Work Culture in Algeria: Between Historical Legacy and Modern Organizational Transformations

ثقافة العمل في الجزائر: بين التاريخي والتحولات التنظيمية الحديثة

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Abstract

This article traces the historical and complex evolution of work culture in Algeria, analyzing how the representations of the Algerian individual toward work have been shaped across successive political and organizational stages. The study is premised on the hypothesis that the current work culture is the product of a heavy historical accumulation, whereby the policies of Ottoman rule and French colonialism entrenched deep-seated negative representations of work, producing attitudes such as indifference and the exploitation of state -owned property "Mal al-Baylik".

The article explains that the organizational transformations that followed independence did not bring about a genuine break from this legacy; rather, they reproduced it by prioritizing the social dimension over competence. With the extension of the "mal el-baylik" mindset to petroleum rent, professional patterns characterized by weak discipline and a dominant social view of the institution became further entrenched.

Conversely, the article presents the private sector as an alternative organizational model, drawing on the results of a field study conducted on a sample of 152 workers in a private industrial enterprise. The findings highlight the sector's ability to activate positive professional values, particularly discipline, respect for professional time, and the adoption of competence as a fundamental criterion in labor relations. However, this change remains limited due to the persistence of traditional social perceptions that make the public sector the more attractive option in terms of job stability.

The article concludes that building an effective work culture requires a profound revision of organizational policies and of the accumulated representations shaping workers' perceptions, in a way that ensures a sustainable cultural transition and enhances institutions' ability to cultivate new professional values based on responsibility, mastery, and commitment.

Keywords: **Culture; Work; Organization; Values; Representations.**

الملخص

تتبع هذا المقال التطور التاريخي والمعقد لثقافة العمل في الجزائر، محللا كيف تشكلت هذه الثقافة عبر مراحل زمنية وتنظيمية متعاقبة. ينطلق المقال من فرضية أن ثقافة العمل الحالية هي نتاج إرث تاريخي مثقل، حيث أسهمت فترة الحكم العثماني والاستعمار الفرنسي في ترسيخ تمثلات

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سلبية عميقة عن العمل، نتج عنها ذهنيات سلبية، مثل اللامبالاة والاستغلال لممتلكات الدولة "مال البايلك".

ويوضح المقال كيف أن التحولات التنظيمية بعد الاستقلال، لم تحدث قطيعة فعلية مع الإرث السابق، بل أعادت إنتاجه، عبر تغليب البعد الاجتماعي على الكفاءة، ومع امتداد منطق "مال البايلك" إلى الريع البترولي ترسخت أنماط مهنية تتسم بضعف الانضباط وهيمنة النظرة الاجتماعية للمؤسسة.

في المقابل، يُقدّم المقال القطاع الخاص كنموذج تنظيمي بديل، من خلال تحليل نتائج دراسة ميدانية أجريت على عينة مكونة من 152 عاملا داخل مؤسسة صناعية خاصة. وتبرز النتائج قدرة هذا القطاع على تفعيل قيم مهنية إيجابية، أبرزها الانضباط واحترام الوقت، واعتماد الكفاءة كمعيار أساسي في العلاقات المهنية. غير أنّ هذا التغيير يظل محدودا بفعل استمرار تمثلات اجتماعية تقليدية تجعل القطاع العام الخيار الأكثر جاذبية من حيث الاستقرار الوظيفي.

ويخلص المقال إلى أنّ بناء ثقافة عمل فعّالة يتطلب مراجعة عميقة للسياسات التنظيمية، وللتمثلات المتراكمة، بما يضمن انتقالا ثقافيا مستداما، ويعزز قدرة المؤسسات على تشكيل قيم عمل جديدة تقوم على المسؤولية، الإتقان، والالتزام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: **ثقافة؛ عمل؛ تنظيم؛ قيم؛ تمثلات**

Introduction

Work culture has increasingly attracted attention in sociological literature due to its direct impact on economic and social development. Work is not merely the performance of specific tasks in exchange for a salary; rather, it serves as a framework for the production of values and attitudes that shape an individual's relationship with their professional and social environment.

Numerous studies focusing on the public sector such as: The study of Ahmed Heni entitled: *"The Sheikh and the Employer", the study of:* Said Chekhi entitled*: "Workers Facing Work,"* and Ali El-Kenz's study on the relationship between industrialization and society... etc., points to the values and mindsets prevalent among workers, which have become the culture of an entire society. Among these, we mention though not exhaustively the following: state protection, lack of oversight, property of the bey, unclear goals, work time used for personal matters, guaranteed wages without actual work, social services, permanent positions, and so on. These mindsets have dominated the perceptions of the Algerian individual to the point that anything outside of this framework is seen as unfair treatment and an exploitation of their labor power.

