



Challenges of Human Resource Management in Palestine

¹Shaban Jamal Ayyat, ^{2*}Md. Faruk Abdullah, ³Bahyah Binti Abdul Halim

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin
21300, Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu

*Corresponding Author Email: farukabdullah@unisza.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the challenges faced by the Palestinian Authority Institutions (PNA) in their practice of Human Resource Management. It adopted a qualitative approach based on a review of relevant literature to find out the major challenges handicapping the efforts to improve HRM in the West Bank in Palestine. The study reflected that with a specific focus on Palestine, the daily practice of HRM is a real challenge especially under the Israeli occupation and the different strategies Israel employs to destroy any improvement plans. The study showed that in the era of global technology, the Palestinian National Authority and its organisations in the West Bank are facing both internal and external challenges, namely the low organisational position of the management of human resources and its confinement to basic functions. In addition, the Procedural aspects, lack of planning and developmental aspects, and limitation of their practice in routine matters related to employment, calculation of salaries and dues, as well as follow-up and permits which constitute a significant challenge. Moreover, the external challenges include the Israeli occupation, which has a major role in these challenges as the occupation prevents public employees of different positions and deputies from reaching their workplaces by dividing the cities of Palestine, military checkpoints, and frequent arrests of ministers and legislators.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Palestine, Challenges, Israeli occupation



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INTRODUCTION

Human Resources Management (HRM) is one of the main components of any governmental or non-governmental body or institution. The human element has received a great deal of attention in the science of management in general, where several theories have been advanced reflecting the high importance of the human factor and capital in the activities of any organisation as an effective contributor to the achievement of organisational goals. The status of human resources has grown to a level where it is considered as a core contributor to the achievement of organisational goals. Narkhede (2007) explained that the growing interest in the function of Human Resource Management and the different sub-functions that it covers stems from a growing awareness about its role as a core business element rather than a support function. The success of any organisation has lately been linked to the successful management, acquisition, development and retention of key human resource in order to guarantee the competitive advantage on the market and the eventual possession of a valuable and inimitable non-substitutable human resource. So, in view of the importance of human resources in achieving their objectives, the organisations sought to recognise their role and importance.

HRM has acquired a status it has never had before, and as As-Salih (2005) indicated, this function has "shifted from a specialised and independent staff-based function to a source of competitive advantage for the Organization through its active engagement." (As-salih, 2005). The increasing importance of this HRM function has come to face numerous challenges due to the growing complexity and interdisciplinary connections with other organisational functions like operations, customer service and quality management. According to Ferris et al. (2004) this field of Human Resources has moved away from the traditional functions of mere recruitment and management of employee profiles to be a real inner mechanism of organisational performance, production and logistical efficiency. However, Human resources as a field is continuously facing challenges and obstacles due to the changing nature of the current global trends.

On the Palestinian front in particular, this field is really struggling under various internal and external challenges and the government under Israeli occupation is working hard to promote human resources management in the field of sustainable development. Yet it seems that government agencies are facing various challenges that are peculiar to the Palestinian context and have more complicated twists than

the functional challenges that other HR departments around the globe would face. In fact, the said challenges are not limited to the organisational intricacies or functional complexity but to the political and social context as well as the unstable environment in which the Palestinian institutions have to operate. The present paper aims to expose some of the most important challenges that face HRM in Palestine.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE ESSENCE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In this part of the research the paper addresses the main functions and areas of HRM or Human Resources Management to establish a reference line against which the challenges and obstacles facing HRM in Palestine are evaluated. The different sources would establish a clear view of what should normally happen within the realm of a properly organized HRM process.

Daley (2012) mentions that there seems to be no single definition of human resources management because of the different perceptions of human resources management's role. Some look at it from a traditional narrow view, while others look at it with a broad modern view. Therefore, multiple definitions of human resources management have been provided by various scholars and researchers. Still, they mostly agree that Human Resource refers to workforce, personnel, or individuals within an organisation accountable for accomplishing responsibilities assigned to them to attain organisational goals and objectives (Cania, 2014).

However, as Al-Arimy (2015) defined it, human resource management is a social and economic process involving a sequence of coordinated events such as planning, organising, coordinating, controlling or leading to achieve the desired outcome in the fastest and most efficient way. This obviously involves different phases and procedures that start with workforce planning, job analysis and selection then recruiting the most suitable candidates. These functions are only the first part of the management continuum which involves proactive assessment of the organisation's manpower needs and the analysis of the required skills for each job then the profiling of potential candidates, eventually leading to onboarding, employee services and development.

