

Deconstructing "HR Quality" Construct: A Social and Organizational Critical Reading

تفكيك مفهوم "جودة الموارد البشرية": إطار نظري لقراءة اجتماعية - تنظيمية

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Received: 23/04/2025

Accepted: 24/06/2025

Summary :

The article examines the notion of "HR Quality," often perceived as a technical and neutral given. It aims to demonstrate how it is, in reality, socially constructed, negotiated, and legitimized within organizations, by adopting a theoretical exploration, which will be built from an extensive, critical examination of the specialized literature. The importation of the quality paradigm (originating from industry) serves to legitimize the HR function through a specific discourse (processes, indicators). Quality tools are not neutral but are socio-technical artifacts that shape practices. Institutional pressures reinforce adoption, and various actors play a key role in its promotion and definition, which results from constant negotiations and processes of local 'translation' of global models.

Therefore, "HR Quality" is not an objective or universal category, but a contingent social construct. It depends on context, dominant discourses, and power dynamics among actors. This critical reading reveals the stakes hidden by technical rhetoric and transcends a purely instrumental view.

Keywords:

HR Quality - Social Construction – Legitimation – Negotiation - Socio-technical Artifacts

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الملخص:

يتناول المقال مفهوم "جودة الموارد البشرية"، الذي يُنظر إليه غالبًا كحقيقة تقنية ومحايدة، حيث يهدف إلى إبراز أنها في الواقع مُشكّلة اجتماعياً، ويتم التفاوض بشأنها، وتُضفى عليها الشرعية داخل المنظمات، وذلك من خلال اعتماد التحليل النظري الذي سيتم بناؤه من خلال دراسة مستفيضة ونقدية للأدبيات المتخصصة.

إن استيراد نموذج الجودة (المنبثق من الصناعة) يخدم إضفاء الشرعية على وظيفة الموارد البشرية من خلال خطاب محدد (عمليات، مؤشرات)، فتقنيات التسيير التي يستخدمها نظام الجودة ليست محايدة بل هي تقنيات تُشكّل الممارسات الاجتماعية، حيث تعزز الضغوط المؤسسية تبنيها، أما مختلف الفاعلون فإنهم يلعبون دورًا رئيسيًا في ترويجها وتعريفها، الأمر الذي ينتج عن مفاوضات مستمرة وعمليات "ترجمة" محلية للنماذج العالمية.

وبالتالي، فإن "جودة الموارد البشرية" ليست مجرد قياس موضوعي أو عالٍ، بل هي بناء اجتماعي ظرفي، يعتمد على السياق، والخطابات المهيمنة، وديناميكيات السلطة بين الفاعلين. تكشف هذه القراءة النقدية عن الرهانات المخفية وراء الخطاب التقني وتتجاوز الرؤية الأداة البحتة.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

جودة الموارد البشرية - البناء الاجتماعي - إضفاء الشرعية - التفاوض - الأدوات الاجتماعية التقنية

1. INTRODUCTION

Initially formed in the fires of manufacturing as a means of ensuring conformity to specifications and efficiency in the production line, the quality concept has swelled into watersheds far removed from physical products. Over the decades, what began within a defined scope has so outgrown its boundaries that it has settled into every fiber of the organization's warp and woof. So far, the logic of quality has pervaded functions often deemed distant from its concerns, driven by successive waves of modeling from *Total Quality Management* (TQM) to (EFQM) *Excellence Label of European Foundation of Quality Management* and standardization through the rise of the ISO 9000 series (Cole, R & Scott, W, 2000). Human Resources Management is at the frontline of these newly conquered territories.

For so long seen through a social, relational or even informal lens, the Human Resources function is now evermore being asked to transport into the realm of quality management the principles of standardization, measurement and continuous improvement. Therefore, the concept of "HR Quality" has gradually arrived; often signaled as self-explanatory; just apply proven recipes to obtain, more efficiently, more performance. However, anomaly is a complex and problematic one and behind all this technical rationality and seeming neutrality is something that needs to take a closer look at the dimensions.

