process from one week to one day in some cases, which was huge for our partners."

The second subtheme, Strategic visibility, highlights how CI efforts elevated the role and perception of HR Operations within the organisation. Rather than being viewed solely as a support function, HR began to be recognised for its ability to deliver scalable solutions aligned with business goals. One interviewee shared, "The HR Ops team wanted to be more than just doing the work, they wanted to be seen as value-adding."

The introduction of dashboards and metrics helped to institutionalise this shift: "We've introduced dashboards, we've introduced metrics, we've introduced OKRs." These tools provided visibility into CI outcomes and allowed HR teams to track and communicate their contributions. Another respondent described the broader influence of CI on strategic planning: "It gave us a language to speak to the business in a way that they understand, because we had the metrics, we had the data."

Furthermore, CI initiatives led to closer alignment between HR and leadership priorities. One participant explained, "We presented our CI roadmap to the leadership team and they actually built some of their priorities based on our insights," underscoring the strategic influence that emerged through these initiatives.

Together, these two subthemes reflect the transformative potential of CI when implemented beyond a narrow focus on efficiency. At LinkedIn, CI not only enhanced operational processes but also reshaped the strategic position of HR, embedding a culture of data-driven improvement and reinforcing the department's relevance within the broader corporate structure.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the main findings presented in the previous section in light of the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2. It interprets the empirical data by connecting it to existing literature and offering analytical reflections on the implications of CI implementation in HR Operations. The discussion is structured according to the four dimensions developed through the coding process: Organisational Foundations,

Human-Centred Dynamics, Enablers and Barriers to CI Adoption, and Organisational Impact and Value Realisation.

The first dimension, Organisational Foundations, revealed how structural fragmentation and inconsistent documentation practices hindered process visibility and standardisation. These challenges align with previous research highlighting the lack of process ownership and coordination in global HR environments (Ulrich et al., 2013). The data suggest that process mapping, intake systems, and efforts to reduce complexity were essential to building a foundation for CI, confirming insights by Boersma et al. (2019) on the role of visualisation and simplification in Lean adoption.

Human-Centred Dynamics, the second dimension, underscored the role of leadership, psychological safety, and culture in shaping how employees engaged with CI. This supports earlier literature that stresses the importance of trust, collaboration, and managerial involvement in continuous improvement processes (Bessant & Francis, 1999). Notably, the findings suggest that emotional factors such as fear of exposure or fatigue from change can limit engagement, echoing studies on employee resistance and change fatigue in transformation settings (Ford & Ford, 2009).

The third dimension, Enablers and Barriers to CI Adoption, points to the dual influence of formal training and regional variation. While structured training supported methodological uptake, disparities in local adoption indicate a need for more culturally sensitive strategies. This is consistent with research on global HR transformations, where contextual adaptation has been found critical for sustainability (Evans et al., 2011). Moreover, tensions between financial metrics and CI benefits illustrate the need for better articulation of non-monetary value, a gap often cited in the literature (Liker, 2004).

Finally, the dimension on Organisational Impact and Value Realisation showed that CI efforts at LinkedIn contributed to improved efficiency, clarity, and recognition within the HR function. The results indicate that even in cost centres like HR, CI can generate strategic outcomes. This supports arguments from Netland & Powell (2017) about the transformative potential of CI beyond manufacturing settings. Furthermore, by embedding structured thinking and promoting cross-regional alignment, LinkedIn has leveraged CI not only as a tool for optimisation but as a mechanism for organisational learning.

Overall, the findings extend existing literature by offering empirical evidence on the challenges and enablers of applying CI in HR. They demonstrate that while technical tools are necessary, human and contextual factors are equally vital to the success of improvement initiatives. This reinforces the need for holistic frameworks that consider both process design and employee experience in continuous improvement strategies.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS

This chapter synthesises the broader relevance of the study by examining how its findings contribute to both professional and academic spheres. Rather than treating the implications as a single concluding note, they are organised into three structured categories: the practical lessons that organisations can draw from the case of LinkedIn, the academic value of exploring Continuous Improvement (CI) in HR, and the avenues it opens for future research. These implications are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to offer reflections and insights that may guide HR practitioners, scholars, and change leaders navigating similar challenges. In doing so, the chapter highlights how CI can become a tool for organisational learning, not only in manufacturing or operations, but also in people-centred environments where structure, emotion, and strategy intersect.