On the other hand, Ahmad (2008) stated, "human resource management is the basic strategic intent for human capital development for excellence." This englobes all the functions of attracting, hiring, developing, and managing a workforce pool that guarantees all the skills and knowledge requirements needed for the organisation's core operations. The same view has been reiterated in several other studies. Ferris et al. (2012) and Nasir (2017) state that human resource guarantees the availability and maintenance of a reliable, skilled employee base that responds accurately to the organisation's needs in carrying out all its functions and operations the most optimal way. This view reflects that the functions of HRM have become more strategic than ever before because of the importance of talent acquisition, management and retention in order to create a real inimitable Human Resource basis for the business. This is supposed to provide the organization with the resources that it needs to perform its processes and provide its services up to the

highest possible standards and according to the best practices in every area of its business, In the Palestinian context though, there are many specificities that make the simple HRM practice a challenging task. AISabbah et al. (2017) have expressed this in their paper stating that the PNA organizations and institutions were "operating under difficult conditions and have established their unique characteristics." (AISabbah et al, 2017). They also indicate that these institutions had to find their own way of countering the impact of any measures that the Israeli occupation enacts to limit the functionality of the PNA (Palestinian National Authority) organizations and institutions.

FUNCTIONS OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (Palestinian context)

HRM functions are indispensable for any organisation's long-term success, which usually revolves around recruitment or staffing, managing and directing the employees. (Eslami, and Nakhaie, 2011). From figure 1, it is clear that there are seven essential functions of HR that are performed in every organisation.

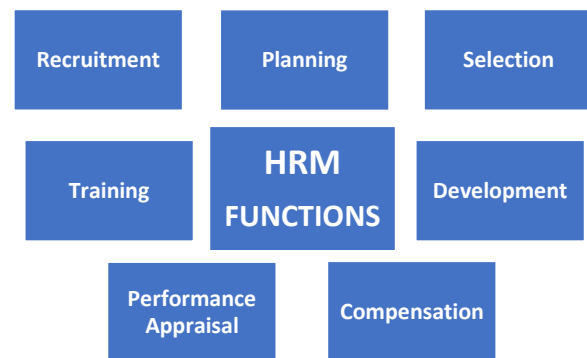


Figure 1: Functions of HRM

Talking about the most important HRM functions in the context of the Palestinian Authority and its institutions would simply be challenging to grasp in one research paper. In fact, Human Resources Management in its essence is a strategy for the acquisition, utilization, improvement, and preservation of an enterprise's human resources. According to Ivancevich and Konopaske (2013), any organisation, regardless of size, products, or services produced, has to recruit applicants to fill a position. The objective is to provide the right personnel for the proper work and optimum utilization of the existing human resources. This task, as simple as it may seem, is a source of interminable problems for the PNA because under the various arrestations and obstacles put by the Israeli occupation, keeping a stable and reliable employee base is not possible. AlShobaki et al. (2017) and AISabbah et al. (2017) indicated that one of the main challenges in HRM planning is the lack of clear visibility especially with the recurrent embargoes and closures that limit the access to and from vital places.

As for the recruitment function, it is clear that in Palestine the process is rather unstructured and lacks the right resources pool. AlSharbati (2015) says that the recruitment function in Palestine is still far from being satisfactory as the outcomes of the Palestinian universities do not offer a reliable enough workforce for the local authority to count on. Knowing that the recruitment function is a series of activities to locate and attract applicants with the motivation, ability, skills, and knowledge required to cover the staffing planning

deficiencies, the process is challenged in many ways in the Palestinian context. According to AlHerbawi (2015) and AlSharbati (2015) there are three main obstacles to accurate and reliable recruitment which relate to the inappropriate and inadequate Higher Education outcomes in certain fields, the irregular and uninstitutionalized relationships between the PNA and the universities in Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Add to that, the "insufficient Data and studies on both the supply and demand for Higher Education graduates and their inter-linkages." (Hashweh and Berryman, 2003, in AlSharbati, 2015)

It goes without saying that the PNA is in dire need for good quality and reliable graduates and a strong labor base. According to Ahmad and Hashim (2009) "the recruitment process should be open and honest, far from the aspects of corruption, collusion, and nepotism. Islam recommends that the management should choose people who are pious and proper as expected." (Ahmad & Hashim, 2009).

