

HRM AND RATIONALIZATION PROBLRMATIC IN ALGERIAN ENTERPRISES

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Abstract: *The article offers a comprehensive analysis of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in Algerian companies, incorporating insights from local work sociology, field observations, and a review of relevant literature. The findings reveal a significant gap between the formal HRM policies and their actual implementation, which is shaped by informal customs and traditional power dynamics. The interpretation thoughtfully places these practices within the context of existing studies on the cultural differences between Western models and Algerian realities. This analysis provides valuable perspectives for understanding Algerian organizations in a more dynamic way, moving beyond rigid or static views.*

Keywords: HRM, culturalism, Algerian sociology, work, enterprise

1. Introduction

This article presents a theoretical analysis alongside field notes on HRM practices within an Algerian mining company. It draws on contributions from Algerian sociology of work and organizations, a field that since the 1970s has explored the confrontation between imported Western managerial models and Algerian socio-cultural specificities related to work and management. Although this line of inquiry remains relevant, it requires a more dynamic approach that acknowledges the complexities of contemporary Algerian organizational logic.

2. Problematic and context

Following independence in 1962, Algeria embarked on an extensive industrialization effort, with factories and industrial complexes built through cooperation with socialist countries. This shift aimed to overcome the economic stagnation inherited from colonization and to structure a modern national economy (Harbi,1980). However, the transition to an industrial economy, along with its accompanying social changes, marked a significant break from the rural lifestyle that still characterized much of Algerian society.

Understanding HRM and management practices in Algeria is inseparable from the broader sociological and anthropological frameworks analyzing development and modernization. Specifically, the concepts and practices of general management and human resource management in Algeria are products of the development projects initiated after independence. These projects in return, aimed to modernize Algeria, and according to the dominant modernist paradigm of the time, this modernization was to be achieved through industrialization.

The modernist proposition advocates for the idea of modernity and the potential to transition Algerian society from a traditional cultural system to a more advanced position based on the Western cultural pattern, an argument articulated by decision-makers after independence. This vision is reflected in the constitutional discourse of the 1976 Constitution and the National Charter, which affirm that:

"The Industrial Revolution brought about significant changes in the mindsets of workers, peasants, and various members of society, in addition to propelling development; all of which contribute to the overall advancement in science and technology and facilitate the introduction of modernized methods of work and organization" (El-mithaak Elwatani, 1976: 18).

As stated in Article No. 21 of the 1976 Constitution and the National Charter, the Industrial Revolution is intended not only to foster economic development but also to transform individuals by enhancing their technical and scientific capabilities and altering the social structure. Additionally, it aims to change the overall image of the country. This revolution is grounded in a socialist framework, which provides it with deeper meaning and political significance (Algerian Constitution, 1976).

This evidence from official and leadership discourses clarifies the direction of the development and modernization process. However, the social sphere is mainly controlled by what can be described as: the patriarch, tribal chief, or political leader. These figures view social responsibilities through the lens of the "people," which gives them the authority to understand the social, economic, political, and cultural needs of the population. Consequently, they have the right to implement projects and policies from a top-down perspective, often overlooking grassroots choices and opinions. Therefore, this situation requires a thorough understanding of human resources and HR management in Algerian society, necessitating a multidimensional analysis that considers various socio-anthropological factors.

3. Literature Review

In Algeria, management models, particularly global human resources management, often convey rational, bureaucratic principles that conflict with local practices rooted in community values and traditional power relations. Numerous studies in Algerian labor sociology have highlighted these discrepancies, often attributing them to cultural incompatibility or identity-based resistance to modernization (El Kenz et al., 1982). While this culturalist perspective has some validity, it should be expanded to include a more comprehensive approach that places the actors at the center of the analysis. In practical terms, how do workers, managers, and HRM professionals negotiate the relationship between modern management principles and local social realities on a daily basis? What specific organizational culture is emerging in Algerian companies at the intersection of global influences and entrenched traditions? These questions will guide our analysis.

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The sociology of work and organizations in Algeria began to develop in the 1970s, coinciding with the country's extensive industrialization after independence. This development was also informed by Pierre Bourdieu's studies on work, workers, and peasantry in Algeria, both before and after independence (Bourdieu, 1958; Bourdieu et al., 1964; Bourdieu and Sayad, 1964). For instance, the pioneering research by El Kenz, Guerid, and Chikhi at the El Hadjar Steel Complex illustrated the gap between imported industrial culture and the traditional values of Algerian workers (El Kenz et al., 1982). Additionally, subsequent studies by Guerid (1997), Kadri and Benguerna (2014), and Mebtoul (1986) demonstrate how Algerians blend community values with professional requirements. Madoui (2009) analyzes how Algerian entrepreneurs draw on both managerial modernity and traditional relational resources.

Moreover, further research has expanded this cultural analysis, revealing how the paternalistic practices of Algerian managers often contradict Western HRM models (Mercuri et al., 1997; Bachir, 2007) and highlighting the persistence of community logic within Algerian public companies (Merani, 2005; Madoui, 2009). However, some scholars have critiqued the excessive focus on culture, proposing four main arguments: First, that Algerian society is experiencing a redeployment of ancient cultural values, suggesting a traditionality of society. Second, that traditional values characterize only part of Algerian society while another part is modern, representing a dualistic framework. Third, cultural ambivalence posits that Algerian society is both traditional and modern. Finally, Abdelkader Djeghloul argues that while Algerians are "inevitably" moving towards modernity, traditions are still preserved (Mezouar, 2012).