Work culture is a reflection of the prevailing social, political, and economic contexts in any society. It is shaped through the historical and organizational experiences a society undergoes. In Algeria, where work culture is marked by complexity due to historical accumulations and rapidly shifting organizational structures since

independence, these elements have produced inherited collective representations. This leads us to ask the following questions:

- How has the accumulated historical legacy, on the one hand, and the successive organizational changes, on the other hand, contributed to shaping the work culture of the Algerian individual? and what are the limits of establishing an effective work culture in the context of the transition toward a market economy?

This central question gives rise to two subsidiary questions:

- How have the different historical and organizational periods contributed to shaping Algerians' representations and values related to work?
- To what extent can private-sector organizations bring about a change in these representations and help to the activation of more effective work values?

To address these questions, the article examines the following analytical dimensions:

- An analytical overview of the historical contexts and organizational transformations, and their role in shaping the dominant patterns of work culture among Algerian individuals.
- The role of the private sector as an alternative organizational model capable of fostering a constructive work culture, based on an analysis of the results of a previous field study.

This analysis will be carried out using the descriptive–analytical method, which allows for the analysis of relevant historical and sociological literature and the tracing of the historical trajectory of work representations in Algeria and their influence on the formation of work values across different stages. This approach helps in understanding the nature of the relationship between these elements. The role of the private sector will also be examined through an analysis of the results of a previous field study on its ability to build a new work culture among Algerian workers, with the aim of highlighting the effectiveness of the private sector's organizational model in reshaping work values compared to prevailing patterns.

1. The Conceptual Framework

1.1 Work Culture

It is a term composed of two concepts: *culture* and *work*. As for culture, it is adopted here based on its definition as a system of values, representations, norms, and behaviors acquired by individuals through social interaction. Lebaron defined it as *"a set of shared practices and representations of a specific group"* (Lebaron, 2009, p. 42). Hofstede described it as a *"collective mental programming"* that determines patterns of thinking and acting within a society (Bollinger & & Hofstede, n.d, p. 17). Piaget indicated that culture encompasses *"the entire life of a distinct group of people, their personal relationships, attitudes, as well as their values, beliefs, norms, and ways of knowing"* (Berger, 1995, p. 16).

Since our analysis focuses on understanding how work-related values and representations are formed among Algerians within the context of historical and organizational transformations extending from the public sector to the private sector it was most appropriate to adopt the concept of culture, given that both values and representations constitute dimensions of it.

It is important in this context to distinguish "work culture" from other related terms, such as *professional culture*, which concerns specific professions; *worker culture*,

which focuses on the diverse cultural background of the worker; and *organizational culture*, which is linked to the organization itself and to the rules, norms, and indicators produced within it.

Work culture, however, refers to a broader social and historical system that goes beyond the boundaries of the institution, encompassing the values, attitudes, and deeply rooted representations in society regarding work its nature and its meaning.

Choosing this concept is essential when studying the Algerian context specifically, because many of the prevailing representations about work today such as discipline, time, effort, and the expectation of a permanent position are not the product of current institutions. Rather, they are the result of accumulated patterns formed during earlier historical periods, reinforced under the public sector, and reproduced in the face of private-sector organizational structures.

By analyzing these representations and values, it becomes possible to understand the behavioral patterns of the Algerian worker and to determine the extent to which actual change in the prevailing work culture can be achieved.

1.2 Values

1.2.1 Linguistic definition:

There is no consensus on this concept in the social sciences due to its connection to the individual's psychological makeup and the difficulty of separating it from beliefs and attitudes. Arabic dictionaries indicate that the word *"value" (qīmah)* was originally associated with an economic meaning (price), before it shifted to the moral field, where *values* came to replace the earlier term *virtues*. It refers to *ideals* that use standards for value judgments guiding moral activity (Boumakhlouf, 2013, p. 58)

1.2.2 Conceptual definition:

Values are understood as qualities or standards preferred by individuals within a particular culture and expressed through behavioral patterns manifested in social reality (Bouguerra, 2009, p. 88). Values are merely a reflection of the way people think within a particular culture and historical period. They guide people's behavior, judgments, and attitudes regarding what is desirable or undesirable forms of conduct, in light of the rules and standards established by society.

They are among the most important indicators of quality of life and the level of advancement or civilization of any society (Khalifa, 1992, p. 14). Values are considered the essence and core of culture, as they regulate social behavior while also reflecting the dominant culture, being translated into actions and practices that make them observable and measurable.

Among the most important work-related values are: the value of time, mastery, compliance, creativity, innovation, loyalty, and belonging values that can be measured through individuals' behaviors in the workplace.

1.3 Representations

1.3.1 Linguistic definition:

The term *tamathul* (representations) is the plural of *tamathul*, derived from *mathala al-shay'*—meaning "to resemble something." *Al-mithāl* refers to the "image," and *mathala lahu al-shay'* means "he portrayed it" (Ibn Mandour, n.d, p. 611).