In the application of this analytical schema, which prioritizes procedure and measurement; to the management of people at work, this inevitably opens up questions about the fundamentals of what is being evaluated and standardized in the first place. Indeed such inherent naturalness of "HR Quality" tends to veil the reality that, like any other management tool, it is a social construct, whose real extent and profound meaning has to be interpreted, in order to fully understand it. This need to see past technical evidence that frames our reflection; a constructivist perspective; the idea that the categories of thought we work with, and the rules structuring our organizations are the effects of social and historical elaboration appears especially productive here.

Therefore, we formulate our theoretical research question as follows: How is the concept of "HR Quality" socially constructed, negotiated and legitimized in organizations? What discursive

processes, actor dynamics, and institutional mechanisms serve to construct its meaning and establish its normative uses in practice?

The choice of adopting such an epistemological position is not neutral: it requires us to question not so much the technical “truth” of HR Quality but more of the conditions through which it comes to be a relevant and operative category. Faced with this position, we are led to develop the following theoretical hypotheses:

Hypothesis1: “HR Quality” is not an objective and universal category, but a contingent social construct, whose meanings and dimensions are contingent to context, organizational histories and power relations among actors.

Hypothesis 2: The material mechanisms connected to quality (standards, indicators, audits ...) must not be considered as no more than neutral tools; they are vectors in this social construction; and objectify a certain vision of HR performance, while disseminating a specific set of assumptions on work and its management.

To investigate these hypotheses, we take both theoretical and conceptual approaches. It is grounded in social constructivism (Berger, P. L , & Luckmann, T, 1966) that enables us to scrutinize how "HR Quality" is (re)produced and (re)produced in interaction, through language and institutionalization processes. This viewpoint prompts us to mobilize complementary analytical lenses : critical discourse analysis (Foucault, 1980) to examine how language constructs knowledge and power; insights from organizational sociology, particularly neo-institutionalist theory (DiMaggio, P, & Powell, W., 2000) to capture the diffusion of managerial archetypes; and frameworks based on strategic players (Crozier, M & Friedberg, E, 1977) or translation (Callon, 1986) (Latour, 2005) to grasp appropriation and local negotiation processes.

This overarching constructivist framework guides our theoretical exploration, which will be built from an extensive, critical examination of the literature at the nexus of quality management (QM), HRM and organizational sociology.

This study pursues the following objectives:

Designing a socio-organizational theoretical frame that breaks down and elucidated the idea of "HR Quality" as social construction, thus revealing the implicit aspect of the concept.

To provide insight regarding the major social, discursive, and institutional mechanisms that govern how organizations define, diffuse, and adopt (or resist) “HR Quality”, by adopting a critical

reading of the implications of this social construction for management practices and professional relations.

2- THE SOCIO-DISCURSIVE GENESIS OF "HR QUALITY"

Understanding the notion of "HR Quality" as a social construct requires tracing back to the origins of its emergence and diffusion. It is not simply a matter of observing the application of a technical tool to a new field, but rather analyzing how a specific paradigm quality was actively imported, translated, and legitimized within the field of human resources. This genesis is deeply socio-discursive: it unfolded through conceptual evolutions, the actions of influential actors, and the mobilization of a specific language that gradually shaped representations and practices.

2.1- The Importation of the Quality Paradigm into the HR Field

The history of quality management is one of progressive extension, a colonization of new organizational territories. Originating from statistical control applied to industrial production in the first half of the twentieth century, the quality mindset became richer and more complex over time. A major turning point occurred in post-war Japan.

Confronted with an initial reputation for poor-quality products and seeking to rebuild their economy, Japanese industrialists proved particularly receptive to new ideas. They notably welcomed and adapted the teachings of American experts such as W. Edwards Deming and Joseph M. Juran, who advocated an approach going beyond mere final inspection to focus on process improvement and employee involvement (Deming, 1986) (Juran, 1999).