As for the process of selection, according to Ali (in Junaidah Hashim, 2009), To a certain degree, especially in the Palestinian context, this selection process is filled with aspects of corruption (corruption, collusion, and nepotism) that influence decision-making in recruitment. However, Al Qur'an affirms in verse 26 of Surat Al-Qasas: "And one of the two (women) said, 'O my father! Make him as a worker (at us), actually the nicest guy that you take as a worker is strong and trustworthy'". But it remains to imperative determine to which extent, the corruption and other internal and external factors impact the HRM process in the Palestinian Authority institutions and organizations.

Once the recruitment and selection are performed properly, there comes the function of training, to keep the employees up to date in terms of skill and knowledge. Simamora (2009) mentions that orientation and training are a process that attempts to provide a piece of information to employees, increase their expertise and understanding of the organisation and its goals. According to Fathoni (2006), education and training are essential because it is a repeated process of individuals. However as it seems, AlHerbawi (2015) indicates that in the Palestinian context it seems that "it is not what you know but Who you know" that really counts in most HR functions. This has been recurrently indicated as one of the major weaknesses of the HR system in the PNA institutions and organizations.

Other functions like the performance appraisal and the compensation functions seem to have their strengths and weaknesses but they are not the main focus of this paper. Although in some parts of this paper, the performance appraisal is to be discussed as a source of dissatisfaction and low performance on the part of certain categories of employees.

METHODOLOGY

The present study follows a qualitative methodology based on the systematic literature review in order to get as much information and individual views about the issue as possible. This methodology allows the researcher to understand the different points of view of the academic researchers and professional observers at the same time. This is intended to

reflect a more or less realistic appreciation of the situation and the challenges facing HRM in Palestinian organizations and especially governmental institutions,

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION GLOBAL AND LOCAL HRM CHALLENGES

It is a fact that Palestine, apart from its national and local challenges, is also bound by the global and regional rapidly changing business environment which means that there are currently many human resource management challenges that will continue to evolve for years to come. In fact due to the Due to the fluctuating economy as well as global and local developments, rapid changes are occurring that affect HR in a wide range of ways. Nakhede (2007), explains that the challenges involve managing workplace diversity, recruiting and retaining talent but also far more than that reaching up to the inner functions of needs analysis and cultural management that are often not easy to manage in the general context of HR in the world but in particular in the Palestinian organisations and authority agencies.

According to Nasir (2017) and Ferris et al. (2004), the most critical challenges facing modern-day HR officials are increasing the reliance on modern technology and changing human resources and information systems management's organisational structure. These constitute some of the most evident and visible challenges that make HRM a difficult task, especially with the workforce's changing composition and skill level and talents needed for organisations' current and future functions. This view is also found in many other research papers like AlShobaki et al. (2017), Faisal (2016) but especially articulated by AlSharbati (2017).

Bahaz and Sharqi, (2009) clarified that the most critical challenges facing the management of human resources, especially in the Arab world, are: the low organisational position of the management of human resources, and then the relative decline of the administrative level and the limit of systems and regulations. It also includes contractual rights and obligations of workers and employers, irregularities, the limit of management practices in most recruitment, salary and entitlements, but most importantly the lack of human resources in HRM departments and the adoption of human resources management information systems. The Palestinian context, as presented by Raheem (2016) and AlHerbawi (2015) is even more vulnerable to these points as it seems to be "unstructured" and not well organized as Raheem (2016) hinted.

According to Abdul Baqi (2000), there have been many changes in different areas of work at present, and these changes have accompanied many challenges and obstacles to the management of human resources to achieve its goals towards employees on the one hand and the direction of the organisation on the other hand, In fact, apart from the overwhelming gaps in the quality and availability of human resources in the Palestinian authority institutions and the lack of a "unified framework in most institutions" (AlSharbati (2015) makes it even more difficult than in the other Arab countries and globally given the changing landscape in the HRM arena.

Changing values and trends

Looking at the various research and academic works that are focused on HRM in general and in Palestine in particular AlShobaki et al. (2017) and Alsabbah et al. (2017) deplore the lack of experience within the PNA and its institutions in handling the rapid changes in culture and attitude. They indicate that the institutions of the PNA only had two turbulent decades to sort out their organizational schemes and often relied on external frameworks rather than producing their own system. "dissatisfactory levels of HRM practices may be attributed to the fact that the PNA government, after its establishment, was forced to work with two different rules and regulations inherited from Jordanian and Egyptian administrative laws, and such duplication of regulations causes confusing work standards that may affect HRM practices." (Alsabbah et al. 2017).