1.3.2 Conceptual definition:

Jodelet considers social representations as a form of shared and socially constructed knowledge that aims to build a common reality within a specific social group. They play a fundamental role in defining identity and in various social processes, particularly those related to the dissemination and circulation of knowledge. According to Jodelet, representations guide our attitudes and behaviors (Jodelet, 1991, p. 36).

Thus, representations serve as a means of understanding and interacting with reality. They help us interpret social phenomena and fulfill both psychological and social functions. As explained by Roussiau and Bonardi (Roussiau & Bonardi, 2001, p. 14), they influence collective behavior through shared representations.

In this research paper, we attempt to analyze the shared representations that have formed around work and how they influence the values, behaviors, and attitudes of the Algerian individual.

2. Historical and Organizational Background of the Work Culture in Algeria

2.1 The Work Culture Inherited from Ottoman Rule

Algeria, during the final years of Ottoman rule which lasted from 1518 until the beginning of French colonization in 1830 experienced political and economic conditions that significantly influenced the work culture of the Algerian individual. After a period of relative stability and prosperity in urban centers during the first century and a half of Ottoman governance, manifestations of this prosperity were evident in the urban architecture as well as in the emergence and flourishing of certain crafts and manual industries. These included cities such as: Tlemcen, known for its woolen blanket production; Constantine, famous for tanning, saddle making, and jewelry; Algiers, known for its shoes and jewelry; Mountain and Atlas regions**,** where industries such as burnous weaving, weapon making, blacksmithing, and carpet production thrived. Heavy industries also developed, such as cannon casting, gunpowder production, and shipbuilding. However, conditions began to deteriorate due to the growing competition from European products and the burdensome taxation policies that extended to other sectors as well (El Mili, n.d, pp. 307-319).

Agricultural labor, which was already underdeveloped and generally low in productivity due to the limited arable land, the use of simple tools, and primitive irrigation methods dependent on rainfall, suffered additionally. The sector was frequently affected by droughts and locust infestations and was further burdened by unfair taxes imposed on both farmers and herders. Despite the existence of some flourishing agricultural areas attested to by many sources, most of the fertile land belonged to the ruling Turkish elite and nobility. Portions of this land were also owned by tribes *(aʿroush),* the *beylik* (provincial government), and religious endowments *(awqaf),* and were often worked by slaves and prisoners. Nonetheless, the agricultural sector could have been a cornerstone for broader industrial development had it been better utilized and not stifled by excessive taxation (Bellah, 2006, pp. 307-319).

Additionally, the state monopolized the trade of agricultural products by purchasing them from farmers at low prices and reselling them to commercial houses, Jewish merchants, and foreign agencies, who reaped enormous profits. This practice

contributed to the destruction of agriculture in many regions, the spread of nomadic lifestyles in inland areas, a decline in productivity, and the overall deterioration of the economy. The state, along with Jewish merchants, also monopolized other goods such as salt, wool trade, and the harvesting and sale of coral along the Algerian coast. This led to a decline in commercial activity both domestically and internationally, due to the decline of industrial and agricultural production, weak transportation systems, low individual income, administrative corruption, as well as the restrictions imposed by the state on export and import operations. The state exported raw materials while importing luxury and recreational goods (El Mili, pp. 307-319).

From this brief overview of the situation in Algeria during the final years of Ottoman rule, it can be concluded that the country's economic, social, and urban life was limited to fulfilling the needs and demands of the ruling Turkish minority. It was not based on sound foundations that could be developed through agricultural or industrial planning and projects. The Ottomans did not encourage any productive economic activity, nor did they invest the wealth accumulated from maritime conflicts or collected taxes and levies in the development and improvement of the country. Instead, they viewed Algeria as a base for conquest and a source of spoils, as well as a revenue stream for financing the navy, the army, and their own luxury and extravagance.

Meanwhile, the material and moral conditions of Algeria and Algerians were in continuous decline due to marginalization, oppression, and persistent injustice. The Algerians were excluded from any involvement in governance and politics, and even from occupations that could have allowed them to gain experience, as these positions were often assigned to prisoners. As a result, a culture of fear began to take root, along with the adoption of many negative values stemming from the inequality they experienced, as they watched foreigners enjoy the wealth of their own land.

This led them to develop a culture of opportunism, where seizing any efit was considered a legitimate right under the pretext of compensating for the injustices of taxation. Likewise, indifference, and the plundering of state property became widespread, with public assets being referred to as "Beylik property" (i.e., belonging to the provincial government, not the people). Trust in the authorities as a body acting in the interest of the people was lost. The situation Algerians lived through at that time deeply shaped their perceptions of authority, the ruling class, the ruler's property, and the relationship between power and the people. These perceptions were overwhelmingly negative and were only further entrenched and deepened during the subsequent colonial period, becoming a firmly rooted belief.

