Towards a Global Framework of Recruitment Practices:

The Effect of Culture Applied to Tunisian Context

Karima Bouzguenda

School of Economics and Management, University of Sfax, B.P. 1088, 3018, Sfax, Tunisia
E-mail: Ka.bouzguenda@gmail.com

Abstract

In conjunction with the democratic process through which several Arab countries are going through, the article suggests a closer look to the manner human resources are managed in the Tunisian context prior to the revolution in order to detect the degree of compatibility with the democratic culture. The aim is to assess the impact of culture on recruitment trends and patterns as well as its incidences on current HRM systems. To this effect, a global framework of recruitment practices is developed based on the last two rounds of CRANET surveys. A comparative analysis shows that recruitment decisions in Tunisian firms are embedded in political and socio-cultural patterns leading to specific configurations of HRM systems.

Keywords: Recruitment practices, staffing, selection, HRM, culture, Cranet.

1. Introduction

The last two years have shown dramatic changes in the political arena especially in the Arab and middle-east countries. The collapse of well-established political regimes characterized by dictatorship, injustice, inequality, regional disparities, and disrespect of human rights... leads us to question the credibility and viability of managerial systems in these countries. In fact, the failure of political regimes has unveiled a crisis in all aspects of life: social, legal, managerial, ethical... As a matter of fact, (Vercauteren, 2000) has anticipated a crisis of the state whereas Niffle (2000) wrote about a crisis of meaning.

Indeed, we lost sense of things in our society: freedom, power, security, and even religion. As a consequence, people have felt unsatisfied, unmotivated, uninvolved and unengaged in the political, social, economic, and business spheres. Yet, the feeling of losing sense in not limited to revolutionary societies, but extends to developed and democratic nations. In 2005, the study of Ipsos/Acor in France revealed a low level of satisfaction of French citizens at work and of life in general (Note1). It is with no doubt that everything is a matter of human resources!

However, the tendency towards democratisation requires a closer look to the manner human resources are managed in order to detect the degree of compatibility with the democratic culture. Empirical research has shown that managerial mode and particularly HRM are largely influenced by corporate culture and more by societal culture (Hofstede, 1980; D'Iribarne, 1989).

The present article suggests analyzing the impact of culture on HRM trends in the Tunisian context prior to the revolution. It aims at analyzing the patterns of recruitment practices in order to assess the incidences on current HRM systems in post-revolutionary firms. More precisely, the questions addressed are the followings: What are the empirical driving factors of staffing practices and to what extend socio-cultural factors influence the effectiveness of selection decisions?

The study is empirically-based upon which the methodology, based on comparative analysis, demonstrates an evolution in recruitment practices based on two rounds of CRANET surveys. The results offer some pragmatic explanations as to human resource function's effectiveness related to organizational capability in attracting and making full usage of human potential (Note 2). From an inductive approach, we attempt to explain findings from a theoretical perspective by investigating a duality in recruitment practices: on one hand, the tendency of using objective and formal selection and hiring criteria in the process of selection. On the other hand, there appears a tendency of relying on informal and "social-based" criteria when it comes to action. Implications for researchers and professionals are finally highlighted.

2. Context and objectives of the study

Research on HRM is rather recent and somewhat limited in Tunisia. It was only since the 1990's that academics' interest on HR issues has grown witnessing limited means and reticence from business owners. It is argued that the major reason for the denial of establishing HRF is mainly related to the fact that in practice, managers do not consider HRF as important as other functions of the organisation (Ben Ferjani, 1998). However, Zghal (2004) advocates that some changes have been undergone under the 'impulse of the state' (2001). The author did not demonstrate the impact of the initiatives undertaken neither on the role of HRM in the organization nor on its contribution to enhance performance. But, what if the state's pressure has proved to be coercive serving personal and political interests? What if managers took some measures to abide to a corruptive system and by the same token preserve their own interests? What if the labour force's involvement has been neglected and marginalized in favour of conformism and obedience? Everyone realized that the whole system is falling apart. The academics and researchers should have anticipated such consequence instead of trying making sense of an irrational system. This situation has led to the existence of a gap between theory and practice, an effect of managerial fads, and a lack of competitiveness (Grint, 1997; Autissier & Wacheux, 2006…).

