

**Transplanting Employee Empowerment In Algeria:
What Are The Prospects?**

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Par : **Mrs Nesrine BOUCHA**
Maître de conférence Classe à B ú
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Keywords : *MPerformance Management; employee empowerment; authority (and power) in organisations; managerial styles; transplanting HRM practices. .*

Abstract :

This article will aim to investigate theoretically the prospects for transplanting the notion of employee empowerment to the specific organisational contexts of Algerian firms; it will study and assess the projection of introducing employee empowerment as a performance management HR practice in the Algerian work environment; an environment characterised with the exertion of authoritarian and bureaucratic managerial style.

The rationale of this investigation is to critically review Human Resources Management literature around employee empowerment; Algerian national and organizational culture and strategy implementation theories to structure of the article and derive from a set of theoretical frameworks (chosen and discussed throughout the paper) a series of three study axes to exploit and answer the research questions advanced.

INTRODUCTION

Human resources management is a distinct organizational discipline enclosing a set of functions ranging from the traditional administrative functioning of employees to a more implicit study of the employee (the third factor of production) in the global mission of business health and benefit.

This article treats of the notion of employee empowerment in Algeria and the eventual prospects of transplanting it in Algerian firms

Employee empowerment is a term often used in the management language but it has been a challenge to enclose its exact definition. The concept was nurtured in HRM academic circles and was appraised as an HR practice and

eventually described as a strategic one.¹

The literature around the concept is multiple and increasing, the challenge lies however in the magnitude at which this management notion is conditioned by numerous independent factors and the different perspectives it holds.

Employee empowerment is a term generally used to label the act of a supervisor empowering an employee, by definition giving them power.

Employee empowerment has been advocated by the HRM literature and proved to hold a front seat within the strategic thinking of a firm, thus this particular choice of managerial concept.

This paper will aim to investigate the prospects of transplanting this notion of Employee empowerment to specific organisational contexts (Algeria in this case); it will study and assess the projection of introducing employee empowerment as an organisational HR practice in the Algerian work environment; an environment characterised with the exertion of authoritarian managerial style.

This article will address the following research questions:

1. How is employee empowerment measured within the Algerian work environment?
2. Are the organisational values and work ethics of this particular third world economy context coherent with the principles and morals engaged in employee empowerment?
3. If employee empowerment as an HR practice was to be introduced in an Algerian company's organisational culture and behaviour, what are the issues around strategy implementation?

In the light of tackling the above issues, question one will look for answers in the definitions of employee empowerment and the theory that underpins its favourable work atmosphere.

Question two will address the present authoritarian managerial style representative of the public sector's work environment and contrast the values behind professional authority with those of employee empowerment. Question three will investigate the implementation strategy literature to underpin the possibilities of such implementation in the Algerian workplace.

This paper will be structured around these three main parts that will each tackle one of the above questions.

I. EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

Employee empowerment is a managerial construct with a multitude of

¹ Yasser F. Jarrar, Mohamed Zairi, (2002) "Employee empowerment: a UK survey of trends and best practices", *Managerial Auditing Journal*, Vol. 17 Iss 5, pp.266 - 271

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dimensions that by definition refers to the act of empowering a subordinate (giving them power) or the act of being empowered by a superior (receiving power). The proliferation of this particular HRM best practice is taking a colossal scope in the HRM literature.

The notion of employee empowerment can be used to describe the psychological and the individual aspect, as well as the organisational one. It has been stated that while one is the cause, the other is the consequence respectively in the empowerment balance.

The organisational aspect of employee empowerment results from the behaviour of supervisors/managers that empower their subordinates, whereas the psychological aspect of the approach describes the empowered state of the subordinate that is the result of their superior giving the power.

Conger and Kanungo in 1988, Boren in 1994, Harari in 1994 and Rothstein in 1995 have theorised around the concept of employee empowerment and have all been players in the defining or attempting to define the concept. Again both the individual and the organisational perspectives are recurring. The above theorists all seem to however identify employee empowerment from the behaviour of the supervisor position of empowering, thus the organisational perspective. Empowerment has a connotation in its self that direct in a first instance to empowering rather than being empowered.

