

CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: *One of the main concerns of organizations' developing international activities is the identification of new and efficient ways of capitalizing the cultural potential disposed of by inside employees, in order to obtain a dominant competitive position.*

In some management specialists' opinion, culture represents the best way to manage (Burdus, E., 2001, p. 52). And this is because, truer than ever, managers deal with a global environment in which they develop their activity, and from this perspective there appears the need to homogenize cultural values. Recent studies show trends of reducing the importance of cultural differences among countries and of creating a global culture generally based on western values, American values in particular (Mellahi, K., 2001, p. 45). Hannerz U. (1998, pp. 295-310) supports the idea according to which global culture is the result of increasing interdependences (connections) specific to different geographical areas, beyond their borders, while the process of cultural development cannot be located in a certain country or region. The main causes the global culture occurred are: industrialization, urbanization and education.

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1. The concept of culture

Culture plays a very important role in the way employees in a company act, communicate, relate, work in teams or perform with success. In the context of an internationalized work force we can no longer say that

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each country applies its own methods and management systems based on its culture. Employees come from everywhere, cultural differences do exist and, consequently, human resources management has to cope with these differences. Understanding people means understanding their origins, and only then can one understand their current behaviour and anticipate their future behaviour. Each person comes with a specific culture from their family, native place and country where they spent a certain period of time.

There are several accepted definitions of the concept of culture. Culture is defined as a mental programming of thinking, which distinguishes the members of a group (or category of people) of another (Hofstede, G., 1996, pp. 21-22). By category of people we understand a nation, a region or an ethnical grouping, a category of age, a social class, an activity section, an organizational group. By culture we understand a stage of intellectual development of population; economical culture represents a stage of economical development and even more: attitudes, values, norms on which economical activities are based and which help modelling the behaviour of a company.

In G. Hofstede's opinion, culture is achieved, not inherited. It comes from the person's social environment, not from their genes. Culture has to be distinguished from human nature and individual personality (Hofstede, G., 1996, 21-22), although the limit between human nature and culture, as well as that between culture and personality, is a subject of debate among scientists in different domains.

Culture consists of behavioural characteristics that are cumulative and transmitted by symbols, personalities, rituals and values.

By symbols we understand words, objects, gestures whose signification results from a convention. At the level of organizational culture, symbols represent abbreviations, jargon, formal or informal direct communication means, clothes codes, statutory symbols, all of them recognized only by the members of that specific organization.

Personalities or heroes are real or imaginary characters that serve as behavioural role models within a culture. Inside an organization, the methods of selection and reward are based on the model of the „ideal employee” or that of the „ideal employer”.

In organizations, rituals refer not only to holidays, but also to a large number of formal activities, such as: reunions, planning systems, activities, informal modalities by which formal activities are achieved: who affords being late, to which reunion, who talks to whom etc.

Values represent the deepest component of a culture. Most of the time, these feelings are unconscious and undebatable. Connected to what is right or wrong, proper or improper, beautiful or ugly, rational or irrational, normal or abnormal, natural or unnatural, logical or paradoxical, decent or indecent. These feelings apply to most of the members of a culture, or at least to those persons who own the status of opinion leaders.

The success of organizations, in the context of a globalization process, is influenced to a ever greater extent by the understanding and accepting the differences among national cultures.

Any management model includes certain elements specific to a culture. This happens because not only organisations can be fall within a certain culture, but also the authors of those models are part of that culture because they are born, they live and work in that culture.

My suggestion is that, in the context of a cultural diversity, multinational organizations should adopt a compromise solution, asking for the understanding and application of management models that reflect that respective culture as true as possible.

2. Aspects of the European human resources management

European management is defined as the concept of solving problems and making decisions at all organizational levels, helping to distinguish the European identity of strategies, as well as of planification, implementation and evaluation of changes (Burdus, E., 2001, 300).