Fortunately, academics have intelligently inscribed their studies in the situational approach, according to which context is considered to have a major effect in explaining phenomena. More precisely, studies confirm the premise according to which culture constitutes a contingency parameter in explaining the effectiveness of managerial practices. As a matter of fact, since the 1980's Hofstede has argued that cultural dimensions explain the relative performance of organizations (1980, note 2). The author affirms that "National culture is one of the many factors shaping organisational culture next to such factors as personality of founder, feelings of insecurity, expectations of stakeholders and type of technology in use". He further asserts that "organisational cultures differ mainly at the level of practices" (p. 3).

Furthermore, Brewster (1995) defended the idea of the existence of a European model of HRM and demonstrated the effect of situational variables on real practices. It follows that the search for homogenization and harmonization does not eliminate concern for national specificities; rather it is intended to develop best practices in management. The Cranfield Network on global HRM (CRANET), founded in 1989, gathering as of today 44 countries mostly from Europe, aims at assessing global and national-specific dimensions of HRM from comparative and longitudinal perspectives (Gooderham & Nordhaug, 2010; Brewster, et al, 1011; Steinmetz, et al, 2011), (Note 3).

The present paper aims at achieving two objectives: on one hand, we attempt to sketch a general framework on global staffing practices based on the 2004 survey. On the other hand, an assessment of the evolution of recruitment policy in Tunisian organizations is led based on the third round survey conducted by the author during 2008-10. The emphasis on staffing practices is justified by the fact that they are neatly related to organization's long term policy in attracting and retaining highly qualified employees and thus to its competitive capacities. As such, examining staffing practices allows a better understanding of HRM policy and by the same token the general policy of the organization. In order to assess the evolution of recruitment practices, we propose a comparative framework based on aggregate data on countries, members of CRANET.

3. General framework of recruitment practices

The framework is based on CRANET aggregate data of the 2004 survey that have been made available by the coordinator at Cranfield management school in London. The database concerns 30 countries and involves 7637 companies with different sample- sizes representing all sectors of activity including public administration. Findings of the survey show that staffing methods vary among personnel categories as illustrated in table1.

www.iiste.org

IISTE

Table 1. CRANET aggregate staffing methods in percentage (% Tunisia)

	Management N= 6904 (150)	Technical N= 6754	Clerical N = 6670	Manual N= 5894
A. Internally	39.4 (28,67)	18.2 (20.67)	25.3 (23.33)	19.5 (12)
B. Recruitment agencies/ consultancies	28.4 (32)	19.6 (22.67)	11.4 (22)	7.4 (13.33)
C. Advertisement	24 (23,33)	43 (22.67)	41.3 (26)	38.9 (6.7)
D. Word of Mouth	2.8 (16,67)	4 (12.67)	6.3 (20)	18.3 (59.33)
E. Vacancy page on company website	1.7 (-)	5 (-)	6.7 (-)	4.6 (-)
F. Vacancies on commercial job websites	1.7 (1,3)	5 (-)	4.3 (-)	2.9 (-)
G. Direct from educational institution	0.2 (-)	2.8 (-)	1.7 (-)	2 (-)

Source: Field study, 2004

In fact, surveyed companies in all countries seem to mostly rely on internal recruitment for filling managerial positions and on advertisement for technical, clerical and manual staff. It is argued that internal recruitment for managerial positions is proved to be efficient in terms of cost, employees' motivation, and improving the quality of top management team (Peretti, 2002, Citeau, 2003). Similarly, reliance on advertisement to hire other categories of personnel in Tunisia confirms the results of 1999 survey (Zghal, 2001).

Statistics by country and by staff category show some trends of staffing methods characterized by both convergence and divergence.

- The khi² test indicates a significant dependency relationship between countries and staffing methods for all staff categories (sig = 0,000).

- Each country seems to privilege one dominant method over others with a convergence in relying on first advertisement and second internal recruitment. These countries are likely to maintain their staffing policy proved to be effective over the years.

- Some countries tend to use recruitment methods in a relatively equal manner including Tunisia, Turkey, Turkish Cypriot Community, and France. These countries seem to go through a phase of testing several methods and may over the years settle on most effective ones.

- Some countries, such as the USA, Canada, and the United Kingdom, are pioneers in utilizing "innovative" staffing methods related to information technology and e-recruitment.