While American management at the time often remained focused on post-hoc control, Japanese companies deeply integrated these ideas, developing original approaches such as quality circles (groups of employees analyzing and improving their own work) as early as the 1960s, and the Toyota Production System (TPS), a precursor to lean manufacturing, focused on eliminating waste and continuous improvement (Kaizen) (Ohno, 1988, pp. 75-92). This focus on "total" quality, involving all levels of the organization, enabled Japan, from the 1970s onward, to surpass its Western competitors in key sectors such as automotive and electronics, offering higher-quality products at competitive prices (Ishikawa, 1985).

Faced with this Japanese "quality shock," the American and European response was initially marked by misunderstanding, attributing Japanese success mainly to cost factors or dumping practices. It was only in the 1980s, as their market shares eroded, that Western companies truly recognized the stakes and began to develop their own response, often under the label of Total Quality Management (TQM). This period saw the emergence of formalized management systems and the publication of international standards, with the creation of the ISO 9000 series in 1987 (Cole, 1999, pp. 117-132).

At the same time, national or regional initiatives appeared, such as the Baldrige National Quality Award in the United States (1987) or the creation of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) and its excellence model in Europe. However, the adoption of these approaches was not uniform. In France, for example, deployment was later (in the 1990s) and initially perceived with skepticism, even criticized for its procedural nature deemed excessive, before later versions of the standards (notably ISO 9001:2000) placed greater emphasis on managerial involvement and the process approach, including for services (Boiral, 2007, pp. 127-146).

The penetration of the HR field by the quality logic was actively mediated and promoted by specific actors. Consulting firms played a decisive role by adapting, simplifying, and disseminating quality methodologies (TQM, Six Sigma, Lean...) and helping companies obtain certifications. Standardization bodies, by integrating requirements related to skills and training into generic standards such as ISO 9001, institutionalized the link between quality and personnel management. Business schools then relayed these concepts, training generations of managers in this new language (Zbaracki M. J., 2025).

This importation was accompanied by a notable semantic transformation. Terms such as "competence," "performance," and "evaluation" were redefined through the lens of measurability, conformity to standards, and alignment with defined processes. HR activity itself was reconfigured as "processes" (recruiting, training, etc.) to be optimized. The introduction of concepts such as the "internal client," popularized notably by Japanese figures like Kaoru Ishikawa, illustrates this transposition of a market logic within the organization, positioning the HR function as a "service provider" that

must satisfy its operational "clients. This new vocabulary is not neutral: it conveys a specific, rationalized, and procedural vision of human management (Zbaracki M. J., 2025).

2.2- Quality as a Language of Managerial Legitimation

Beyond their claimed instrumental effectiveness, the adoption and dissemination of "HR Quality" discourse and practices serves primarily a symbolic, legitimating function for modern management. In an environment characterized by increased international competition and the rise of managerial rationality as the preferred mode of thought, the possession of a quality label (e.g., ISO certification, TQM, Six Sigma) has become a potent signifier, a nearly de rigueur badge of organizational modernity, procedural rigor, and hence presumed performance (Zbaracki M. J., 1998, pp. 602-636).

For the HR function, often caught up in a persistent quest for strategic recognition within organizations, adopting this language seemed like a significant tactical opportunity. Not only did it enable the HR function to bolster its internal credibility relative to functions defined as "harder" (finance, production), but it also allowed it to establish, following the work of Ulrich (1997) or Guest (1997), an "objective" and measurable contribution to overall performance. "HR Quality" thus becomes a potent rhetorical and political tool, allowing HR to engage with the rest of management using a shared and valued discursive standpoint that of rationality and control (Ulrich, 1997); (Guest, 1997, pp. 263–276).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially in its Foucauldian tradition, offers tools to fully capture the dynamics of this phenomenon. CDA understands language not as a neutral reflection of reality, but rather as a constitutive practice that, through its use, produces the objects, subjectivities, and power relations it describes. Far from being a neutral set of techniques, quality discourse functions as a powerful power/knowledge apparatus (Foucault, 1980). It produces managerial reality by defining what is true, normal, effective, or deviant in the realm of management. Key terms ("process," "standard," "conformity," "non-conformity," "continuous improvement," "indicator") are not just words; they structure thought, order action, and define the limits of the sayable and the thinkable.