2.2 Work Culture During the French Colonial Period:

The colonial administration worked tirelessly to destroy everything related to culture education, creativity, and other values and meanings through the policies it adopted from the moment it entered Algeria. It systematically sought to render the educated population ignorant, leading illiteracy rates to reach 94% among men and 98% among women. The number of individuals in prestigious professions sharply declined; by 1954, there were only 76 doctors, 39 pharmacists, 10 dentists, 83 middle-school teachers, 28 engineers, and 78 lawyers (Bellah, p. 275).

The colonial power also exploited Algerians economically and oppressed them socially by confiscating their land through various methods, including excessive taxes and unjust penalties. It sought to impoverish them so they would accept working for the lowest wages. As a result, the worker became like a slave, laboring for fourteen hours a day for half a franc to one and a half francs, under extremely harsh conditions and constant fear of dismissal, with unemployment rates exceeding 65% (Bellah, pp. 160–161). Since most Algerians worked in seasonal agricultural labor, they were forced to move frequently and leave their families behind in difficult social circumstances. Consequently, work came to represent nothing more than a means of survival a way to secure their daily bread.

The colonial policy of racial discrimination also had a profound effect whether through wage disparities, with significant gaps between Algerians and European settlers, or even between Algerians working in France and those in Algeria. In terms of job roles, Algerians were confined to manual and subordinate positions, while Europeans held supervisory and managerial roles, preventing Algerians from acquiring any training or professional experience, this applied to both industrial and agricultural sectors.

Furthermore, the colonizers integrated the Algerian economy with the French economy in ways that served France's needs rather than Algeria's development. They encouraged the cultivation of crops needed by France and developed only limited industries (such as construction materials) for the purpose of building railroads and roads to facilitate the export of raw Algerian resources. As a result, local industries suffered greatly under competition from French goods, and were later prohibited from continuing altogether (Bellah, p. 256).

The conditions under which Algerians worked exploitative organization, long hours, low wages, limited job types, psychological frustration, fear of unemployment, forced migration, insecurity, discrimination, cultural repression, and attempts at religious conversion all left deeply negative effects on the Algerian individual and their relationship with work. These experiences destroyed the individual's spirit, making work, in their consciousness, synonymous with oppression and servitude rather than dignity or creativity. They also created negative perceptions of work and of the employer, seen as part of a colonial system of repression. These deeply rooted perceptions shaped during both the Ottoman and colonial periods persist to this day and have become a major obstacle to adopting positive, effective, and constructive work values.

2.3 Work Culture Shaped by Public Sector Structures:

After independence, Algeria's economy underwent various organizational transformations, which in turn shaped specific representations and values toward work among Algerian workers in particular, and citizens in general. One of the earliest phases was the self-management stage, which was defined in *the Preliminary Draft of the Main Principles of Self-Management* as*:* "A form of political, economic, and social organization whose ideological content represents the primary path Algeria chose to move toward socialism. It aims to reconcile the interests of workers, who have risen from the rank of wage earners to that of free and responsible producers through their direct participation in managing production units and their moral and material interest in

the fruits of their labor, with the interests of the national community by allocating a portion of enterprise profits to the public good and by aligning unit development plans with national and regional development plans" (El Suwaidi, 1990, p. 121).

Self-management, however, was not the result of deep or pre-planned reflection. Algerians adopted it spontaneously, as the previous definition suggests, driven by a newfound sense of freedom and ownership of their homeland after centuries of colonization. Their patriotism compelled them to assume positions of responsibility despite lacking the necessary expertise in order to preserve national stability and fill the vacuum left by the departure of the colonists. Eventually, legal texts were introduced to organize the system, most notably the decrees of March 22, 1963 (El Suwaidi, p. 130). This structure achieved relative success in the agricultural sector, as noted by Michel Leunis in his book *The Algerian Peasants*: "Management committees operated regularly, a spirit of cooperation prevailed among workers, and even the committees tasked with more difficult roles displayed collective rather than individual tendencies" (El Suwaidi, p. 131). However, the same success was not replicated in the industrial sector, largely due to contradictions between legal texts and their practical implementation.

Workers found themselves as wage earners without participating in profits. They also lacked knowledge about how to manage their enterprises, as the general assembly of workers was excluded from the management process**,** with its role limited to approving decisions. This was particularly problematic given that most workers were unfamiliar with the legal texts' content. As a result, workers were confined to carrying out specific tasks without being consulted or regarded as partners in management. This led them to focus exclusively on demanding their rights such as wage increases, improved working conditions, insurance, and social services like transportation and meals without concern for production volume or the future of the enterprise.