The origins of this HR approach can be found in the definitions of terms such as authority delegation and job enrichment. Authority delegation refers to the action of a supervisor giving more power for actions and decisions making to their subordinates. This idea of authority delegation and decentralisation of decision making power is at the heart of today's understanding of employee empowerment²; it refers to the very core theory behind the employee empowerment concept³. The notion of Job enrichment can also be perceived as one of the foundation thoughts for today's meaning of employee empowerment.

Having approached some theory around employee empowerment positioned from the organisational angle, more recent research has been inclined on the other hand to analyse the concept of empowerment from the empowered employee's perspective.

Thomas and Velthouse in the past decade assert that employee empowerment was to be examined from the psychological perspective when discussed in HRM literature; it is the impact of employers' strategic thinking adopted within an organisation on employees. They affirm that when analysing and encircling their employees' frame of mind on their job tasks and how they perceive their

² Kanter, Rosabeth Moss, Harvard University, 1983. 'Technological innovations, Organizational change and Employee participation'

³ Edward J. Lawler. 1992. 'Affective Attachment to Nested Groups: A Choice Process Theory.' American Sociological Review 57: 327-339

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role within the organisation, employee empowerment can then be measured. Conger and Kanungo have developed a theoretical four dimensional framework summarized in the follow table:

Employee empowerment dimension	Description of dimension
Meaningfulness	Meaningfulness describes the value and the purpose that the employer would attribute to the notion of empowerment. Meaningfulness is the individual's own meaning of the term and is conditioned by his/her personal ideals and morals. This dimension measures the strength of the relationship between an employee and their personal meaning of their work. The stronger the employee feels for their work, and the bigger chance they will adopt and embed with employee empowerment.
Competence	Competence is the individual's judgement on their work and capability to perform task activities skilfully. Gist in 1987. Competence is the dimension supported by organisational psychologists where research has demonstrated that one's belief or view on their work is very subjective and might overlap the individual's actual competence. The stronger one feels about their capabilities, the more chances employee empowerment will be received and take on employee empowerment.
Self determination	Self determination refers in this context to autonomy in the initiation of the individual at work said Bell and Staw in 1989. This third perspective projects the strength of determination the employee would feel towards their job; the further determination and job fulfilment one would feel, the greater chances for approving of employee empowerment.
Impact	Impact is the perception of the degree to which an individual can influence strategic, administrative or operating outcomes at work. Gist and Ashforth in 1989. The dimension of impact is the magnitude at which one employee would feel they have impact on their surrounding environment. If the employee judges they have strong impact on their subordinates/superiors, he/she will feel stronger about practicing employee empowerment as part of their HR set of practices.

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The table above illustrates the conceptual employee empowerment framework in which the employee identifies his/hers orientation towards their work role and therefore the magnitude at which their potential receptiveness to employee empowerment can be measured.

The above conceptual framework is illustrated to serve as a theoretical support to use to measure the level of employee empowerment in the Algerian workplace. This paper is based on theoretical literature review to tackle the research problems; if however one would use quantitative methods to pursue this goal, this above framework would match perfectly as a support for empirical data gathering.

Cultural, social and psychological factors are extra complication in the employee empowerment equation. The individual that subjects empowerment as well as the individual that is being empowered much feel that the act itself adheres to their cultural and individual beliefs and frame of thinking. As Westernised best practice HRM policies can be, confining employee empowerment a closed set of definition leaves little or not enough importance to the unique individual point of view on the concept. One might argue that if looked at from this unique individual perspective, no generalisation or categorisation could have been made.

In the first section, employee empowerment has been discussed and to an extent the first of the three research questions stated in the introduction has been answered. Respectively, the next section will consider the notions of culture and organisational culture and will look for answers to the second research question which queries the coherence of the Algerian organisational culture and managerial style with employee empowerment's implicit values.

