

Chapter 23

The Wasta Model: Impact on Human Resource Practices and HRM Within Lebanese Universities

Elizabeth Kassab Sfeir

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6913-781X>

Université Antonine, Lebanon

ABSTRACT

This article explores the concept of Wasta, an interpersonal influence. It is defined by Mohamed and Mohamed as involvement of a third-party person to attain a favour. This research examines the impact that Wasta has on human resources practices in Lebanon. A mixed methods approach, being questionnaires and interviews, was used in order to obtain data. Implications of Wasta in a new model are illustrated showing the effect on employees when recruited through knowing someone. It subsequently shows the influences on other HR practices of training and development, compensation, and career development. This paper is the first of its kind illustrating the impact of Wasta on employee engagement. It is a pillar for future research, giving added value to the minimal studies available on HR practices in Lebanon and the Middle East.

INTRODUCTION

The continued sustainability of organizations depends on the quality of their human capital. In a world that has become ever more global, diverse and multicultural, the development of human resources is imperative. Kipkebut (2010) states, “various studies have stressed the benefits to organizations of a loyal and committed workforce.” Business practices must recognize that HRM practices are now an international phenomenon (Robbins and Judge, 2015) important to any multinational company. In order to focus on internal systems to gain a competitive advantage in the local and international marketplace, businesses must now ensure that they conform to globally adapted HR practices (Morris et al. 2009), recognizing that organizational culture plays a significant role in their HR practices.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3873-2.ch023

The Wasta Model

In the aftermath of the global financial crisis, the Middle East is at a new stage regarding international relationships with international partners: there is a realization of the imperative to break away from the legacy of the long Ottoman reign – namely, a ‘Byzantinian’ lack of transparency and top-heavy bureaucratic management – in order to achieve competitiveness and become part of the global economy (Leigh, 2009). One central aspect of this legacy is the Middle Eastern cultural phenomenon known as *Wasta*, which refers to the ‘intervention of a patron in favor of a client in an attempt to obtain privileges or resources through a third party (Mohamed and Mohamed, 2011, p.412); in the Middle East, the term *Wasta* is synonymous with ‘social networks or connections’. This research explores the extent to which this phenomenon continues to influence HR practices within the context of Lebanon’s higher education sector – namely universities. Notwithstanding that Lebanon is emerging from a civil war, with its attendant continuous political instability, the Middle East, and particularly Lebanon is, according to Budhwar and Mellahi (2006), currently in the process of making changes and improvements in strategies and in the implementation of practices and procedures. Thus, it is timely for close scrutiny to be directed at the intersection of the pervasive *Wasta* system of preferment and HRM practices within a Middle Eastern organizational culture.

For the purposes of this research, HRM practices are seen to include the following: recruitment and selection; training and development; compensation and benefits; performance appraisals; and, career development. The aims of this research is to prove that *Wasta* has an impact on HR practices within the organization. In doing so, this paper will contribute to attesting to *Wasta* and its effects providing much-needed data to corroborate this phenomenon.

BACKGROUND

HRM has gone through various changes over the years. Cohen (2015) discusses the evolution of HRM and states that it was formally recognized in the early 1800s. HRM goes back to when all levels of business organizations – employers and employees, skilled tradesmen and apprentices, supervisors and managers, companies and the people who work for them – were first recognized; this was a time when the “welfare secretary” started to appear. These ‘secretaries’ oversaw the hiring, paying, disciplining and developing of the employees. Hence, Cohen shows that the HR process actually began when the first person agreed to be paid for work completed. This author further explains that ‘personnel’, which was the term previously used before ‘HR’, began in the Industrial Revolution and in the era of scientific management.

Thus, the long-standing recognition in the literature of the importance of HRM in western business institutions creates a pathway for turning the focus on this aspect of employment and business management in the Middle East. The literature issuing from the Middle East is more anecdotal (Zahra, 2011) and case-study based. Budhwar & Mellahi (2007) give some interesting insights about HR in the Middle East, however they are still only ‘insights’. These insights are the changes in the level of ownership in several Middle Eastern countries due to privatization; identifying key differences in HRM practices between large and small firms in public and private sectors; the change in the role of the government towards HRM policies; GCC countries investing in HR however they are finding difficulties in meeting the demands of the labour market and the employment of locals (Emiratization etc.) Afiouni et al (2013) note that most of the HR research being conducted in the Middle East increased in 2007 and the quality also improved.

24 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-wasta-model/295355

Related Content

Strategies to Combat the COVID-19 Pandemic in the UAE: A Guide to Encounter Human Resource Challenges

Premila Koppalakrishnanand Gerry N. Muuka (2022). *Navigating the New Normal of Business With Enhanced Human Resource Management Strategies* (pp. 68-92).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/strategies-to-combat-the-covid-19-pandemic-in-the-uae/297403

Crafting Engaged Employees Through Positive Work Environment: Perspectives of Employee Engagement

Tanusree Chakrabortyand Madhurima Ganguly (2019). *Management Techniques for Employee Engagement in Contemporary Organizations* (pp. 180-198).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/crafting-engaged-employees-through-positive-work-environment/221407

Portal for Employees in the Public Sector: A Tool for Knowledge Management in Human Resources

Ana Campos Cruz (2022). *Research Anthology on Human Resource Practices for the Modern Workforce* (pp. 659-679).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/portal-for-employees-in-the-public-sector/295368

Bringing Social Media Into Work: The Positive and Negative Effects on Policy Implementation – An Introduction to Theory and Research

Francesca Di Virgilio (2021). *Critical Issues on Changing Dynamics in Employee Relations and Workforce Diversity* (pp. 121-142).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/bringing-social-media-into-work/269357

Research on Human Resource Allocation Model Based on SOM Neural Network

Jing Xu, Bo Wangand Gihong Min (2022). *Research Anthology on Human Resource Practices for the Modern Workforce* (pp. 513-525).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/research-on-human-resource-allocation-model-based-on-som-neural-network/295359