In response to the continuous fulfillment of workers' social demands without raising their awareness about the consequences of their negative behavior or the catastrophic direction their institutions and the economy were heading toward a culture emerged among workers wherein the institution was perceived as a *mother figure* responsible for providing for her children's needs. The workplace was no longer seen as a source of wages in exchange for specific efforts, but rather as a provider of social welfare. This gave rise to a rentier mentality based on the idea that Algeria's oil wealth is a natural right of all citizens, capable of covering their living expenses even if they remained idle at home. This mentality is clearly reflected in the findings of interviews conducted by a researcher Nouar (Nouar, 2005, p. 117). on labor culture at the public company TREFILOR (SNS)**.** When asked what the institution represented to him, one worker responded: "SNS means the big tent. It's the best framework for both executives and workers. Workers had every right including a bag of milk, summer camps for their children, food services, and even medical treatment abroad for those who had serious work accidents. Having a work certificate from SNS meant a lot." The researcher further noted that the memories of the interviewed executives provided a purely social image of the SNS institution. This image included: canteens for workers and executives, transport, occupational healthcare, social aid, supply cooperatives, summer camps, and guaranteed wages.

Moreover, the increasing state intervention and control over the management process led to the derailment of self-management. Conflicts arose between the working class and the managerial class, prompting the state to opt for direct intervention through nationalization decisions. These decisions allowed it to entrench the socialist model**,** converting self-managed sectors into public sectors under direct government supervision, with workers becoming state employees (Zakkaz & Bouchicha, 2013, pp. 56-59).

Algeria's adoption of the socialist management model was part of its broader effort to build a national state with economic sovereignty, based on the concepts of progress and social justice**.** The worker was granted the status of a "productive manager," as per the Charter of Socialist Organization**,** and workers' councils were created to ensure genuine worker participation in managing institutions.

However, these ideals remained largely rhetorical. Public institutions remained under the centralized authority of the state, stripping workers' councils of real power. Even directors lacked decision-making authority, as all decisions were drafted and imposed by the government. This revealed a clear discrepancy between rhetoric and practice, where political values were prioritized over economic efficiency, ultimately weakening the concept of productive performance within institutions.

In addition, the first and second three-year and four-year development plans played a role in shaping Algerians' perceptions of work. These plans prioritized industrialization, with increased reliance on the hydrocarbon sector (Toumi, 2011, p. 9). As a result, factory workers earned multiples of what agricultural workers made**.** Moreover, industrial jobs offered permanent positions and guaranteed monthly salaries, whereas agricultural work was seasonal and often failed to yield tangible returns (Boumakhlouf, 1991, p. 187).

As a result of the aforementioned conditions, the workforce shifted from agricultural labor toward industrial work. This pushed many individuals to leave their lands which had been an integral part of their lives and culture and move toward factories, most of which were concentrated in the northern regions. Consequently, they faced numerous social problems such as alienation, housing difficulties, and limited access to education and healthcare, especially for those who relocated with their families. These circumstances exposed them to stress, frustration, anxiety, fear, illiteracy, and malnutrition factors that significantly shaped their attitudes, behaviors, and reactions within the factory environment. These pressures generated a form of aggressiveness, reflected in various problems such as laziness or slow production, and repeated absenteeism which Saïd Chikhi described as a social plague. He pointed out that repeated absenteeism had become a serious issue due to its impact on productivity (Chekhi, 1987, p. 33). He found that actual working hours did not exceed 66% at best, dropping to 57% in 1982. He also reported that the annual absenteeism rate per worker increased from about 10% in 1976 to its highest level in 1986, reaching approximately 15.5% per worker. At the same time, production levels dropped sharply during this period—from 7,116 units in 1979 to 6,206 units in 1982 (Chekhi, pp. 49,50,52).

In addition to workers' poor handling of machinery and the frequent breakdowns they caused especially since wages were guaranteed even in the absence of production, this reflected a negative work culture that had formed among Algerian workers. Work

came to be perceived merely as a source of wages and provided services, while work relationships were often built on regional ties, which served as the primary source of trust.

Workers' representations of machines and the workplace were also shaped by unfamiliarity; these were things foreign to them. They had not witnessed their construction nor contributed to building them rather, they suddenly found themselves operating structures and machines with which they felt no connection. This applied to both ordinary workers and managers alike, causing them to feel alienated and deprived of a sense of identity at work. Since the first sector affected by workers' behaviors was production which continued to deteriorate the state persisted in relying on hydrocarbons to cover expenses. This fostered a culture of dependency among workers and weakened their sense of responsibility, leading to disastrous outcomes (Maamer, 2006, p. 213): declining rates of productive capacity utilization, accumulating debt, and increasing numbers of workers. The latter resulted from the state's desire to eliminate unemployment, as employment in the public industrial sector rose from 99,276 positions in 1966 to 345,901 positions in 1977 in the same sector (Safir, n.d, p. 77). This aligned with what was stated in the General Report of the First Four-Year Plan: "The primary objective of the long-term development strategy chosen is to fundamentally eliminate unemployment and underemployment through genuine industrialization" (Safir, p. 44).