Despite the call to reintegrate economic and political dimensions to understand the evolution of work in Algeria—emphasizing the impact of public policies and legal frameworks on organizational practices—the socio-anthropological approach remains more relevant. This approach incorporates economic and political dimensions, linking society, economy, and state. Ultimately, these works provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of contemporary Algerian organizations at the crossroads of global influences and local traditions, encouraging the development of a sociology of work that is rooted in the empirical realities of Algeria, as well as its cognitive and historical construction.

4. Methodology

The methodological component of this research involves a comprehensive review of the available literature on the topic, including socio-anthropological studies related to companies and human resource management in Algeria. Additionally, field observations were conducted during intermittent visits to a mining company from 2018 to 2022. These observations were analyzed thematically to extract key conclusions, which will be discussed in this research. This discussion is supported by a cognitive

framework that includes socio-anthropological theories and concepts relevant to organizations, businesses and human resources.

Only then, a thematic analysis of the findings from both the field data and the literature review will be presented. This analysis will help develop critical themes that enhance our understanding of the subject. Theoretical frameworks will also be applied to analyze the data and provide a clearer and more coherent understanding of the results.

5. Discussion of The Results

The results highlight a significant discrepancy between local human resource management (HRM) practices and imported formal models. The bureaucratic negotiating management principle is based on "social power," where managers are in a hierarchical relationship with other members of the organization. In this context, a position is more about defining responsibilities than exercising power. In conflicts among parties at equal levels, such as with the syndicate, relationships shift into negotiations and exchanges of interests. This situation reflects a strong doubt about managers and executives' competence, which also applies to other levels of the hierarchy. This observation is linked to the concept of "historical non-compromise" identified in earlier studies (El Kenz et al., 1982).

At various stages in the human resources development process, the failure to enforce official rules regarding attendance and promotions highlights the dominance of informal logic over rational bureaucratic procedures. For instance, favoritism in promotions based on community affiliation reflects the persistence of traditional social regulations within the workplace. Additionally, supervisors' tolerance of workers' shortcomings reveals a paternalistic approach aimed at maintaining balance in a challenging work environment.

However, Algerian society is evolving, fostering a collective consciousness that embodies a culture of resistance. This culture is one of the dominant forces in organizations, influenced by elements such as "Bailek ownership" and tribal or geographical ties (Bachir, 2007). Furthermore, empirical observations indicate that HRM's lack of attention to the difficult conditions faced by workers, particularly miners, contributes to social reactions directed at supervisors. Consequently, this gap illustrates the divide between formal managerial logic and the realities on the ground, highlighting the unique nature of studying HRM in this context.

The findings confirm analyses within Algerian labor sociology that identify a persistent gap between imported modern principles and local practices rooted in community values and power relations. However, the culturalist interpretation requires qualification. Workers do not totally reject modernization; rather, they seek recognition for their contributions and specific needs (Guerid, 1997; 1994; 1990).

This study illuminates the complexities of management and culture, particularly in the context of importing Western HRM models into Algeria. It demonstrates that local practices arise from an ongoing negotiation between professional requirements, socio-cultural heritages, and specific structural workplace constraints.

Moreover, there is a necessity for a more open approach to other methodologies. A dynamic and comprehensive framework is needed, one that places the actors at the center of the analysis rather than relying solely on holistic approaches, such as culturalism. This perspective often suggests a deterministic view of behavior based on cultural factors (Pesqueux, 2020: 02). It assumes individuals share similar personal traits, leading to a passive acknowledgment of social conditions while minimizing their active role. In fact, culturalism can inadvertently develop into an ideology (Pesqueux, 2020).

Therefore, moving beyond this perspective opens research opportunities to study how Algerian workers actively construct meaning around their professional practices at the intersection of global and local influences. Managers, supervisors, and workers are not merely custodians of tradition; they are mediators who strive to find viable compromises between modern management principles and deeply rooted social realities. Such diverse approaches to studying social reality can enrich HRM research through socio-anthropological perspectives, providing valuable insights and recognizing the specificities of the Algerian context. Ultimately, HRM must shift away from purely bureaucratic logic to accommodate the unique characteristics of the Algerian field.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of recognizing an Algerian sociology of organizations that focuses on the roles of actors, deeply rooted in local contexts and responsive to the changing dynamics of management, labor, and organization. Furthermore, it is essential to move beyond the simple opposition

between tradition and modernity. Instead, we should aim to understand the unique socio-professional practices in Algerian enterprises, which are shaped by a complex mix of diverse and evolving socio-cultural influences.

In addition, insights from our field notes, literature review, and theoretical framework support the significant contributions made by sociologists and anthropologists in Algeria. Their work confirms the strength of their approaches and concepts. Finally, scholars interested in labor, management, and organizational studies now have the necessary conceptual and theoretical tools to explore these areas and expand into new fields.

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