



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

IN SCIENCE, ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT

Volume 10, Issue 7, July 2023



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 7.580



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The Conceptual Framework of Human Resource Management Practices Effects on Employee Performance: A Study Among Palestinian Municipalities Employees

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, the focus will be on examining the significant human resource management practices chosen, and their impact on the performance of employees within the central municipalities in Palestine. As a result, the study begins by providing the necessary background information, including a brief discussion on the concepts of employee performance and human resource management practices. It also addresses the specific context of Palestine. Subsequently, a comprehensive explanation of the research gap is presented, encompassing the study problem, research questions, research objectives, study significance, and the scope and limitations of the research. This is followed by the provision of conceptual and operational definitions. Finally, the chapter concludes.

KEYWORDS: Employee Performance, Human Resource Management Practices, Municipalities.

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Employee performance is a critical factor for organizations to gain a competitive advantage in the modern economy (Khan & Wisner, 2019). Recognizing employees as valuable assets and investing in their development can contribute to achieving organizational goals and missions. Human resource management (HRM) plays a pivotal role in enhancing employee performance and serves as a crucial entry point for organizations (Kerdpitak & Jermittiparsert, 2020). Previous research acknowledges the significant impact of HRM practices on employee performance (Shaukat et al., 2015). While traditional HRM is commonly associated with public sector organizations, implementing effective HRM practices poses challenges in developing countries (Suhail & Steen, 2018). Therefore, analyzing the context of developing countries necessitates considering HRM practices as a fundamental aspect. Existing literature on HRM emphasizes that employees' perceptions and experience of HR practices are influenced by their managers (Cristiani & Peiró, 2019). Supervisors play a critical role in implementing well-designed HR practices that positively impact employee performance. Duvnjak & Kohont (2021) underscore the importance of supervisors adhering to HRM rules, as differences in implementation can stem from varying leadership styles. Thus, in the context of leadership and HRM practices in Palestinian municipalities, justice, and performance pose significant challenges that need to be addressed to achieve desired goals.

The State of Palestine faces distinctive challenges as it governs and manages itself through newly established organizations, operating under difficult conditions and limitations due to its status as an incomplete independent state (Olof Palme International Center, 2019; World Bank, 2020). Consequently, the adoption of effective HRM practices becomes imperative to enhance employee performance in Palestinian organizations.

Palestinian municipalities encounter the constraint of limited land availability, with a significant portion of the Palestinian National Authority's territory occupied by Israeli settlements. Additionally, the Israeli army's restrictions on the use of domestic raw materials exacerbate economic challenges. Recent studies have brought attention to the subpar performance levels PNA (Palestinian National Authority) institutions and their employees (World Bank, 2020). In response to these issues, donor organizations such as the World Bank, the European Union, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) have evaluated PNA's performance and provided conditional assistance to improve employee performance. Given the constraints imposed by the Israeli occupation and the challenging conditions faced by PNA institutions, achieving high performance becomes even more critical for these organizations.

Hence, this research underscores the significance of HRM practices, as they play a crucial role in organizations within emerging countries. The study specifically concentrates on these aspects within Palestinian central municipalities, recognizing their potential to enhance employee performance. It is of utmost importance to highlight that the ability of employees to perform well becomes essential for the survival and functioning of municipalities under such difficult circumstances (World Bank, 2015).

The municipalities sector in Palestine has experienced significant growth, resulting in a total of 144 municipalities (119 in the West Bank and 25 in Gaza). These municipalities have been categorized based on population, performance, areas of activity, and services (Wertman & Kaunert, 2023). The primary objective of this study is to address the issue of low employee performance within the central municipalities of the West Bank. Local reports from the Audit and Administrative Control Bureau and international reports from the World Bank have both highlighted the poor performance among employees in Palestinian local authorities (UNISPAL, 2021).

Empirical studies have further substantiated the subpar performance of municipal employees (Al-Jabari, 2021). In addition to the performance concerns, municipal officials have struggled to deliver satisfactory services to the public, resulting in a decline in the quality of public service provision (World Bank, 2015, 2018). Based on the literature reviewed, it is evident that human resources play a critical role in the success and long-term viability of any organization. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the implementation of HRM practices within the MoLG-specific context of Palestine and the local government sector, especially within Palestinian municipalities. The effectiveness and efficiency of human resource management must be perceived positively by employees, as this directly contributes to the achievement of organizational objectives.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to provide organizations with valuable insights into the influence of HRM practices on employee performance, empowering them to take necessary actions to enhance employee performance. It contributes to the expanding knowledge of stakeholders and explores the HRM practices that impact municipal employees' performance in Palestine. The findings of this study will be particularly beneficial for the Ministry of Local Government, policymakers, and government officials, as they can utilize them to formulate and implement policies and programs that promote effective HRM practices in Palestinian municipalities.