The symptoms of the economic shock in public enterprises became evident as soon as oil prices declined, prompting the state to resort to economic reforms in an attempt to rectify the situation.

This occurred in the early 1980s in response to a severe economic crisis, with the aim of restructuring public enterprises and achieving their autonomy, while improving management and enhancing the efficiency of human resources. However, these reforms which were supposed to shift the Algerian worker from a "passive" mindset to a culture of production and responsibility did not take into account cultural and social dimensions, resulting in counterproductive outcomes. Workers faced social and professional difficulties, such as forced relocation, lack of essential facilities like housing, schools, hospitals, and marginalization in decision-making, which generated feelings of injustice and exclusion and left them resentful.

Moreover, the separation of institutional tasks prevented managers from efiting from each other's expertise or gaining comprehensive knowledge of the enterprise, leaving management culture absent among Algerian workers. This was further worsened by the fact that managerial appointments were based on political criteria rather than qualifications. These managers were influenced by imported management models, which they tried to implement without considering the specificities of the Algerian economy or the prevailing environment, creating a disconnect between the organization of public enterprises and the way they were managed (Ben Antar, 2002, p. 113).

Political slogans and continued reliance on oil rents also contributed to reinforcing a negative work culture characterized by indifference, absenteeism, weak discipline, and lack of organizational commitment. When policies of workforce downsizing were implemented a shock to Algerians who could not grasp the collapse of the oil rent myth, which had failed to protect them the individualistic tendency among

workers grew, and professional solidarity declined. Overall, work culture deteriorated, and employment opportunities began to be seen as a prize rather than a responsibility. The experience showed that economic reform in Algeria failed to build a new work culture as long as reforms were limited to structural and financial aspects without addressing cultural and educational dimensions in depth.

Later, structural adjustment followed a severe financial crisis that peaked in 1994, prompting the state to enter agreements with the International Monetary Fund. These included abandoning its direct role in production and opening the door to a market economy and privatization. The announcement of market liberalization marked the end of a national market protection system that had lasted more than three decades (Zakkaz & Bouchicha, pp. 75-77). Algeria adopted this step in the hope that the private sector would serve as an alternative to solve problems, reduce the financial burden on the government, instill a work culture based on labor, creativity, and competition, and achieve maximum economic efficiency and social welfare.

2.4 The Role of the Private Sector in Algeria

The private sector in Algeria has a complex historical trajectory closely tied to the country's political and economic transformations. Although this sector existed during the colonial period especially in agriculture and crafts, the state's adoption of a socialist model after independence marginalized its role and distorted its image in the collective imagination. Through official discourse, the private sector was depicted as "exploitative" and a "threat to the revolution," which led many Algerians to associate it with selfishness and illicit profit**.** Such discourse also shaped negative perceptions of working in the private sector, portraying it as an environment lacking in security and stability compared to public institutions (Khamees, 2011, p. 205).

Nevertheless, a clear contradiction emerged in these official narratives on the one hand, acknowledging the private sector's role in development and its importance in supporting the public sector; and on the other hand, tightening restrictions on its activities.

The 1963 Private Investment Law (Law No, 63-277, 1963)**,** the first investment law in independent Algeria to address the private sector, granted some freedom for private investments but under strict conditions. The most important was localization of investments, which resulted in the freezing of private trade, financial, and monetary relations with the outside world. The National Trade Office was created, and in 1964, authorities-imposed rules to monitor capital transfers and foreign exchange**,** effectively eliminating opportunities for private capital to engage with foreign capital. This allowed the state to monopolize foreign relations and prevent any external interference in its domestic policies.

Moreover, the Algiers Charter of 1964 explicitly described the private sector as exploitative a label that has persisted to this day. It even portrayed private sector activity as a threat to revolutionary policy. The use of such terminology seemed designed to influence the public emotionally, instilling revolutionary zeal. The Charter claimed that the working masses were capable of resisting sabotage efforts led by anti-socialist groups. This kind of rhetoric damaged the image of the private sector in the public eye, discouraging the workforce from joining it. Additionally, the sector was burdened with

heavy tax regulations, making it difficult to offer workers conditions comparable to those found in public institutions.

The 1976 National Charter reaffirmed this negative view and offered an even more precise definition of the "exploitative sector" as one that employs individuals and profits from their labor (Zouzi, 2009-2010, pp. 112-113).

The purpose of such characterizations was to keep the private sector limited to small-scale commerce and some food and consumer industries. Further restrictions came in the 1985 Finance Law, which set a maximum investment limit.