In addition to the lack of maturity and experience of the PNA and its institutions there was a clear inability to follow the recent trends in the labor market with the spiking demand for intellectual skills like problem-solving, critical thinking skills and technology manipulation skills. This is due to the low quality of the outcomes of the local universities in Palestine as expressed in AlHerbawi (2015) and AlSharbati (2017). Obviously this required adaptation and the change in work cultures both locally and globally is contrasted with the ever increasing competitive market which puts a lot of stress on the HR section to keep attracting, developing and retaining workers with the required skills. And if this is hard enough for most countries around the globe, it is even harder and more tedious for the institutions of the PNA

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES TO HRM IN PALESTINE

The European Joint Strategy in Support of Palestine (2017) states that there are certain challenges that are really specific to Palestine because of the sociopolitical environment there. The strategy statement recognizes that Palestine has endured a long period of hard times under the Israeli occupation that made its institutions and organizations fragile and vulnerable. "The Palestinian context (a territory under 50 years of occupation) is unique in many ways. The lack of control over land, water, physical boundaries and revenue; the administrative and political fragmentation; a discriminatory planning environment of fundamental uncertainty; and the regular and persistent violations of human rights and international humanitarian law prevent the Palestinian society and economy from realising their potential in all respects." (European Joint Strategy in Support of Palestine, 2017). In this particular context as indicated in the same strategy, the mere reasonably stable development effort proves extremely challenging.

In addition to the fragmentation and lack of inner structures to support establishing a strong HRM system, Palestine is facing one of the most important issues that have been raised by AlSharbati (2015) and Alsabbah (2017) that is due to the scarcity of open positions within the PNA institutions and the lack of opportunity for development in many cases. "As for the government sector, there are limited job opportunities, job vacancies are scarce, and the political problems between the Palestinian parties make it worse, and there are plenty of unemployed graduates." (AlSharbati, 2015)

According to Alsabbah et al. (2017), one of the main issues with the application of HRM policies in Palestine is due to the fact that "the Palestinian National Authority government, after its establishment, was forced to work with two different rules and regulations inherited from Jordanian and Egyptian administrative laws. Therefore, such duplication of regulations causes confusing work standards that may affect HRM practices." (Alsabbah et al. 2017). This confusion has even been more accentuated with the presence of the Israeli occupation and the various ways in which it affects the functioning of the PNA administrations. This is because of the hegemonic practices and movement restrictions that are often applied as well as arrests of key personnel in those administrations.

According to the European Joint Strategy in Support of Palestine stated also that "the Israeli violations of the basic rights of the Palestinian people have affected the performance of the Palestinian National Authority in general and its institutions and ministries in particular." The Israeli occupation has been enacting measures and laws that really limit the ability of the PNA to establish a strong and reliable system on all levels. On the 25th of January 2006, it froze the Palestinian Authority's tax revenues and imposed a total siege to prevent international aid from reaching the Palestinian Authority. This stopped the Palestinian National Authority's ability to pay its employees' salaries regularly (Independent Commission for Human Rights, 2008).

In this way, the Israeli violations have affected the performance of the PNA institutions and vital service sectors affecting its ability to function normally and protect Palestinians' human rights. According to Raheem (2016), the institutional handicaps experienced by the Palestinian authority have brought all of its efforts to a halt because of the inability to make workable resolutions and implement them appropriately in the various administrations and ministries. It is the "combination of institutional and organisational factors that have, in turn, put immense pressures on the criticality, development and implementation of talent management systems for organizations operating in this region." (Raheem, 2016).

FOCUSED DISCUSSION

The reviewed literature whether Academic research or working papers of international organizations have pointed out two main categories of challenges that have always handicapped the establishment of a sound and reliable HRM system in the institutions of the PNA. Some of these factors are internal and relate to internal weaknesses that necessitate due focus and correction while some other issues are not really easy to deal with and that are directly related to the Israeli occupation and breaches of the international law. While the first category is related to the PNA's low level of maturity and experience as indicated by AlSharbati (2015) and Alsabbah (2017) along with the European Joint Strategy in Support of Palestine, the second part which is related to the external threats and obstacles involves the Israeli occupation which has a real strong impact on the institutions of the PNA.