Brewster C., Hegewish A. and Holden L. define the European human resources management as it follows:

The European human resources management is very complex. The European space is the only region in the world that comprises so many historical, cultural and linguistic differences. Each and every country in Europe has its own employment system, its own laws and institutions, its own educational system and a heavily personalized managerial culture. In some countries such differences can be identified even at a local level. It is also worth mentioning that these differences are governed and regulated by the legislation of the European Union (Jackson, T., 2002, p. 147).

Therefore, the European human resources management model has to provide organisations with the possibility to perform in an environment which is characterized by a high level of complexity and diversity economically, socially, politically and culturally.

The European human resources management model is characterized by the influence of factors such as culture and legislation, form of property over companies, work union activities and consultative agreements and employers' participation.

Culture and legislation – the specific of the national culture is also reflected at the practical level of human resources. Looking at legislation only, the American human resources management model is characterized by a small influence of the legislative system over the human resources practice. Unlike the American system, the European one is limited by a series of legislative restraints, specific either to the European Union or to each one of the countries in the European space. Also, the European human resources management model is limited by a high level of government implication in regulating the human resources strategies and policies.

3. Management concepts and practices

The amplification of the international dimensions of human resources management and the growth of the European Union represents important premises regarding the harmonization of the human resources practices in the European countries. However, the main characteristic of the European human resources management model is diversity.

During the last decade, the human resources function has suffered significant changes, mainly caused by the economical, social, cultural and political context in Europe. This is how the human resources function currently includes a strategic vision. Human resources managers take part in the process of elaborating strategies and policies for the organization.

The growth of the European Union helps create a social, economical, political and legislative climate on the entire continent, but, despite all this, cultural differences among countries cannot be excluded which means that, from the point of view of human resources practices, the European countries will be characterized by a series of differential elements.

The differences between the management model used in the Anglo-Saxon countries and that used in the other European countries are also transferred to the level of human resources practices.

Thus, in the organization from Great Britain and Ireland, the number of human resources managers compared to the rest of the employees is much bigger unlike the situation applicable for the other countries in

Europe. In Anglo-Saxon countries, the rate between the number of human resources managers and the total number of employees is of 1:5. In Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Estonia, Letonia, compared to the average registered for the other countries which are members of the European Union, the rate between the number of human resources managers and the total number of employees is of 1:8.

Germany and Great Britain are characterized by a higher level of implication of human resources managers in the management process of the companies, unlike the situation specific to Latin and Scandinavian countries.

In France and Spain, human resources managers have a rather formal role, compared to the importance of this position in the organizational structure. In Sweden, human resources are considered the main factor of success, receiving a special importance.

In countries such as Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, the formalization level of human resources policies is reduced, the organization management in these countries being based on unwritten human resources strategies and policies.

4. Communication process

The development of the social partnership and that of the civil society represent cultural and historical processes tightly conditioned by the economical and social realities, by human mentalities and values, by culture and maturity of a specific community. Tolerance, social responsibility, acceptance of pluralism and rights represent cultural characteristics that support a certain evolution of the social dialogue. In this sense, the dialogue with social partners at an European level shall step into a new stage of historical maturity in the context of the European Union growth. From the point of view of the social dialogue, the European legislation places collective negotiations on an important place, both at the activity domains level and at the enterprise level.

5. Human resources management in Romania

The human resources management model used in Romanian companies reveals a series of characteristics of the human resources management models applied in developed countries, but it is "primitive." It

has to be said from the very beginning that in Romania an independent human resources management model has not been shaped yet. From this point of view, we can say that the human resources management applied in Romanian companies is characteristic to the transition period Romania used to find itself in the last twenty years. From the point of view of the content, human resources practices in Romanian organizations include a series of elements characteristic to the European, American and Japanese human resources management model.