This study can serve as a guide for developing policies and regulations that improve employee performance in the public sector, aligning with the National Policy Agenda 2017-2022's priority of "citizen first." By defining effective HRM practices, the studied municipalities can proactively enhance their employees' performance, thereby positively affecting service provision to citizens. Furthermore, this research will assist HR departments in managing their day-to-day operations effectively. It will also enhance the knowledge of HR academics, HR professional bodies, and research organizations regarding best HR practices, especially those key elements that impact employee performance and contribute to overall organizational performance. By identifying potential areas for further investigation, this study paves the way for future research in the field. It advances the theoretical knowledge in human resource management by integrating employee performance into HR practices. Consequently, it lays the foundation for similar replication studies with extensions in other developing countries.

III. PALESTINIAN CONTEXT OF HRMP AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE (EP)

The Palestinian context presents several unique challenges, particularly due to the prolonged period of Israeli occupation, which has rendered its institutions and organizations fragile. Various factors, such as the lack of control over land, water, physical borders, and revenues, administrative and political fragmentation, an uncertain planning environment, and continuous violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, have hindered the realization of Palestine's potential in all aspects (EU, 2017). Furthermore, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and its institutions have faced difficulties in adapting to the evolving labour market trends, especially the increasing demand for intellectual skills like problem-solving, critical thinking, and technology manipulation. This inability to keep up with the changing labour market demands has been attributed to the low quality of outcomes from local universities in Palestine (Al-Sharabati, 2015).

In the context of this study, the focus will be on exploring the reality of Palestinian municipalities, as they act as a vital link between the citizens and the central government. It is important to recognize that these local authorities have undergone different periods of rule, including the Ottoman Empire, British Mandate, Israeli occupation, Jordanian rule over the West Bank, Egyptian rule over the Gaza Strip, and the current Palestinian National Authority. The combination

of the unique Palestinian context, historical challenges, and the evolving labour market underscores the significance of studying the impact of HRM practices on employee performance within Palestinian municipalities. Understanding these factors can shed light on the complexities and potential solutions for improving employee performance and the overall functioning of these organizations in challenging circumstances.

a. Employee Performance (EP)

Understanding each employee's performance is essential because critical management decisions are based on individual performance, which leads to organizational success. Performance is defined as “behaviour that delivers results” (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). Employee performance is the accomplishment of tasks carried out by one or more persons, as decided and assessed by the top management of the organization, it entails meeting pre-established and accepted standards while using available resources efficiently and effectively in an ever-changing environment (Ngwa et al., 2019). Performance is a multidimensional concept consisting of two aspects: the behavioural (process) aspect is used to “what people do at work” while the result (outcome) aspect is used to the “outcome of an individual's behaviour (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

Campbell & Wiernik (2015) have argued that the direct determinants of performance are role knowledge, skill, and choice behaviours concerning direction, intensity, and duration of the effort. Employees need to understand what they need to accomplish to do their work. Only when an organization's people are performing better can it go forward? Organizational HRM can improve organizational human resources, which are essential for improving employee performance. Employee behaviours are formed through a set of distinct and interrelated human resource management practices that are used to measure the performance of the individual working within the organization and raise the performance of workers by motivating them and creating competition among them (Kerdpitak & Jermittiparsert, 2020). Training and development improve the performance of employees to enhance their skills according to the updated knowledge by providing on-the-job and off-the-job training. (Gan & Yusof, 2019).

b. Employee Performance in the Palestine Context

The Palestinian Authority has worked on developing and improving human resource management practices and staff performance through reforms in various areas such as: conducting a comprehensive analysis of human resources and preparing a comprehensive plan for human resource development, strengthening human resource management procedures, and following up on the development of the new human. (MoLG, 2020) The World Bank report reported that staff performance in the PA did not improve as desired, despite the PA spending millions of dollars to improve staff performance (World Bank, 2020). Unfortunately, despite planning new reforms and development, the World Bank continues to criticize staff performance within the PNA institutions, and this proves the fact that staff performance has not improved (World Bank, 2020). As a result, recent internal and external evaluation reports still represent poor staff performance among public institutions in the Palestinian National Authority (PCDCR, 2019; UNISPAL, 2021). In general, employees of Palestinian National Authority institutions do not provide effective services to their citizens due to low levels of employee performance (PCDCR, 2019; UNISPAL, 2021).

Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP)

The practice of human resource management (HRM) practices is a general term that covers the procedures, functions, and activities. that are related to the entire human resources of an organization. According to Hee & Jing (2018), human resource management practices as a system for attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining employees to ensure effective implementation and sustainability of the company and its members. Additionally, HRM practices are regarded as a collection of uniform guidelines and procedures intended to make sure that an organization's human resources support the attainment of its strategic goals. many organizations are well aware that HRM practices should be used in performance appraisal because if HRM practices are improved, employee performance will be improved (Hee & Jing, 2018).

Many studies dealt with the concept of HRMP and its relationship to individual and organizational outcomes at the level of different organizations, for example, Mushtaha (2014) pointed out that the field of training was of a good degree from the point of view of the employees, and his study revealed the importance of a training program for the new employee, and he pointed out the importance of paying attention to it. Training in the workplace because of its influence on boosting staff morale and cutting expenditures. The study advised paying closer attention to the training process, making it more intense, and monitoring the learners' progress after a training session to gauge how much they had learned. In an early review of the literature on HR practices in different countries, it is shown that the most popular HR practice studies are recruitment, selection, training, development, compensation, rewards, and performance appraisal (Parakandi & Behery, 2016). Furthermore, most of the studies have been done in the field of HRMP and employee and organizational level performance, especially in developed countries, which concluded that the HRMP is an important factor to predict employee performance (Mellam et al., 2015).

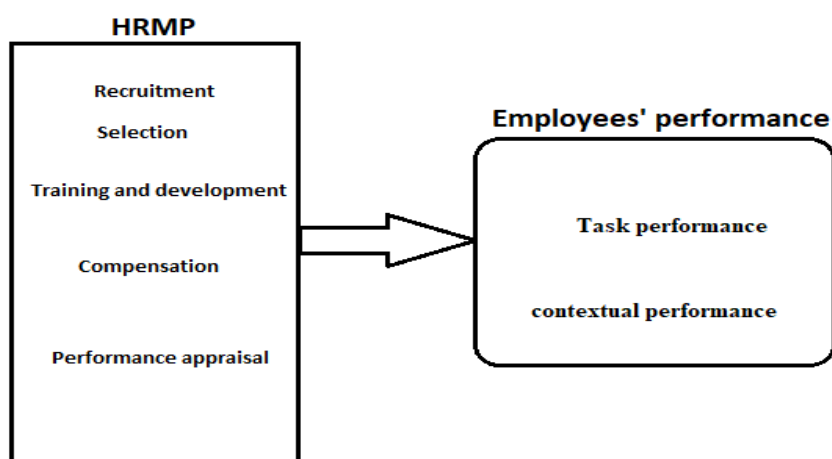
c. HRM Practices in the PNA

Little is known about human resource management plans in the Middle East in general and Palestine in particular, as there is a lack of studies that prove the effectiveness of human resource management plans, although scholars believe that some human resource management theories that began and were established in countries the advanced are applicable in the context of Palestine and many other practices according to contextual conditions (Alsabbah et al., 2017). Looking at the various research and academic works that are focused on HRM in general and in Palestine in particular, Al Shobaki 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 system (Alsabbah et al., 2017). This confusion has even been more accentuated by 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. Furthermore, “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 scarcity of open positions, according to Al-Sharabati (2015) and Alsabbah et al. (2017) “As for the government sector, there are limited job opportunities, the scarcity of vacancies, and political problems between the Palestinian parties make the matter worse, and there are many unemployed graduates”. It's not easy to find the right people to do the proper jobs and employ human resources as effectively as possible. and it is a source of endless problems for the Palestinian National Authority because, under the various arrests and obstacles set by the Israeli occupation, it is not possible to maintain a stable and reliable staff base.