ALGERIAN NATIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Much of the work in the international HRM area concerns ways in which national culture impacts employment practices in host countries and the limitations culture creates regarding the ability of Multinational companies to transfer employment practices to host countries. Said Laver in 1992. National culture is one of the very first problematic issues faced by HRM strategists.

What is national culture? And can it be defined? It has certainly been attempted.

National culture is described by the cross cultural theorist Hofstede as the set of mind that differentiates one group of people from another. It is also described by anthropologists as the set of learned values, behaviour, and beliefs that are characteristic of a particular society or population; primatologists talk about it as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art,

law, morals, customs and any other capabilities or habits acquired by men as a member of society⁴. It is evident that although perceived from different angles, the meaning of national culture revolves around a sense of shared values and ideologies portrayed in external actions implying the belonging to a certain society. Geert Hofstede in 1983 created a conceptual framework for understanding cross cultural differences in a five dimension matrix where the following dimensions are:

- Power distance
- Uncertainty avoidance
- Individualism/ collectivism
- Femininity/ masculinity
- Long-term/ short term orientation

This paper will apply Hofstede's cross cultural paradigm to illustrate Algeria's culture and thereafter to correlate it with the Algerian organizational culture.

After reviewing literature around the Algerian culture, the following assumptions framed on Hofstede's five dimensional cultural models have been projected.

Algeria projects the following cultural traits

• High power distance where this dimension corresponds to the degree of inequality accepted and expected by the individuals. In Algeria's case, this degree of difference is tolerated if not promoted by employees and even more by employers. The notion of power in the typical Algerian firm is a familiar one where subordinates recognize the power exerted on them customary. The reasons behind such recognition of vertical power relationship lie in the historical social development of the country.

• High uncertainty avoidance where this dimension of uncertainty avoidance describes the manner in which members of a corporation approach uncertainty. Certain cultures favor it, where others avoid it: it is the degree of tolerance that a culture can accept before having to worry about the consequences⁵.

The cultural and organizational conflict in the Algerian employee's mind in regards to eventual ambiguity of speech or action is also the result of post colonial cultural formation within this particular society⁶.

• Collectivism depends on the level of independence and freedom that employees of a corporation will claim to have. Individualists will regard identity from an individual point of view, whereas collectivists will identify to a society

4 Wael, 2001 'Tree of Origin: What Primate Behaviour Can Tell Us about Human Social Evolution'

5 Geert Hofstede, 1983 'Cultural Dimensions Explained' Book 5

6 Abun-Nær, Jamil M., 1987 'A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period'

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or a social group. Algeria illustrates a society where moral, political and social beliefs that focus on human interdependence and assigns great importance of to the collective societal perception rather individual values. Albert Camus in 1955 has describes Algeria to comprise "Mediterranean collectivism".

Masculinity and femininity are concepts resulting to the given importance of morals behind success, and the importance of possessions (masculine values) and the social environment as well as individuals helping each other (feminine values). In the case of Algeria, masculinity is high and the society as a whole represents a typical example of masculine culture⁷.

Long term orientation is the fifth dimension that was added to Hofstede's original work in 1991 after trying to introduce eastern values and perspectives to his framework. The study of Chinese Cultural Connection by Michael Bond in 1987 has revealed that Confucian Dynamism cultures require a longer time frame compared to western cultures. Algeria is no exception in the sense where short term orientation is not the approach taken by the society.

Having laid down Algeria's typical societal characteristics, the coming paragraphs aim to answer if national culture is behind organisational culture.

Organisational culture comprises a set of beliefs, values, norms and customs that represents the unique character of an organization, and provides the context for action in it and by it.

Whereas organizational structure is relatively easy to describe, organizational culture is less concrete and more complex to define. Its clarity and significance is crucial though to the homogeneity and well functioning of any company. Organisational culture is the key to organisational excellence from Schein's (2004:23) point of view.