In order to detect the variations in staffing practices, an analysis for each category of personnel is carried out.

3.1 Aggregate global staffing methods

3.1.1 Staffing methods for managerial positions

Managerial positions in 22 out of 31 surveyed countries are primary filled relying on internal recruitment (70.96%, N= 6904), 11 countries' proportions reach more than 50% (that is 35.48% of the sample), and 14 out of them are between 30% and 50% (45.16% of the sample).

Based on figure 1, even though advertisement and recruiting agencies and consultants account all together for more than 50% for filling managerial positions, they come in the second place after internal recruitment whereas 9 countries (including Tunisia) are using these methods in the first place as a primary staffing method.

Figure 1. Comparison of staffing methods for managerial positions (Cranet, 2004)
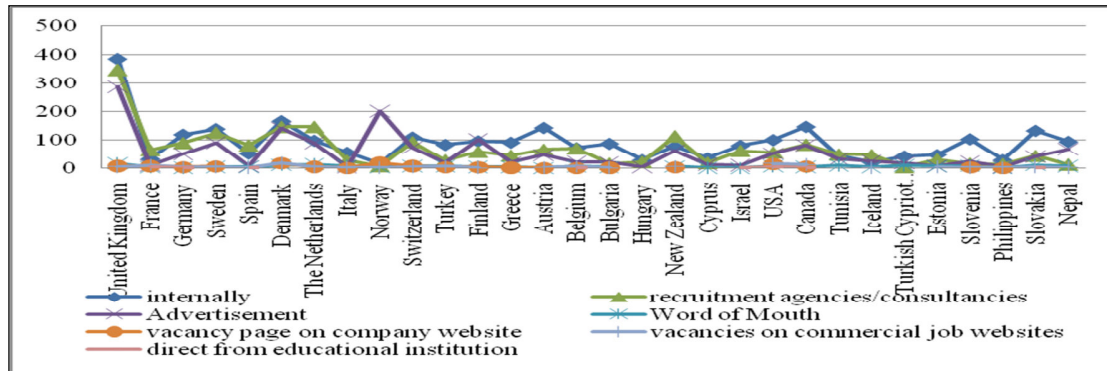
Furthermore, relying on the method "word of mouth" tends to be kept to its minimum to hire managerial staff with Tunisia ranking in the third place (7.33%) after Turkish Cypriot Community (14.10%) and Italy (8.41%). In the meantime, some countries are getting ahead in relying on e-recruitment both through commercial and company's websites mainly the USA (12.50%) and France (13.22%).

3.1.2 Staffing methods for professional and technical jobs

Figure 2 shows a general tendency on relying first on advertisement (22 out of 31 countries with 43% of jobs filled), second on recruitment agencies (19.6%) and to a less extent internal recruitment (18.2%) and word of mouth (4%). Yet, some disparities are revealed when it comes to individual countries.

Figure 2. Comparison of staffing methods for professional/ technical jobs (Cranet, 2004)
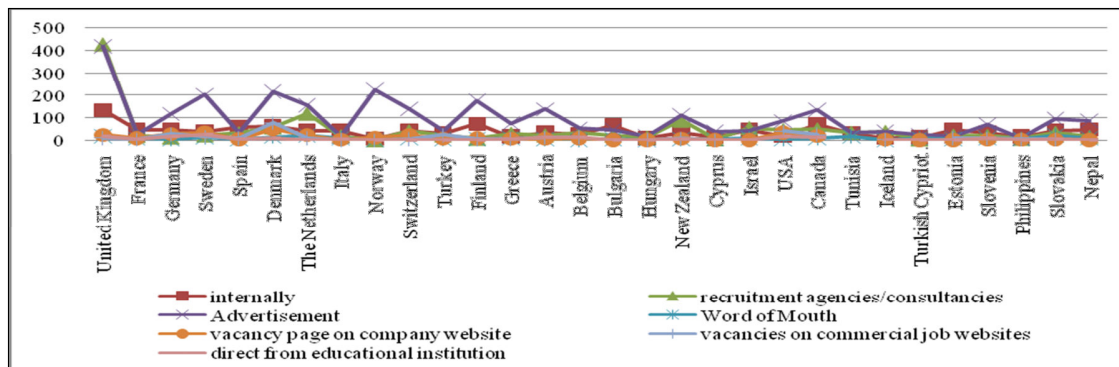

In fact, some countries gave more interest on e-recruitment methods and educational intuitions in searching for technicians (USA, Canada, Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium) while Tunisia is the only country reporting no use of these methods. Heavy reliance on "word of mouth" is also confirmed for Tunisia (12.75% of country's total) placing it in the second rank after Turkish Cypriot Community (17.24%).