By adopting this language, management and the HR function within, it does not just communicate; it exercises productive power. Moreover, it shapes the subjectivities of employees and managers themselves, prompting them to internalize quality norms and engage

in self-discipline according to its precepts. Such discourse sets the terms of a “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1975, pp. 23-30) where performance is defined largely by procedural compliance and quantifiable measurement, potentially marginalizing other dimensions of work (creativity, subjective well-being, solidarity). Here, power is not only repressive; it is productive of norms, categories, and docile subjects. Mastering this discourse becomes an essential power resource for managers, enabling them to justify their authority and decisions (Guest, 1997).

This embedding in the quality discourse is strongly reinforced by pressures from the institutional environment, an effect that is especially well captured by DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) theory of isomorphism. The adoption of these initiatives is often not purely the result of rational decision-making based on technical effectiveness, but largely stems from a search for legitimacy and the influence of mimetic behavior within the organizational field.

DiMaggio and Powell identified three main mechanisms behind this homogenization of practices. Coercive isomorphism comes from direct or indirect external pressures: such as regulatory requirements that mandate certain standards for particular sectors, contractual pressures from large customers (e.g., demanding ISO certification from suppliers, including for their HR processes), or pressures from financial markets where investors favor firms with strong control systems in place (DiMaggio, P, & Powell, W., 2000).

Organizations face mimetic isomorphism due to uncertainty, causing them to mirror their perceived legitimate or successful competitors' structures and practices. This logic of imitation, i.e., "doing what others do" as a way to reduce uncertainty and signal membership in the community of "modern" organizations, even without certainty about actual benefits, also applies to the adoption of TQM or ISO certification. Lastly, normative isomorphism comes from the professionalization of management and support functions such as HR (DiMaggio, P, & Powell, W., 2000).

Professional standards, values, and “best practices” are articulated and promoted by professional associations, academic programs, and leading consulting firms. Consequently, there is strong normative pressure on organizations and managers to adopt practices and frames recognized as legitimate by the profession (e.g., quality approaches). The adoption of "HR Quality" is, thus, often less a conscious and strategic choice than a quasi-automatic response to

these various pressures aiming to guarantee organizational conformity and survival in a demanding institutional environment (Powell, 1995).

At the crux of this dual endeavor at discursive and institutional legitimation is the instrumentalization of HR performance indicators (KPIs). Retention rates, time-to-hire, cost-per-hire, absenteeism rates, satisfaction survey scores. These metrics represent efforts towards the objectification and quantification of HR activity, making it readable, comparable, and manageable according to the canons of dominant managerial rationality. Indeed, the alleged positive correlation between the application of TQM principles (which rely heavily on measurement) and economic performance has considerably contributed to establishing these indicators as essential components of management practice (Powell, 1995, pp. 15-37).

Yet a constructivist view, particularly one sensitive to the sociology of science and technology reminds us of the fundamental non-neutrality of these quantification operations. What to measure, how to measure it, and how to interpret results is always a social and political act that reflects particular managerial priorities. Translating on-the-ground realities into quantifiable criteria can drive behavior, potentially creating perverse effects (and resentment) by focusing on metrics rather than on less measurable aspects of quality. Hence, far from being mere neutral reflections of organizational performance, HR KPIs function as active agents in constructing a particular, socially-constituted version of "HR performance"—one deeply aligned with the prevailing quality discourse and serving the legitimation needs of both management and the HR function itself (Zbaracki M. J., 1998, pp. 602-636).

3 - ORGANIZATION MECHANISMS OF CONSTRUCTION AND DISSEMINATION

Although the socio-discursive genesis of "HR Quality" points out the work of the discourses and legitimation processes, its consolidation and perpetuation into the organizations depend of the organizational mechanisms more concrete. This idea is not floating in the ether of managerial ideas; it is grounded in material and symbolic devices, and is continually invoked, negotiated, and at times even reconfigured by the actors who inhabit the organization.