The three main characteristics of organisational culture described by Kilmann, Saxton, & Serpa, in 1986 are Behavioural control, Source of identity and search for stability. The later three can also be interpreted as the functions of a given organisational culture.

As previously organized, this section will outline the algerian organisational behaviour gathered from literature review around the topic framing it on the three above organisational culture issues.

Behavioural control: where the employee's social and professional behaviour is directed by the company's corporate culture. Algeria's organisational culture is one where behavioural control is attained from authority. The workplace's atmosphere is formal, bureaucratic, technocratic, non informative, closed and very hierarchical⁸.

⁷ Judith Surkis, 2009 | Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity

⁸ The political Quarterly review, volume 68, issue 4; 1997

Source of identity is the activity where the employee will carry its organizational culture and feel part of it. The internal organizations and structures of the Algerian firms confirm the influence Algerian nationality has on the management styles. The Algerian identity is a complex one where post colonial traces and religious movements have resulted in the Algerian employee to feel very needy of appurtenance as well as organizational appurtenance.

Encourages stability when the firm's goals and aims are clearly identified and appropriated by the employees, stability in the workplace is acquired.

Hierarchy ladder is very high and decision making within the firm does not consider general employee consensus, employee participation is low and the involvement and the matter of opinion of the individual is disused. Senior employees are expected to be authoritative with subordinates and the term 'co-workers' is unemployed.

At this point of the literature review it is important to mention the significant gap of literature around the concept of the Algerian organisational culture.

The Algerian organisational culture is thereby characterised by the use of authoritarian management style.

Therefore on a closer look, we can observe that most of the theories on national culture presented above on Algeria are reflected to a certain extent in Algerian corporate culture.

Before going on to the next section of this article, authority and managerial authority ought to be defined first.

Authority by definition is the power or right to give orders or make decisions. Weber asserts that men claim authority as they feel they have a legitimate right to expect willing obedience to their command.

Managerial authority works on the same foundation and is divided into the following managerial authority types

- Coercive authority that describes motivating staff by fear of losing status, positions, bonuses or jobs

- Reward authority that refers to positive reinforcement of the employee and award him with something of value

- Expert authority is where authority is earned if the team respects one's skills as a project manager or leader

- Referent authority that refers to the ability to influence others through charisma and personality.

The first of the above, coercive authority, is the most applicable in the Algerian organizational context.

The past section has addressed the second research question set out in the introduction

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Are the organisational values and work ethics of this particular third world economy context coherent with the principles and morals engaged in employee empowerment?

After critical review of literature, the obvious answers are that the organisational work ethics of the Algerian firm are to an extent incoherent with the philosophy behind employee empowerment set out earlier. Whereas employee empowerment is a concept that underlines and necessitates values such as self dependency, individualism and horizontal and vertical integration to name a few, the Algerian organisation portrays to an extent the opposite of that where high hierarchy, collectivism, and authority practice are observed.

This third section of this paper on strategy implementation will be inclined more on the problematic conception of implementing western HRM strategies in developing countries such as Algeria.

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Whereas HR strategy implantation has been discussed on a micro organisational level by the likes of Purcell in 2001 or Legge in 1995 who have discussed the problems firms encounter when implementing strategy such as the lack of employee commitment to general corporate aims, this section will take one step back to look at the very macro perspective of strategy implementation.

In order to expand and grow, in order to globalise from a trading and economic perspective, the cultural clash is predictable. Multinational companies are modelled and designed to think, act, and process in a capitalist way that will overlook some of the basic global common sense such as how world cultures and societies in their very essence differ.

This paper mainly aims to draw attention on the problematic conception of implementing western theories in developing countries.

Employee empowerment is a construct born and derived from western anglo-saxon culture and strategic thinking; the prospects of implementing it in Algeria are questionable.