3.1.3 Staffing methods for clerical jobs

Filling clerical jobs follows the same pattern of technical jobs. What is noticed is that more countries score higher in using the method "word of mouth" with 10 of them reaching two-digit numbers whereas Turkey, Tunisia, and Greece are at the top of the list (figure 3 below).

Figure 3. Comparison of staffing methods for clerical jobs (Cranet, 2004)
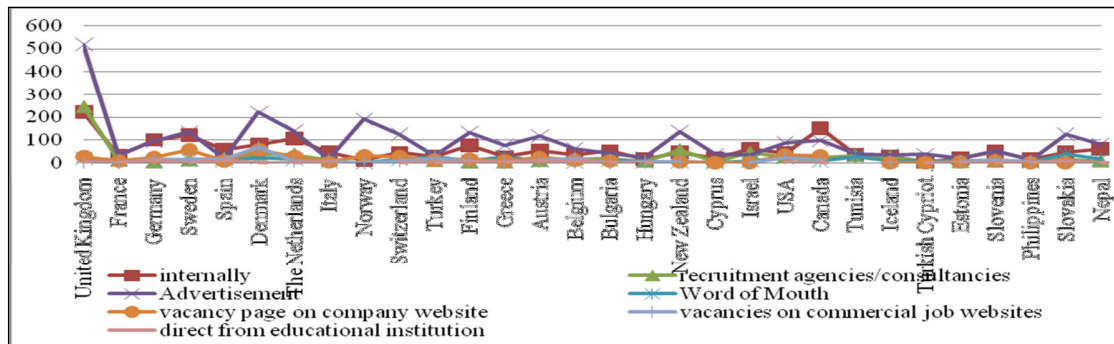
3.1.4 Staffing methods for manual jobs

Based on figure 4, reliance on "word of mouth" method is gaining more interest while recourse to recruitment agencies and internal hiring are lagging behind (7.4% and 19.5% of countries' total respectively).

Figure 4. International comparison of staffing methods for manual jobs (Cranet, 2004)
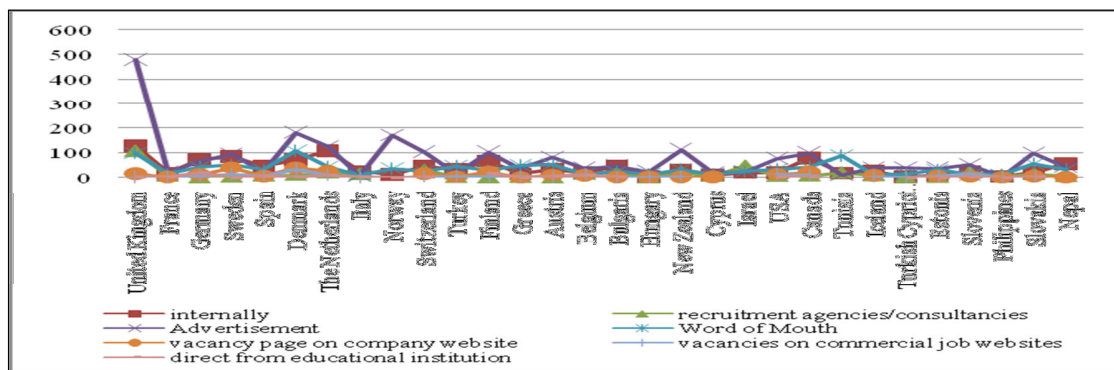
3.1.5. Synthesis of staffing methods

The differentiation of staffing methods for diverse personnel categories confirms the weight of decisions-makers' representations and values usually inspired by national policy and socio-cultural factors. This deduction is based on Khi² test indicating a significant dependency relationship between countries and staffing methods (sig = 0.000) for all categories. As a matter of fact, countries privileging internal recruitment are concerned with providing a social environment favourable to motivation, collaboration, and internal promotion. They are likely searching to avoid conflict and confrontation and are more people-oriented. These findings corroborates with Behrends's study (2007) on recruitment in SME, in which the author argues the influence of the social order system on recruitment's success. Those relying on external recruitment are more rational in their strategic orientation through the search for a competitive advantage through focalisation on processes.