3.1- Quality Devices as Socio-Technical Artifacts

The quality management instruments – standards, procedures, audits, information systems, when applied to human resources field, should not be perceived as merely a neutral technical tool. Instead,

they serve as socio-technical artifacts that is, objects or systems that embed certain visions of work, of organization and management, which, in turn, condition the actions and interactions of those who manipulate them (Orlikowski, 1992, pp. 398-427).

Standards especially the ISO 9001 standard and its different versions hold a central place in this device ; *"Management devices are polymorphic, multidimensional, complex objects characterized by systemic functioning, involving multiple feedback loops. (...) [They] share at least three common traits (...): they aim to organize work by assigning and prescribing tasks; they monitor its proper execution; and they are involved in the evaluation of employees and their performance."* (Maugeri, 2006, p. 14). While expressed in a sometimes-generic manner to handle a broad applicability, they give very clear prescriptions on the requirements for defining, documenting and maintaining control over processes including those around HR (skills, training, communication, staff awareness).

When we evaluate their content (through what might be described as a qualitative meta-analysis), we discover the implicit assumptions behind this particular idealization of "HR Quality." Through the formalization of practices, the traceability of actions, and the precise definition of responsibilities, these standards call for the standardization, not only of ways of doing things, but also of ways of thinking about human resource management. Their role is to spread and legitimize a very form of "good management" oriented to the mere procedural compliance, the prevention of risks and the display of control (Orlikowski, 1992, pp. 398-427).

Compliance with these standards results in greater formalization of HR processes, a clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities, and greater traceability of actions. ISO standards are supposed to be helpful tools to promote continuous improvement, whereas in some HR contexts, applying ISO standards can become a hindrance, leading to firm and less flexible practices. They do influence how actors view their work, (shared) responsibilities and targets, establishing a common cognitive frame that helps to coordinate but also constrains creativity and innovation.

Another powerful tool for erecting and sustaining the standard is quality audits internal (self-inspection) or external often by a certification body. Beyond the mere technical verification of conformity, they represent organizational rituals, regulated stagings in which the legitimacy of the quality approach is enacted and reenacted.

They render transparent the deviation (or conformity) relative to the norm and thereby create a powerful potent pressure toward alignment (Power, 2000, pp. 111-119).

The audit results in the construction of a particular organizational reality. The audit process itself, the scrupulous preparation, the formalized conversations between auditors and those being audited, the production of reports emphasizing “non-conformities,” the insistence on “corrective action plans”, plays a role in constituting the organizational reality it is meant to assess.

Not just an utterance but also a performative act Once denominate and characterize the practiced to the criteria of the standard, the audit is thus part of the representation shaping and the future practice (actions) directing. Here, the direct interaction between the auditor (the embodiment of the standard) and the auditee (who needs to prove himself compliant) is a scene where the acceptable versus “bad” HR practice is constructed and negotiated in place (Guest, 1997, pp. 263–276).

Because audits show discrepancies from the standard, it promotes the actors to behave according to quality requirements and thus help build an organization-oriented culture towards compliance and continuous improvement. By this way, they also enable, for the HR function, to establish itself as a major player in the quality approach, responsible for ensuring compliance with standards and procedures. Finally, the growing integration of modules dedicated to quality or functionalities inspired by its principles in Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) solidifies this construction (Power, 2000, pp. 111-119).

These systems automate a large portion of HR management. For instance, this is the case with skills management software that uses standardized repositories, tools for monitoring objectives and evaluating performance that integrate quality KPIs, document management platforms for HR, or training and accreditation tracking systems, among them. This inscription of the standard in the technical artifact serves to naturalize it, to render it less visible as an organizational choice and hence less likely to be contested (Orlikowski, 1992).

Technology becomes the powerful mediator which structures information flows, guides decisions, and standardizes actions according to quality precepts HRIS, help to better manage human resources and make it easier to monitor indicators, by automating

tasks and providing standardized data. They also contribute to a tighter grip on HR actions, with increased traceability of the actions performed and the identification of deviations from the objectives set. Technology is a small form of soft discipline that encourage actors to behave in a manner that is consistent with the quality goals (Foucault, 1975). HRIS, by making themselves indispensable to HR control, consequently also contribute to spreading a specific vision of work and performance, where measures and standards are at the center.