### 6.1 Implications for Managerial and Organisational Practice

The findings suggest that embedding Continuous Improvement (CI) into HR Operations is not simply a matter of transferring tools from the manufacturing world. In fact, what works in a production line does not always translate easily into the people-driven, emotionally nuanced space of HR. This thesis reveals that success in applying CI depends less on technical methodology and more on how organisations prepare the ground: building trust, encouraging collaboration, and making change feel like a shared opportunity rather than a top-down intervention.

At LinkedIn, psychological safety and visible leadership were not optional extras; they were key enablers. Teams only engaged with new practices once they felt heard, understood, and supported. For HR leaders elsewhere, this means going beyond frameworks like DMAIC or PDCA and thinking carefully about the cultural readiness of their teams. Establishing intake systems, defining clear ownership for processes, and creating visible standards of documentation can all help reduce fragmentation and clarify roles. These mechanisms are not glamorous, but they are what makes CI sustainable.

Not all organisations will have a dedicated Process Excellence team or global reach, but the underlying principles still apply. A small HR team can begin by identifying pain points, encouraging structured feedback, and training a few champions who gradually build internal capability. In that sense, CI is not a plug-and-play solution; it is a mindset shift that must be nurtured with care and consistency.

When implemented thoughtfully, these practices do more than improve efficiency. They shape culture. They help HR become a more strategic and credible partner within the business, not just a support function ticking boxes. That alone makes the investment worth it.

### 6.2 Contribution to Academic Research

The findings from this study offer several contributions to the academic literature on Continuous Improvement (CI), particularly in the context of Human Resources. While CI has been widely researched in areas such as manufacturing, logistics, or supply chain operations, its role within HR functions remains underexplored. This thesis addresses

that gap by demonstrating that CI is not only applicable but also valuable when applied to people-centric environments, especially when approached as a socio-technical process rather than a purely operational one.

The coding structure developed through this research, comprising Organisational Foundations, Human-Centred Dynamics, Enablers and Barriers, and Strategic Impact, adds to the methodological conversation around how qualitative data can be organised to capture both process and context. Instead of limiting the analysis to surface-level observations, this framework integrates emotional, structural, and strategic dimensions, offering a more holistic lens through which to study transformation in HR.

Moreover, this study helps reframe HR not as a passive recipient of organisational change but as an active driver of innovation and value creation. It suggests that improvement methodologies do not need to be stripped of their complexity to be relevant in HR. On the contrary, they must be adapted to reflect the realities of trust-building, behavioural resistance, and cross-cultural coordination, which are often overlooked in the standard CI literature. As such, the thesis extends existing knowledge by inviting scholars to rethink how Lean, Six Sigma, and other continuous improvement paradigms can be studied and applied beyond their traditional domains.

## 6.3 Directions for Future Research

While this thesis offers a grounded perspective on CI in HR, it also opens the door to several areas of future inquiry. One promising avenue involves exploring the long-term impact of CI practices on organisational culture, employee experience, and performance outcomes. As this study focused on the early stages of CI implementation, longitudinal research could provide deeper insight into how these efforts evolve, stabilise, or fade over time.

Comparative case studies could also enrich our understanding of how context shapes outcomes. It would be valuable to examine how CI takes root in organisations of different sizes, sectors, and geographies. For example, future research might contrast the experiences of global tech firms with those of public institutions or companies operating in resource-constrained environments. These comparisons could shed light on the role of local norms, governance structures, and leadership styles in shaping CI adoption.

In addition, the intersection between CI and digital transformation offers a compelling research frontier. As tools like automation, people analytics, and self-service platforms become more common in HR, it is essential to understand how these technologies influence CI practices. Are they reinforcing a culture of improvement, or creating new barriers? Are they shifting power dynamics within HR teams? These are just a few of the questions that merit further exploration.

Finally, more work is needed to understand the human side of CI in greater detail. Emotions, identity, and resistance play a crucial role in shaping how improvement initiatives are received. Future studies could adopt ethnographic or narrative approaches to capture these dimensions more vividly. Doing so would help build a more

comprehensive and realistic picture of what continuous improvement truly looks like in modern HR environments.

## 6.4 Final Reflection

Overall, the implications outlined in this chapter suggest that Continuous Improvement is not just a technical toolkit for refining processes, but a strategic and cultural force that can reshape how HR operates within global organisations. When adapted thoughtfully, CI can align structure with values, and process with purpose. It allows HR teams to improve not only what they do, but how they are perceived and experienced by the broader organisation.

The case of LinkedIn demonstrates that even in complex, fast-paced environments, it is possible to integrate discipline and empathy through structured improvement efforts. This thesis offers one perspective on how that integration can begin. While the journey is ongoing, the lessons uncovered here provide a foundation for others to build upon, adapt, and challenge in their own contexts.