In fact, "the detention of at least forty members representing one-third of the Legislative Council members of Legislative Council led to the paralysis of the legislative authority in 2008. A number of members were sentenced to prison by Israeli

courts. The occupation aims to ensure that they remain in prison for a period that exceeds the legal term of the council's mandate undermining the Legislative Council and destroying the components of the Palestinian political system" (World Bank, 2007). Budhwar et al. (2019) report that the practices of the Israeli occupation have always aimed at handicapping and undermining the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to improve or enhance the efficiency of any of its administrations.

This resulted, as they indicate, in lagging political and legislative reforms or initiatives. These often cause a lot of inaccuracies and slow progress of the administrative mechanisms in Palestine. In the HRM area in particular, the legislative part of the equation has always been weak since in most cases the administrative framework of the Palestinian Authority is based either on the Jordanian or the Egyptian legal frameworks. This leads to a visible gap between the reality of the Palestinian administrations and the theoretical and practical frameworks they are based on.

Add to that, "the poor performance of the Palestinian judiciary is due to lack of full Palestinian control of the West Bank areas under Israeli occupation." (United Nations, 2020) In fact, according to the same report by the United Nations, The Palestinian Authority faces a lot of pressure and unlawful interventions from the Israeli occupation and its army to handicap any attempt to improve or enhance things in the judiciary institutions. This is because the Israelis know that once the Palestinians have a good and well-established judiciary system, many other things would be fixed on different levels.

As a result of Israeli practices, the Palestinian ministries faced many obstacles to their work due to the lack of communication with the technical and administrative staff of the ministries in the Gaza Strip. The occupation impeded some projects, especially in the border (World Report, 2019). In addition to all that, as reported by Britannica (2020), because the Gaza strip was mostly under the Hamas authority, there was little interference of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank with the affairs in Gaza. "It was not until a 2017 agreement that the PA was able to take control of public institutions in the Gaza Strip, though full control was never achieved and the PA withdrew." (Britannica, 2020)

When all of these factors are put together, there is no doubt that as AlSabbah (2017) indicated, the ability of the PNA institutions to implement appropriate HR systems is often undermined by the internal and external factors as mentioned above. "Some studies recommended that PNA organizations should modernize their HRM practices in order for these organizations to conform to the latest updates about developing the HR within the public sector." (International Monetary Fund, 2013, in AlSabbah, 2017)

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present paper indicate that the challenges facing the PNA and its institutions comprise a range of internal weaknesses due to the lack of experience, lack of maturity and especially the inability to secure a reliable and skillful workforce to allow the HRM system to duly function according to the highest standards. In certain areas also, the "wasta"

and connections has been singled out by researchers like AlSharbati (2015) and AlSabbah (2017) as one of the weak areas in the HRM system of PNA institutions. Add to all this, the fact that the PNA has been operating its HRM under confusing legal frameworks from Egypt and Jordan until they recently developed their own framework and laws. Add to all this, the external factors and impacts of the Israeli occupation that often undermined the legislative, executive and institutional efforts to implement good HRM practices.

It is evident that, although there are continuous attempts to improve Human Resources Management practice in Palestine (under the Palestinian Authority) there are many hurdles that have to overcome before actually talking about improvements. These involve the system structure, the cultural and political conditions but above all, the Israeli occupation and its impact on all levels of the Palestinian administration, especially on the legislative, legal and manpower level. To face the above-stated challenges effectively, the managing authority in Palestine has to adopt a more dynamic approach to HRM through integrating more applications of Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) and keeping an eye on all the internal and external challenges in order to be able to deal with them in a rational and premeditated way. This obviously calls for a more effective and responsive interaction with different departments in their organisations in order to keep accurate information about the actual status of the skills pool.

In this regard, it is important to say that although the Palestinian authority is struggling with both internal and external challenges, it could actually work on response plans and mitigation strategies to face the challenges as they occur. It might be possible for the PNA (Palestinian National Authority) to establish a higher committee for Human Resources Development and for legislative initiatives in different ministries so that they are not targeted by the Israeli occupation. In addition to that, there has to be a set procedure and policy to overcome the shortages in skilled employees or key personnel in case of an embargo or movement restrictions.

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