3.2 - Actors, Negotiations and Local Translations

While quality devices certainly have an influence through their structuring of the field of possibilities, their effective instantiation is never a simple mechanical application of a preconceived plan. Their interests, their strategies, their resources and their representations mediate it, interpreted, and shaped continuously by the actors in the organization. "HR Quality" is implemented as a byproduct of complex social processes.

3.2.1- The role of so-called "quality entrepreneurs"

Quality professionals, licensed consultants, promotion of HR managers.

It is these figures of "quality entrepreneurs" which play a driving role in the promotion and deployment of the approach. Quality actors are either professionals, striving to expand their area of influence, consultants marketing their knowledge, or HR managers perfectly aware of the benefits (or even need) to adopt this approach in order to renew (or legitimate) their function and they exert conviction strategies, mobilize alliances, try to overcome resistances and appropriate symbolic benefits from quality. They want to influence decisions, mobilize resources, and build consensus around the quality approach; *"The actor does not exist outside the system that defines the freedom which is theirs and the rationality they can use in their action. But the system only exists through the actor who alone can carry it and give it life, and who alone can change it."* (Crozier, M & Friedberg, E, 1977, p. 11)

The eventual adoption of "HR Quality" can therefore be viewed as a collective action orchestrated by these actors. These quality entrepreneurs can be actors internal to the organization, quality managers or HR directors who believe in the advantages of the approach, or actors external to the organization, quality management consultants (Cole, 1999). They act as promoters, by making organizational actors aware of the quality issues and leading them to

using the correct tools and methods. They are also translators, by restating quality concepts and tools to HR specificities.

3.2.2 - Negotiation arenas: Definition of key HR processes; choice of indicators, interpretation of non-conformities

Power games between HR, Quality and operational staff.

The specific definition as well as the invention of "HR Quality" thus becoming (more or less "negotiable" situations) places of negotiating logics of action, sometimes-irreconcilable interests. Which HR processes are seen as being "critical", and need formalization, as a priority? What key performance indicators to select to assess the "quality" of recruitment or training? How should one understand a normative demand considered too general or limiting? How you address a "non-conformity" identified during an audit, as a technical fix or as a more fundamental re-examination of a practice? (Cole, 1999).

All these questions create debates, compromises and sometimes open (though often latent) conflicts between the different stakeholders: the strategic or financial vision of general management, the Quality function (the guardian of procedural orthodoxy), the HR function (defending its business expertise and its way to manage their humans), the operational managers (concerned with the daily effectiveness and sometimes reluctant to additional administrative constraints) and the employees or their representatives (whose work and conditions are directly impacted).

It is in these kinds of permanent negotiations that the effective construction of what constitutes "HR Quality" in a given local context becomes possible. The introduction of "HR Quality" generates power struggles between the various actors; all the actors will work for their interest and to establish their vision of HRM (Bernoux, 2009, pp. 181-183).

3.2.3 - Translation phenomena (Callon, Latour)

How "HR Quality" is translated and reframed?

Translation, as conceived by Michel Callon and Bruno Latour in a somewhat similar context by means of ANT, is a concept through which this dynamic process of adaptation and local negotiation can be analyzed with relevance. The concept of "HR Quality" and its variants simply exist in the form of either international standards, consultant models, or "best practices" reported in managerial journals — is not implemented as such in an organization. To make sense in their own

environment, it must be "translated" by local actors (Callon, 1986, pp. 196-233).

The translation itself is complex process of making sense of the structure: a problematization (how might the quality approach help with the particular HR issues we face?), an interest (how to persuade the other key players of the importance of embarking here, and a mobilization of allies and the resources needed to see the project to completion. As per this process, the original model is, inevitably, simplified, adapted, creatively reconstructed, or even distorted or diverted to aid local interests, or to avoid unanticipated difficulties (Latour, 2005).