Most western theory, management and HR theory included are usually referred to as normative theory. In this term, we note the use of the word normative; this very part of the paper is enquiring on the meaning of this word normative. Normative implies normal, normal implies objective and objective implies factual. However the mainstream theorists trained in classical and neo classical theory possess a conviction based on faith in the supremacy of market economy driven by rationalism and profit motive and as the quote states, the conditions of idealism and profit values are capitalist ones, they therefore by definition contradict their label of normative or standard.

9 Ozay Mehmet, 1995, *Westernising the third world*, p.5

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The rational used in these theories is clearly influenced by deeper abstract judgements that do not fit into the third world picture and certainly do not fit into the algerian one.

Theory by definition should be value-free, however there has been evidence in the theory themselves that prove otherwise. The hidden western ideals used in most management theory even more in the economics ones are conditioned. When a statement is conditioned, it is by definition biased.

The idea of hidden values affecting the judgement of such normative theory can be used the other way around in the sense where a country was institutionalised as Algeria might have problems simply implementing strategy where as stated factors of condition such as institutionalism and path dependency should be taken into account when for instance stating that employee empowerment is a HR good practice

The current management literature as a whole and International HRM management literature does largely originate from the United States and Europe. It is almost implied from this uni-sided literature that there is global consensus of universality in the policies on international HRM in the sense where ultimate objective of profitability through best practice HRM is considered standard.

Western drawn management theories have portrayed great attribution to the performance of their strategies rather than the relevance and contextualisation of these often controversial HR best practice policies

Many theorists have affirmed that new international HRM strategies can be of immense added value to any multinationals if only sustained of creative value and neo consistency¹⁰

The above paragraphs have aimed to illustrate the problematic issues of strategy implementation from western to non western lands; it has come to address one of the issues the third research question pointed out in the introduction raises

If employee empowerment as an HR practice was to be introduced in an algerian company's organisational culture and behaviour, what are the issues around strategy implementation?

As the above paradigms illustrate, strategy implementation from western borders to third world country ones is problematic, and prior to prospecting the functionality of any HR practice or strategy in the aim of implementing it, it seems that the crossing national boundaries should be tackled first.

This paper does recognize however that the issues discussed in this past section are far too macro and universalist to expect immediate action taken against it.

¹⁰ Barney, 1991 and Wright and McMahan, 1992

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CONCLUSION

The aim of this research has been to explore the prospects for transplanting the notion of Employee empowerment advocated in some HRM commentary, to organisational contexts in Algeria.

The sensitive concept of employee empowerment can be measured through the four set of issues described in Thomas and Velthouse reviewed dimensional empowerment model. On that framework, the Algerian organisational culture does not embed employee empowerment in its strategic thinking.

Having defined and discussed national culture and organisational culture, and following Hofstede's cross cultural paradigm and Kilmann, Saxton, and Serpa's main organizational culture characteristics frame, it is clear that the Algerian national culture thereafter organizational culture does not possess the same values and work ethics engaged in the conception of employee empowerment; it even seems to contrast it.

Finally, the problematic nature of western strategy implementation has projected the density and complexity of transplanting western drawn HRM practices such as employee empowerment in the third world Algerian firm.

As a conclusion, the overall evidence appears to indicate that while jury is still out on the applicability of western management techniques in developing countries, managers in these countries will continue to borrow from western practices; they have no other choice. Effective indigenous practices take time to develop. Nevertheless, companies in developing countries must not simply mimic western management practices, but must examine how well the various elements of a company's HRM strategy fit together. Managers should be aware of why certain western practices have been successful and consider the underlying factors of such success, which are necessary and appropriate to their own advancement.

This article had limited its scope in defining core themes, reviewing necessary material in order to understand main concepts, carry out a purely qualitative research methodology to answer research questions and analyse findings by contrasting them with literature review findings. The scale of the research meets the article and management review length limitations.

In further research where larger scale and scope of study is initiated, the possibilities of supplying greater empirical evidence to produce a set of working recommendations in order to implement employee empowerment or even general best practice HR strategies are very promising.

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