As for the case of Tunisia, a relatively different pattern of recruitment methods is discerned; reliance on agencies and consultants for managerial positions, advertisement for technical and clerical staff and the word of mouth for manual jobs. A high rate of using the word of mouth compared to the mean of the sample particularly when it comes to manual jobs; Tunisia is ranked second after Turkish Cypriot Community. As a matter of fact, research on Tunisian firms shows the coexistence of formal and informal criteria in making HRM decisions (Bouzguenda, 2005).

3.2 Trends of selection methods for 2004 survey

The objective is to verity the hypothesis related to the existence of a differentiation in using selection methods according to staff categories in the surveyed countries. On the aggregate level, data reveals the existence of two categories of selection methods. The first category is composed of most frequently used methods which are considered as "traditional" namely references, one to one interviews, interview panel, and application forms. The second category comprises the remaining methods specifically psychometric test, assessment centre, and graphology which are less cited by the respondents yet considered as more advanced and customized methods.

The Khi² test confirms the existence of a significant relationship of dependency between selection methods by staff category and by country. This may be explained in two ways: on one hand, selection methods vary from one category to another, which by itself constitutes a sign of HRM's evolution geared towards a differentiated model in line with contingency theory. On the other hand, staffing policy tends to reinforce selection's effectiveness as a fundamental principle of organizational performance through people management. Such principle is based on the necessary adequacy between organizational needs and available resources both at the organizational and labor market levels.

Based on this state of affairs, the choice of selection methods seems to be based on past experience and conventional ways of getting things done more than on their effectiveness and relevance. Such affirmation may be further explained by analyzing selection methods by staff category as illustrated in figure 5 below:

Figure 5. Classification of global selection methods (Cranet, 2004)

a) Managerial positions

b) Professional/technical staff

c) Clerical jobs

d) Manual jobs
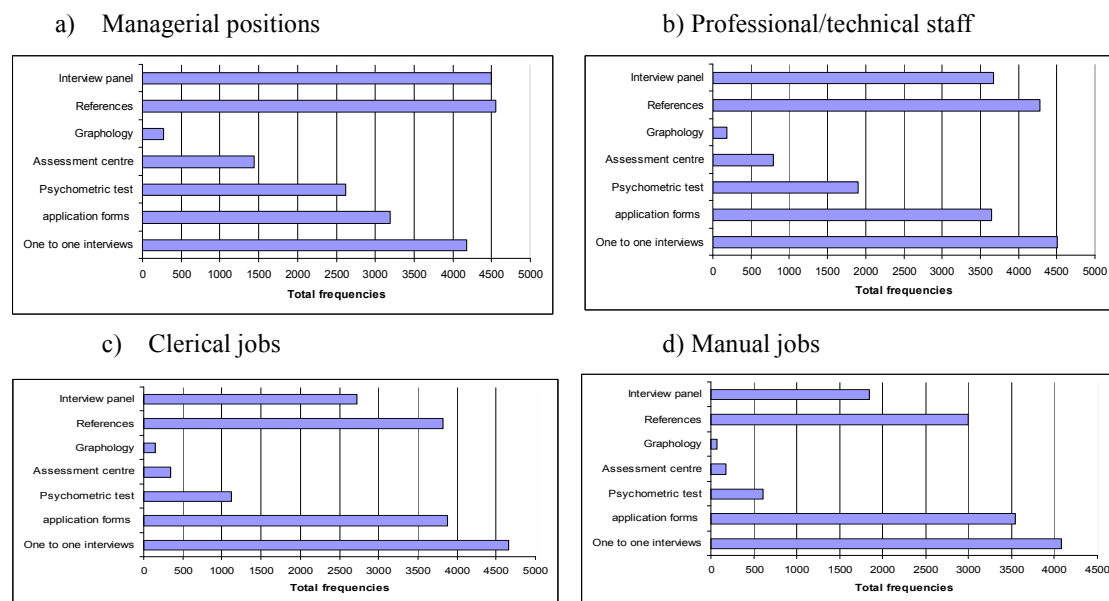
3.2.1 Selection methods for managerial positions

Candidates for managerial positions are selected based upon a battery of methods aimed at guiding decisions as illustrated in figure 5a above. Decisions are made based on three types of information: external from past employers and application forms, directly from the candidates based on one to one and panel interviews, and psychological built on psychometric test, assessment centre, and graphology. Based on such classification, the predominance of traditional methods is confirmed; yet disparities among countries are considered due to contextual and cultural influences as well as maturity and professionalism in HRM domain.