The "HR Quality" concretely verified in the quotidian practices of a company is therefore always the effect of a hybridization, of an organizational bricolage between global prescriptions and local realities, mediated by actor games and power relations. These translation phenomena can result in distorting the idea of quality in a non-negligible way. As a result, local actors can modify the standards and procedures to better align them with their own values and their own practices. They can also use them strategically, with the goal of attaining objectives not initially intended by the promoters of the quality approach. *"The organization is an instrument that social actors have forged to manage their interactions so as to obtain the minimum cooperation necessary to pursue collective goals, while maintaining their autonomy as relatively free agents."* (Crozier, M & Friedberg, E, 1977, p. 196).

Understanding "HR Quality" in its dimension of social construct thus means to be sensitive to these soft mechanisms of translation and negotiation through which its meaning and effective reach are constructed, far beyond the mere application of standardized procedures. HR Quality is not an objective reality, it is rather diverse practices and representations that are continuously (re)negotiated and (re)interpreted by the various relevant actors embedded in the organization.

Drawing on Actor-Network Theory (ANT), these nonhuman devices (standards, software, indicators) work together with human agents to stabilize and circulate a specific image of "HR Quality" that has become stronger. Thus, it becomes crucial to consider the social, political, and cultural dimensions in the analysis of quality approaches in HR, which will help us to understand the ways those approaches

are appropriated, transformed, and used by organizational actors (Latour, 2005).

4 - ANALYTICAL SYNTHESIS OF THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The synthesis of these theoretical implications focuses on the socio-discursive processes and organizational mechanisms that shape what we call the "HR Quality" of organizations, as through our socio-constructivist lens, we are positioned to explore these themes with far greater depth and specification. This analysis exposes the deeply contingent and negotiated character of this managerial idea, one that is thousands of miles away from the presumed technical-neutrality often associated with it. In so doing, this approach does not simply provide analytic keys for interpreting power arrangements or modalities of resistance, or the implications thereof for the sense of work, but it also allows for a horizon for a qualified critique of fully instrumentalist views.

The analytical framework developed, rooted in the principles of social constructivism, has made it possible to dismantle the established idea of "HR quality". It emerges clearly that its meaning is neither intrinsic nor universal, but instead emerges and stabilizes although always provisionally through dominant discourses and interactions among actors. The socio-discursive genesis characterized by the importation of the quality paradigm in the area of Human Resources and of its instrumentalization as a language of managerial legitimation demonstrates how the articulation of a concept such as performance, competence or internal customer satisfaction is treated with a particular perspective.

This discursive work, propagated by consultants, standardizing bodies and academia in turn, contributes to achieving a socially legitimate and desirable portrait of the HR function that resonates with ensure rationality and economic efficiency. "HR Quality" therefore serves as a strong signifier, lending an image of modernity and objectivity to the practices it qualifies.

Such discursive construction is materializing in organizational devices. Standards, indicators and audits are no longer, of course, simply technical devices, but social-technical artefacts transmitting a specific notion of performance seeping into practice, inscribed in time. Standards such as ISO 9001, when applied to human resources, not

only impose prescribed practices or ways of doing things, but also shape what is represented as “quality” management, often emphasizing compliance with procedures and traceability.

As rituals of verification, audits thus serve to further normalize the norm and to generate an aligned organizational reality in which compliance itself becomes a goal. Whether each of these logics plays out as intended or not, again it accounts for how this embodied logics is further incorporated into our Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) which brings this rationality to the very infrastructure of management where it becomes widespread and less explicit, thus less disputable.

These mechanisms render an a benefit distribution to a “natural” definition of HR performance; giving this construction a false sense of technical evidence

However, this objectification is never total. In organizational terms, the meaning of “HR quality” and the way in which it is implemented in the life of the organization are constantly fluid and constitute an arena for contestation of power, reflecting varying logics between the different actors. So far, the implementation of quality initiatives seems to be a never-ending process of negotiation. Quality entrepreneurs try to carry their project but face the interpretations, interest, and strategies of other groups (operational managers, employees, other support functions). What is understood as "critical" processes, what are relevant indicators, or what constitutes and interpretation of a "non-conformity"; are all stakes in these negotiation arenas where at times antagonistic rationalities confront each other.