This is the result of the activity growth registered by multinational companies in Romania. Practically, Romanian organizations prepare themselves with the principles and the demands of developing the activity on a global market. The big number of influences of the systems developed by the human resources management can also be explained by the approach the multinational companies use in transferring the human resources practices in branches located in Romania. In this sense, most multinational companies adopt an ethnically-centered orientation, choosing an integral transfer of human resources strategies and policies in branches located in Romania, so that mother-companies have as much control as possible on the local factors and to ensure that the principles of a successful management are fully implemented in subsidiaries. To a very small extent, multinational companies adapt their human resources strategy to la local characteristics. Thus, for the moment the demand for informational solutions for the human resources management comes from a small number of companies, most of them multinational companies – that imported management culture of the groups they belong to.

In Romania, it still prevails that type of management that focuses on the internal processes, then on the client and last on human resources. Thus, in the context of “a lack of security” lived by the Romanian economy in relation to the cost and fluctuation in human resources, the absence of a primary strategy for employees leads to very high losses, hard to measure and prove in the current political context.

An efficient administration of the human capital facilitates not only reduced personnel management cost, but also the individual effectiveness growth. The final objective has to consist in placing the employee in the centre of the organization strategy and his or her involvement in all the traditional functions for the human resources management. The relation with the employee has to be a personalized one – it is the only way the

relation between the employee and the employer can become really profitable.

Organizationally speaking, Romanian organizations present a series of characteristics specific to the French management model. In general, companies in Romania have an organizational structure built according to functions, presenting a high level of formalization. Also, the high level of authority and centralization of the decision-making process represent features that describe an organization specific to Romanian companies. The activity organizational forms applied by companies in Romania reflect the distance towards a great power which characterizes the Romanian society. The collectivism and the feminine type of culture, specific to the Romanian culture, make it almost impossible to apply in Romanian companies' organizational structure with a reduced number of hierarchical levels, specific to the American management model. Internal competition, very valuable in the American culture, is slightly supported in companies in Romania, which creates certain difficulties in promoting work performance as the main managerial value.

6. Conclusions

Although one of the main objectives of the globalization process is integrating the human resources practices in a global model universally applicable, this desire will be hard to make true because of the differences among countries existing at economical, social, institutional and cultural level. The European human resources management model represents the most eloquent example in this sense. The high degree of diversity characterizing the European space allows grouping countries from the point of view of managerial practices, in four groups of countries, namely: northern countries, Latin countries, Anglo-Saxon countries and German countries. Thus, in the European management model we can identify four management models, corresponding to the four groups of countries. Moreover, at the level of each management model of group of countries, there is a series of national differences from an institutional, cultural, economical and social point of view. In a multicultural context, human resources management becomes the linking element between mother organizations and their subsidiaries in different countries, its role being that of ensuring a balanced relationship between the global integration process and the local adaptation process.

The main concepts that define the European management are: euromanagement, euromanagers and eurocompetences. The development of the European management model represents the consequence of the conjugated action of a group of economical, social, political and cultural factors, in the purpose of harmonizing the differences existing among the European countries.

In some specialists' opinion, the European management is characterized by the lack of a national identity of management throughout Europe, compared to the management models in USA and Japan. The process through which the European Union extends towards south-eastern Europe generates a series of economical, social and political mutations. Another dominant characteristic of the European management is the need to develop new forms of organization in work and to increase the flexibility of organizations in the business environment with the purpose of using cultural, social, political, economical diversity and complexity in order to achieve competitive advantage.

The European human resources management model is characterized by a high degree of diversity from an economical, social, political and cultural point of view and it reflects the property, organizational, national and international dimension of company activities. Unlike the American model, it is characterised by a high level of organisational and managerial responsibility towards employees and by the support provided to work unions.

The participatory management model, the professional model of human resources management, the model focused on managing human resources and that focused on managing organisations all represent the main human resources management models applicable in the European countries.

The growth of the European Union represents the premise of increasing the demands regarding work and life conditions throughout the entire continent. The highly diverse regulations concerning the work and life conditions in the European Union represent serious challenges to which Romanian managers will have to adapt to.

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