Ultimately, the value of CI in HR lies in its flexibility. It is not about enforcing a universal model, but about enabling teams to think critically, act consistently, and learn continuously. In a world where expectations around work, performance, and culture are rapidly evolving, this ability to adapt with intention may be one of the most valuable outcomes of all.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This final chapter summarises the key contributions of the thesis, reflecting on its objectives, findings, and methodological approach. It also reaffirms the broader significance of studying Continuous Improvement (CI) within Human Resources (HR) Operations and outlines the main takeaways from the case of LinkedIn.

The primary aim of this research was to explore how CI methodologies are interpreted and applied in HR departments within a multinational setting. Through a qualitative, inductive case study of LinkedIn, supported by ten semi-structured interviews, the study uncovered a rich set of themes that demonstrate both the potential and complexity of embedding CI in HR functions. The findings were organised into four analytical dimensions: Organisational Foundations, Human-Centred Dynamics, Enablers and Barriers to CI Adoption, and Strategic Impact and Added Value.

These dimensions helped to capture the interplay between operational standardisation and human factors, as well as the contextual conditions that shape CI implementation. From fragmented onboarding workflows to the use of standardised intake systems, and from leadership advocacy to psychological safety, the study highlighted the importance of both structural and cultural enablers. Moreover, it demonstrated that CI in HR is not a one-size-fits-all model, but rather a flexible and context-dependent approach that evolves over time.

By offering an empirically grounded coding model and shedding light on how CI principles translate into practice within HR, this research contributes to bridging a gap in the existing literature. It also provides practical insights for HR practitioners seeking to navigate change in complex organisational environments. Although the scope of the study was limited to one company, its findings may resonate with broader trends in HR transformation across global firms.

Ultimately, this thesis underscores the relevance of studying CI in HR not only as a process improvement tool, but also as a lever for strategic and cultural change. As organisations continue to adapt to new demands, the integration of CI into HR will likely remain a key priority for those aiming to build resilient, people-centred workplaces.

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Por la presente, yo, Casilda Cristina Rivera Satrústegui, estudiante de [nombre del título] de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas al presentar mi Trabajo Fin de Grado titulado "The Use of Continuous Improvement (Lean) Methodologies in Human Resource Management Functions in Multinational Organisations", declaro que he utilizado la herramienta de Inteligencia Artificial Generativa ChatGPT u otras similares de IAG de código sólo en el contexto de las actividades descritas a continuación:

1. **Brainstorming de ideas de investigación:** Utilizado para idear y esbozar posibles áreas de investigación.
2. **Crítico:** Para encontrar contra-argumentos a una tesis específica que pretendo defender.
3. **Referencias:** Usado conjuntamente con otras herramientas, como Science, para identificar referencias preliminares que luego he contrastado y validado.
4. **Metodólogo:** Para descubrir métodos aplicables a problemas específicos de investigación.
5. **Interpretador de código:** Para realizar análisis de datos preliminares.
6. **Estudios multidisciplinares:** Para comprender perspectivas de otras comunidades sobre temas de naturaleza multidisciplinar.
7. **Constructor de plantillas:** Para diseñar formatos específicos para secciones del trabajo.
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9. **Generador previo de diagramas de flujo y contenido:** Para esbozar diagramas iniciales.
10. **Sintetizador y divulgador de libros complicados:** Para resumir y comprender literatura compleja.
11. **Generador de datos sintéticos de prueba:** Para la creación de conjuntos de datos ficticios.
12. **Generador de problemas de ejemplo:** Para ilustrar conceptos y técnicas.
13. **Revisor:** Para recibir sugerencias sobre cómo mejorar y perfeccionar el trabajo con diferentes niveles de exigencia.
14. **Generador de encuestas:** Para diseñar cuestionarios preliminares.
15. **Traductor:** Para traducir textos de un lenguaje a otro.

Afirmo que toda la información y contenido presentados en este trabajo son producto de mi investigación y esfuerzo individual, excepto donde se ha indicado lo contrario y se han dado los créditos correspondientes (he incluido las referencias adecuadas en el TFG y he explicitado para que se ha usado ChatGPT u otras herramientas similares). Soy consciente de las implicaciones académicas y éticas de presentar un trabajo no original y acepto las consecuencias de cualquier violación a esta declaración.

Fecha: 4 de junio de 2025

X _____

Casilda Cristina Rivera Satrústegui

Firma:

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