3.2.2 Selection methods for professional/technical staff

Based on figure 5b above, when it comes to selecting professionals and technicians, some methods within the traditional category changed whereby one to one interviews and references gained more weight whereas the influence of advanced techniques such as psychometric tests and assessment centre is decreasing.

3.2.3 Selection methods for clerical jobs

By examining figure 5c, clerical employees are chosen based primarily on their performance during one to one interviews followed by information provided in the application forms particularly related to their work experience confirmed by references. Interview panel seems to attract some HRD and to a less extent psychological and personality-based information.

3.2.4 Selection methods for manual jobs

As for manual jobs, figure 5d shows that direct one on one interview, application forms, and references count in selecting workers while some countries reported diversifying selection techniques for this category.

3.2.5 Synthesis of selection methods using Cranet data

Based on the above findings, we may infer two trends: on one hand, a general pattern of selection methods is characterized by reliance on past experience and conventional ways favourable to stability. On the other hand, a variation of selection methods is favourable to flexibility and "innovation" in exploiting available and potential resources. Such variation depends on the extent to which decision-makers tolerate errors, allocate recruitment resources, and make use of hiring decisions (Peretti, 2002). We may add the availability of internal competencies in the domain of HRM and particularly in recruitment and selection as well as organizational policy related to outsourcing staffing practices. Indeed, data show that responsibility for recruitment and selection is, in the first order, shared between line management and HR department, in the second order attributed to line managers, and to a less degree attributed solely to HR department (2896 citations for the first case, 1129 for the second, and 663 for the third case).

We may conclude that sharing HRF's attributions is a worldwide phenomenon and by the same token wonder to what extent line managers are best placed to make decisions having a great impact on organizational competitiveness and performance in the long run. As far as HRD's qualifications in the domain of HRM, the results point out that senior HR directors are recruited according to citations as follows: as specialists outside the organization, within the personnel department, as non HR specialists from within the organization and as non specialists outside the organization. These results imply the existence of a moderate level of specialisation in the field of HRM.

Given this global contextual framework of recruitment practices, it would be interesting to detect whether such framework has a continuous effect on shaping HRM using recent data on Tunisian organizations.

4. State of the art of staffing practices in the Tunisian context

3.1 Data collection

Data collection has taken place during 2008-2010. Companies were identified using database of previous surveys, yellow pages, database provided by the national Industrial Promotion Agency (API) as well personal acquaintances. Data collection is based on a standardized questionnaire used by CRANET after double translation. 450 questionnaires are distributed, 105 are recuperated leading to a response rate of 23.33% and 102 are analyzed: 10 public institutions, 10 the service sector including banking and insurance, 8 transport and communication, and 74 private industrial companies.

The objective of the following section is to assess the evolution of recruitment practices in Tunisian organizations in order to upgrade 2004 pattern.

4.2 Current situation of staffing methods in Tunisian organizations

Major policy decisions on recruitment and selection are shared between line management and HRD. Only 14 companies reported that these decisions are the full responsibility of HR. More than 90% of the companies do not

use external providers of services in recruitment and selection.

Recruitment is, for the most part, made internally for the high graded-staff and to a lower rate for the low levels of professional categories (table 2, below). This explains why more than 50% of the companies did not change the number of full-time permanent employees; only 14 of them report having increasing their workforce in the last three years.