Al Shobaki et al. (2017) and Alsabbah et al. (2017) indicated that one of the main challenges in planning human resources management is the lack of a clear vision, especially with the frequent bans and closures that limit access to and from vital places. As for the staffing function, it is clear that the process in Palestine is somewhat disorganized and lacks the appropriate set of resources. Al-Sharabati (2015) says that the employment function in Palestine is still far from satisfactory because the results of Palestinian universities do not provide a reliable enough workforce for the local authority to rely on. Aware that the recruitment function consists of some actions to locate and draw candidates with the motivation, aptitude, skills, and knowledge needed to handle recruitment planning.

The role of human resources is an issue of great importance in the Palestinian reality because Palestine is an emerging "state" that lives under Israeli occupation and does not have complete control over natural resources. Therefore, the importance of the human factor appears as one of the most important means of achieving economic and social development (World Bank, 2020), and based on the foregoing, the investigation of human resource management practices in the context of Palestine and the reality of the Palestinians. Municipalities, as they constitute a link between the citizen and the central government, are necessary to achieve better results for the performance of employees. The interrelationships between all variables could be reflected through the conceptual framework of the study as in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



To investigate the relationship between HRM practices and employee performance in the Palestinian setting, the following hypothesis was developed:

H1: *HRM practices have a significant positive impact on employee performance among employees in Palestinian municipalities.*

IV. METHODOLOGY

Data will be collected through the use of questionnaires, and subsequent analysis will involve employing statistical methods and the SPSS application. By following this methodology, the researcher aims to align with (Kumar, 2018) characterization of research as a methodical process that involves gathering, evaluating, and transforming data into meaningful information. To effectively analyse the quantitative data, the deductive approach will be used. The deductive approach assumes that causal relationships between variables are supported by auxiliary quantitative data, enabling conclusions drawn from observations and experiments to be quantitatively analysed using statistical methods. As a result, the deductive approach seeks to establish generalizations from a sample to a population, which aligns with the positivist model (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, the study adopts the deductive reasoning approach.

The Sampling Strategy

The study's focus is on analysing specific HRM practices that impact employee performance in Palestinian municipalities, with organizational justice serving as a mediating factor. The main fieldwork for this study will take place in Palestine, spanning from January 2023 to March 2024. For this study, the administrative staff with supervisory roles in ten central municipalities (Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Jenin, Tulkarim, Qalqilya, Salfit, Tubas, Jericho) were selected as respondents. These individuals are crucial contributors to formulating human resource policies within their respective organizations. They possess the necessary knowledge of HRM methods and employee performance and play critical roles in enhancing employee performance. The choice of these municipalities is intended to reflect the entire population rather than just a sample, providing a comprehensive picture of the HRM practices employed in Palestinian organizations. Hence, the study population consists of 603 employees and the sample size of 240, employing the stratified sampling procedure to gather data from 10 central West Bank communities. Yamane's simple sample size formula was used to calculate the sample size since the population under study is small and only requires a slight reduction (Yamane, 1967). The number of samples predicted from each municipality reflects a proportion of the study's 240 total sample sizes and is displayed in **Table 1**. The study sample consists of administrative employees working in the Palestinian municipalities classified A in the West Bank.

Table 1: Distribution of the study sample to the Palestinian municipalities.

| No. | Municipality | The number of administrative staff | Their ratio to the total number | Sample volume |
|-------|--------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Hebron | 158 | 26.20% | 63 |
| 2 | Tul Karim | 91 | 15.09% | 36 |
| 3 | Ramallah | 81 | 13.43% | 32 |
| 4 | Jericho | 74 | 12.27% | 30 |
| 5 | Nablus | 65 | 10.77% | 26 |
| 6 | Qalqilya | 36 | 5.97% | 14 |
| 7 | Jenin | 35 | 5.80% | 14 |
| 8 | Bethlehem | 30 | 4.97% | 12 |
| 9 | Salfit | 21 | 3.48% | 8 |
| 10 | Tubas | 12 | 1.99% | 5 |
| Total | 10 | 603 | 100% | 240 |

V. CONCLUSION

This research underscores the significance of HRM practices, as they play a crucial role in organizations within emerging countries. The study specifically concentrates on these aspects within Palestinian central municipalities, recognizing their potential to enhance employee performance. It is of utmost importance to highlight that the ability of

employees to perform well becomes essential for the survival and functioning of municipalities under such difficult circumstances.

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