Translation phenomena clearly show how undeniably global models are, in local contexts, necessarily re-appropriated, adapted, even diverted. Feeding into this 'ideal type' abstraction, however, the practice of "HR Quality" is never anything but a hybridized organizational construction, a contingent, negotiated and politically loaded statement about its meaning.

The constructed, contingent and negotiated nature of “HR Quality” unfolds promising analytical pathways. First, it opens up power problems that are usually hidden behind the technical and objective surface of quality language. Having the power to define standards, carry out audits, or elucidate indicators constitutes a resource in organizational power struggles. Examining who benefits

from a given definition of quality can help illuminate dynamics of domination and marginalization.

Second, this reading helps to frame resistances not simply as irrational obstacles but potentially as well-founded responses to logics considered illegitimate, disconnected from the reality of work, or threatening to professional autonomy. Third, it asks us to ask about the consequences for the meaning of work. Intense rationalization, the standardization of behaviors, quantitative indicators, etc., can be at odds with the subjective, relational, and ethical aspects of human work, leading to a potential loss of meaning, demotivation, or a form of organizational cynicism.

Hence, instrumental managerial approaches considering “HR Quality” generally seem to be rather narrow or restrictively instrumental. In neglecting the socio-political dimension of its construction, in treating quality tools as universal technical solutions that can be deployed in the same way regardless of purpose and actors involved in the quality process, these approaches risk not only ineffectiveness but also the generation of unforeseen perverse effects.

Over-standardization can quash initiative and flexibility; excessive process control can undermine trust and engagement; reductive quantification can distract from crucial aspects that cannot be captured by simple measures. A socio-organizational view, on the other hand, calls for a reflexive view; recognizing “HR Quality” for what it is a social construction in constant mutation and incorporating into the implementation of it an explicit analysis of the contexts, actors and power issues at stake.

5. CONCLUSION

At the end of this exploration, it clearly appears that the notion of 'HR Quality', far from being an objective technical entity, is a social construct shaped by discursive forces, organizational devices, and actor dynamics. The aim of this article was to understand how this concept is socially constructed, negotiated, and legitimized. The analysis confirms that 'HR Quality' emerges from a complex interaction where managerial discourses legitimize its importance, where standards and tools materialize it, and where actors translate and adapt it to their contexts and interests. It is therefore not an immutable essence but an organizational reality in perpetual (re)definition.

Our initial hypotheses are validated. First, 'HR Quality' proves to be a contingent construct rather than a universal category, its

meaning fluctuating according to contexts and power relations. Second, the material mechanisms of quality (standards, indicators, audits) indeed act as vectors of this social construction, objectifying a particular vision of HR performance, through differentiated action logics and power games that undeniably influence the definition and implementation of 'HR Quality', making it a constant negotiation issue.

The socio-organizational theoretical framework mobilized through the aspects of discourse, devices, and actors was decisive in uncovering these dynamics. It allowed us to go beyond a purely instrumental reading and reveal the social foundations of a notion whose managerial prominence continues to grow. This approach highlights the imperative to integrate the socio-political dimension into the analysis of quality approaches applied to human resources, in order to grasp the complexity of power issues, the contingency of meanings, and the sometimes-paradoxical effects on work and professional relations.

Future research perspectives could focus on in-depth comparative studies, examining the social construction of 'HR Quality' in varied cultural or sectoral environments, to better understand contingency factors and modes of local translation. It would also be fruitful to investigate ways for organizations and managers to adopt a reflexive approach to quality in HRM, an approach that takes into account its constructed nature to develop more relevant, equitable, and meaningful approaches for employees. These avenues open an essential field of investigation for a finer understanding and a potentially more humanistic orientation of human resource management.

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Deconstructing "HR Quality": A Theoretical Framework for a Socio-Organizational reading.....C. Belaloui and Pr.H.Kherouf

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