Table 2. Recruitment methods by staff category in surveyed Tunisian organisations (2010)

	Management	Technical	Clerical	Manual
A. Internally	**56 (%)**	49	35,3	21.6
B. Recruitment agencies/ consultancies	24	30	12	10
C. Advertisement	**71.4**	**64.7**	**54**	**48**
D. Word of Mouth	17	26.5	30.6	34.7
E. Vacancy page on company website	21.7	23.4	17	10.6
F. Vacancies on commercial job websites	19.8	21.6	8.7	6.5
G. Direct from educational institution	23.4	35.4	16.7	14.6
H. Speculative applications/walk-ins	**45.7**	**53.2**	**55.3**	**48.9**
I. Job centres/public recruitment agencies	**75.5**	**76**	**70**	**74**

Compared to the general framework, we notice a **reversing effect** of some methods frequently used in past surveys and reliance on some newly introduced methods. This effect varies from one category of personnel to another as illustrated in the following figure 6:

Figure 6. Evolution of staffing methods by staff category across Cranet surveys
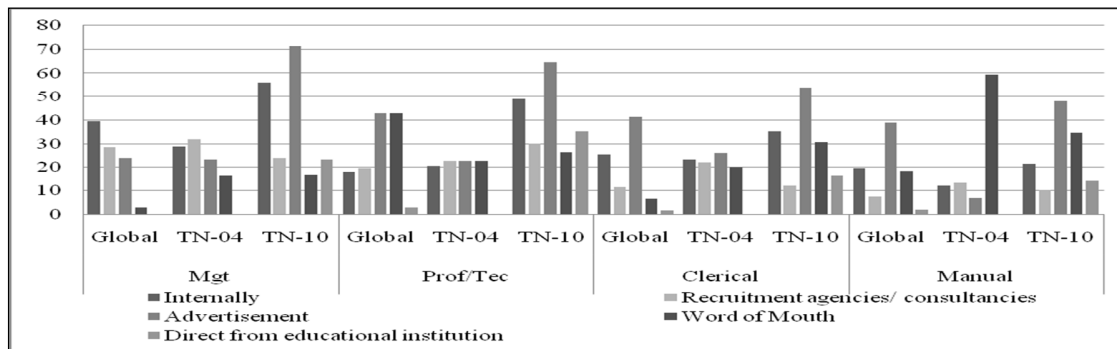
(Global: refers to general framework (all CRANET members in 2004); TN-04: Results of Tunisian survey in 2004; TN-10: results of Tunisian survey in 2010).

According to the figure 6, we notice the following:

1. Staffing practices in Tunisia appear to converge to general framework for 2004 survey but widely diverge in 2010's round. In fact, an alignment of staffing policies is observed when it comes to filling managerial positions, professional and technical jobs whereas hiring clerical and manual employees involves a different scheme from the global framework.

2. The weight of word of mouth technique is significant both at the aggregate and specific-country levels. Tunisian companies are more comfortable using this method and beating global records for staffing clerical and manual jobs. This choice gives decision- makers more discretion by focalizing on informal practices.

3. The query for harmonization is getting more difficult as data from 2010 survey reveals a different rationale in staffing policy and consequently a different pattern. This turnaround is attributed to contextual factors marked by challenges of globalization and technological breakthrough, and consciousness level of the labour force. We recall one of the respondents attesting *"we cannot get things done, everything is upside down, and we need to get things going no matter what. We cannot apply your theory; the real world is more complex than you think"*. He

quickly rejected the idea of having harmonized HRM systems around the world and evoked the resistance to changing the old fashioned way of getting thing done.

In order to assess the evolution of HRM practices, every round of survey introduces some amendments based on past findings and emergent trends in HRM issues. Figure 7 below presents the current status of staffing methods adopted by Tunisian organizations.

Figure 7. Updated staffing methods in Tunisian organizations by staff category (2010)
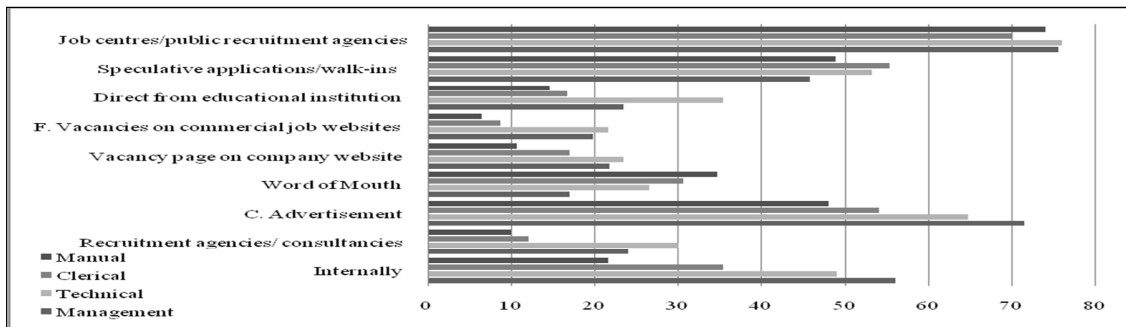