The state's insistence on protecting the socialist system it had adopted on the one hand, and maintaining its dominance over various sensitive sectors on the other, led it to oppose the private sector throughout this period, viewing it as an enemy that threatened its interests. This prompted the state to adopt various methods to undermine it, including distorting its image in the minds of individuals, at a time when it should have been leveraging it to support its policies. The state did not anticipate that it might one day need to rely on the private sector, and the representations it had built around it would later become one of the greatest obstacles to its effectiveness. Although the private sector began to regain its position as a pillar of the national economy following the liberal reforms after 1988 particularly after the issuance of Decree 95-22 the prevailing culture and perceptions about it among individuals did not keep pace with this change.

2.5 The Private Sector as a Framework for Promoting an Alternative Work Culture

In a study we conducted on "The Role of the Private Industrial Sector in Building a New Work Culture among Algerian Workers" (Bouguerroumi, 2014–2015), we explored the contributions of work organization in the private industrial sector to the development of a new work culture among Algerian workers. We adopted the descriptive method, as it was the most suitable for analyzing work organization within the studied industrial enterprise and for revealing its impact on workers' values regarding work. Data were collected using various tools provided by this methodology.

The questionnaire was the primary tool. It included questions about the type of organization adopted within the enterprise, different work-related values, as well as questions about workers' representations of work, the organization, and the employer. This tool was complemented by direct observation during our time within the enterprise, where we recorded professional behaviors related to discipline, adherence to organizational procedures, and methods of implementing certain procedures.

In addition, unstructured interviews were conducted with a number of workers, as well as with the training and recruitment officer and the human resources manager, in order to interpret the quantitative data and verify the actual organizational procedures. The study also relied on analysis of official documents (internal regulations, absenteeism and labor rotation records, and human resources data) for the precise information they provide about organizational structure.

This study was conducted within a private industrial enterprise located in the Eucalyptus Industrial Zone – Algiers, a leading company in its field in North Africa, employing 610 workers. We adopted a representative sample of 152 workers (25% of the total population), selected using stratified sampling according to socio-professional categories, while ensuring relative homogeneity among the workers.

After collecting, coding, and processing the data, the results revealed a clear change in workers' values, which directly reflected on their professional behaviors, largely due to the strict organizational discipline implemented by the enterprise. The analysis focused on several organizational dimensions, such as recruitment policies, types of contracts, task allocation, incentive and penalty systems, and working conditions, in order to understand their impact on work values, particularly discipline, which is one of the most absent values in the public sector.

The results showed a high level of discipline regarding time management, with 69.7% of workers stating that they always respect entry and exit times, compared to only 4.6% who do not. This was attributed to the enterprise providing transportation services ensuring workers arrive on time and leave at the end of the shift. Additionally, the strict penalty system, including salary deductions, contributed to discipline: 53.3% reported that absenteeism occurs only for health reasons, 28.9% for family reasons, while 14.5% stated they never miss work. There was also a clear commitment to completing tasks within deadlines, with 58.6% always meeting deadlines versus 3.3% who never do. This is linked to a promotion system based on performance rather than seniority, fair work distribution, and clear task definitions, which encourage workers to take responsibility for their work.

Regarding quality of work (mastery), 78.3% of workers reported consistently performing their tasks well, supported by comfortable working conditions and a conducive physical environment. Compliance with job requirements was also high: 77% always adhered to the dress code, and 63.2% followed regulations without direct supervision, thanks to continuous performance evaluations by their immediate supervisor. New values related to creativity and innovation emerged, especially among workers efiting from continuous training, with 43.4% reporting efforts to find innovative solutions to professional problems. This behavior was supported by 77.3% of workers who felt that rewards were distributed fairly, compared to 42% who thought otherwise.

Thus, work values can be activated and enhanced by providing material and moral conditions for the worker, such as wages, incentives, workplace comfort, availability of work tools, supervision, and enforcement of penalties. In other words, the effectiveness of these work values largely depends on the enterprise's ability to systematically manage and utilize these organizational mechanisms.

The study also revealed a notable shift in the values underpinning workplace relationships within the enterprise, compared to previous literature on labor relations in the public sector. While Ali Al-Kenz's study showed that the formation of the working class in Algeria was primarily governed by moral principles first and geographical logic second, and Saïd Chikhi's study indicated that professional relationships were built on regional, family, and religious affiliations (Chekhi, p. 4), our study results show that while the moral dimension remains present in professional relationships, the geographical/regional criterion and other affiliations, whether family or religious, no longer play a significant role.

The results demonstrated that although the majority of workers belong to the same region 46.7% of the sample have neighborly ties with other workers, 32.9% have friends there, and 28.9% have family relations with others these factors are not the

primary basis for interaction or trust, except in very limited cases. The main criterion underlying workplace relationships is trust, not in the moral sense, but trust in the worker's competence and professional experience. Workers reported that supervisors' trust in them is based on ethics (53.9%) and professional competence (48%), with personal reasons being minimal.

