

Chapter 86

Specific Human Resource Practices Towards Middle Managers and Their Effects on Their Strategic Roles: A Case of Large Tunisian Companies Participating in Industrial Upgrading Program

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the contribution of human resource managers to activate and develop the potential of middle managers in a strategy development process. Precisely, the attention is directed on specific practices used by human resource managers and their effects on strategic roles of middle managers in emerging market companies. A survey questionnaire was distributed to 350 CEOs of large Tunisian companies participating in the Industrial Upgrading Program. The results of the application of structural equation methods show the existence and significant and positive effects of specific human resource practices on strategic roles of middle managers. Participation in the decisions and team/group incentives are used by middle managers and influence all strategic roles of middle managers. However, pre-employment training is used towards middle managers, but it has no effect on all strategic roles of middle managers.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 1990s, a substantial amount of the research in the field of strategic management had focused on the middle management involvement in strategy, and had shown that middle managers had substantial strategic roles which were likely to lead to successful strategy processes (Ahearne et al., 2014; Andersen, 2004; Balogun, 2003; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Floyd & Wooldridge 1992, 1997, 2000; Heyden et al., 2017; Hornsby et al., 2002; Lavarda et al., 2010; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990; Wooldridge et al., 2008). Wooldridge and Floyd (1990) are among the first researchers who have confirmed a positive relationship between middle managers involvement in strategy making process and the performance of organisations. Recently, more and more researchers have made a considerable contribution on this subject. For illustration, Jaoua (2016, 2018a, 2018b) shows that middle managers have a decisive potential to influence the strategy, both in its formulation and its implementation. First, strategic roles of middle managers play a central role in increasing creativity in strategy, and therefore organisational performance varies depending on changes in these strategic roles (Jaoua, 2016). Second, strategic roles of middle managers following their involvement in strategy formulation are decisive in achieving organisational performance (Jaoua, 2018a). Third, the involvement of middle managers in strategy formulation has beneficial effects also on the relationship between successful strategy implementation and organisational performance (Jaoua, 2018b).

This confirmed importance of strategic roles of middle managers opens several avenues of research in different domains. Specifically, for the field of human resource management, there is a relevant question about how HR managers can help middle managers to play effectively their strategic roles. Indeed, the new human resource management is strongly integrated with corporate strategy. It is involved in decision making at board level, and it is a decisive partner in strategy executions by impelling and guiding serious discussions of how the company should be organized to carry out its strategy (Boxall & Purcell, 2008; Hsu & Leat, 2000; Mahapatro, 2010). Nowadays, the HR function is increasingly seen as one of the key functions in the development and implementation of strategic responses to environmental changes (Sofia & Ingmar, 2015; Ulrich, 1997; Yeung & Berman, 1997). According to Mahapatro (2010), HRM must play four roles. First, it would define an organisational architecture by identifying the company's way of doing business. Second, it must be accountable for conducting an organisational audit. The third role is to identify methods for renovating the parts of the organisational architecture that need it. Fourth, it must take stock of its own work and set clear priorities.

In this context and according to the HR contingency approach, it becomes very important to focus on HR practices used towards middle managers, and also their effects on strategic roles. We expect that HRM can make a significant contribution to activate and develop the confirmed potential of middle managers in strategy development process. We then wonder if there are specific HR practices used towards middle managers. In such a case, what is their impact on strategic roles of middle managers? Precisely, the research questions for this study are: What practices do HRM engage to help middle managers to exercise their strategic roles? Do these practices have a significant and positive impact on strategic roles of middle managers? Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to report empirical findings on the existence of specific HR practices towards middle managers, and if applicable, the relationship between these practices and the strategic roles of middle managers. Thereby, the contribution of this research to existing research is threefold. First, we investigate whether there are specific practices towards middle managers, and what their impact will be on their roles. Second, by including specific practices towards middle managers, we explore the concept of HR differentiation. This is important for theoretic-

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