Furthermore, 85.5% of workers indicated that they interact with their supervisors based on respect, and their trust is grounded in ethics (53.6%), interpersonal skills (34.4%), and experience/competence (27.8%). Horizontal relationships among workers are based 80.2% on respect and 38.1% on trust, whereas neighborly relations accounted for only 6.6%. About 73% of workers reported that the source of trust in their colleagues is ethics, 15.1% cited professional experience, and only 6% relied on neighborly ties as a basis for trust.

These results reflect workers' awareness on one hand, as they move away from subjectivity and rely on objective criteria that serve both their interests and those of the enterprise. On the other hand, they also reveal limited trust within this type of organization, due to growing individualism and each worker's desire to secure their future by safeguarding their position or obtaining a better one. This aligns with the logic of a capitalist enterprise based on profit and competition.

However, the study also showed that certain representations and values could not be altered or instilled by private sector organization. Existing perceptions about the sector and work in general still hinder the building of trust, loyalty, and commitment. The results indicated that over 80% of workers still perceive work and the enterprise primarily as a source of income, rather than an opportunity for stability, development, or self-realization. Additionally, 46.7% focus on obtaining more efits, compared to only 36% who consider what they can contribute to the enterprise, reflecting the continued social view of the enterprise as an entity that gives without expecting reciprocity.

The results also indicated that 46.7% of workers perceive employment in the private sector as a restriction on their freedom. It is not seen as a place of stability, but rather as a temporary stop in their career path while they await a permanent position in the public sector, which remains open for recruitment and is still considered by them the best option for job security. Only 14.5% expressed a desire to continue working in the current enterprise, while 35.5% preferred to work in the public sector, and 44.7% favored self-employment. These perceptions are largely linked to a lack of job security and, consequently, social security, due to the prevalence of temporary work contracts. Among the 68.4% of workers with non-permanent contracts, 40.1% expressed concern about the termination of their employment. They view a permanent position as a right from which they have been deprived, affecting their level of integration into the enterprise and preventing it from gaining their loyalty and commitment despite all it provides.

The study showed that 46.7% of workers do not care about what is said about the enterprise in their presence, even if it is negative, and 74.4% leave the enterprise as soon as they find a better job opportunity. These findings suggest the need to review certain organizational policies, such as temporary work contracts, which prevent workers from feeling secure and drive them to seek alternatives. They also indicate that the continued existence of the public sector as a competitor, with the same culture, represents a major

challenge for private sector organizations in promoting work values. Comparisons remain, with a focus on guaranteed income rather than actual effort, which is the best that workers aspire to.

This is supported by the fact that 52.6% of workers reported not spending all their time at the enterprise working: 35.5% spend some of their time resting, 27.6% checking on colleagues, and 8.5% attending to personal matters. Only 46.7% spend all their time working, despite the monitoring imposed by the enterprise.

Conclusion

Work culture in Algeria cannot be understood in isolation from the historical and organizational transformations the country has experienced. It reflects a connection between the past and the present, between what is hoped for and what is real. Analysis of the different historical stages shows that the prevailing work culture today is the cumulative result of successive experiences extending from the Ottoman and colonial periods to the socialist public sector.

Work culture is not only an organizational issue but also a matter of representations and values, requiring a fundamental review of social and professional socialization methods and active promotion of positive work behaviors. Overcoming entrenched negative representations requires a comprehensive project starting with the organization itself, and private sector organizations are among the most capable of initiating this change.

The results of the field study showed that the private sector, despite its negative image, offered an organizational model that, thanks to its strictness, contributed to modifying certain work values, particularly those related to discipline, such as time management, task definition, and compliance. It also helped reshape professional relationships based on trust in competence and experience rather than personal or initial affiliations.

However, it failed to gain workers' loyalty and commitment, due to its inability to change certain entrenched representations, such as viewing work merely as a source of income (a means of survival) and perceiving the enterprise as a provider of social efits without reciprocity especially while the public sector remained an attractive option in terms of security making the task of cultural change more difficult.

Therefore, we conclude that changing work values in particular, and work culture in general, cannot rely on a single sector or a single policy. The private sector can be an important lever in this change, but it cannot achieve it alone. It requires the combined efforts of all sectors and systems in society, particularly those responsible for socialization (family, school, economic institutions, media, etc.), to ultimately form a social system that fosters positive and effective representations of work and promotes a set of work values based on discipline, creativity, innovation, loyalty, and commitment, culminating in a productive, creative, and innovative work culture.

In light of the above, the study recommends improving work organization in the private sector in ways that correct existing representations and enhance professional integration, thereby contributing to the continuous promotion of a positive work culture.

It also recommends that the public sector adopt more objective standards to change its deeply rooted work culture.

Finally, the study suggests future research exploring the role of different organizations (family, media, mosques, schools) in shaping an effective work culture, as well as examining the role of entrepreneurs in reshaping work values among the new generation of workers.

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