When external staffing is considered, companies are looking into several alternatives of staffing methods particularly job centres/public agencies, speculative applications/walk-ins, educational institutions and recruitment agencies, and to a less extent emergent electronic staffing methods via commercial job and company websites.

We may infer that the combination between previous and recent methods explains to a certain level of confidence the detected change in staffing policy favourable to the search for an apparent more formality, transparency, and equity.

4.3 Selection methods by staff category

Global staffing practices show a general rationale in combining recruitment methods as if the diversified answers have yield to a certain pattern of hiring techniques. A similar trend is noticed regarding selection methods involved in the selection procedure as illustrated in figure 8.

Figure 8. Evolution of selection methods by staff category across Cranet surveys
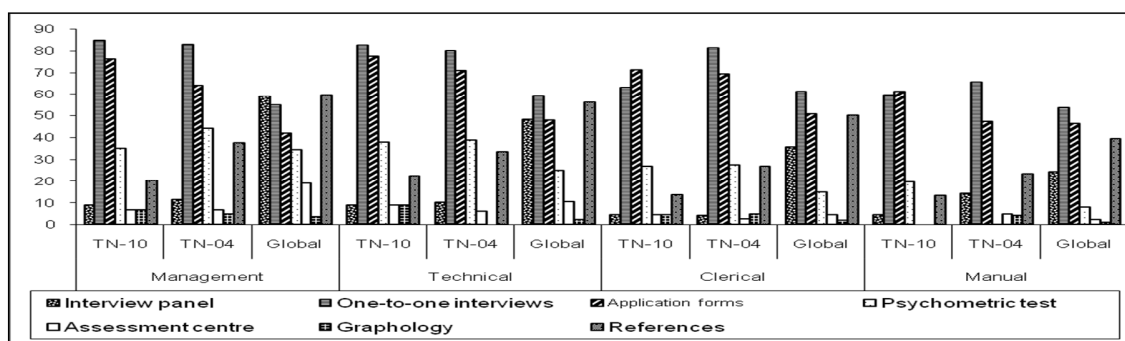
In fact, usage of selection methods on the global level shows a certain pattern characterized by the search for different types of information to found decisions.

Data on Tunisian companies (TN-04 and TN-10) show some divergence from the global pattern related to the existence of a certain consensus in relying on one-to-one interviews and application forms. Other methods are engaged with different degrees (references, panel interviews, psychometric tests) with regard to staff category. Furthermore, the selection pattern seems to stabilise according to 2010 survey as indicated in table 3 below:

Table 3. Updated selection methods by staff category in Tunisian companies (2010)

	Management (%)	Technical	Clerical	Manual
A. Interview panel	8.9	8.9	4.4	4.3
B. One-to-one interviews	**84.8**	**82.6**	**63**	**59.6**
C. Application forms	**76.1**	**77.3**	**71.1**	**60.9**
D. Psychometric test	**34.8**	**37.8**	**26.7**	19.6
E. Assessment centre	6.7	8.7	4.4	--
F. Graphology	6.7	8.9	4.4	--
G. References	20	22.2	13.6	13.3
H. Ability tests	**30.4**	28.9	24.4	**37**
I. Technical tests	**26.7**	**56.5**	**28.3**	**55.3**

Indeed, as "new" selection methods are considered in the process, decision-makers' orientation is detected according to which ability and technical tests account more than "previously" considered methods such as graphology, assessment centre, and psychometric tests. Such an orientation reveals that selection in Tunisian organizations is based on technically-centred methods more than psychologically-centred techniques. This is to confirm not only the prevalence of a traditional HRM system characterized by reliance on informal and culturally-oriented approach but also reference to decisions makers' representation and value system prevailing during the decision process.

Given this situation, the question to be raised is to what extent staffing policy in Tunisian organizations is receptive to advanced issues in recruitment and selection mainly with respect to diversity and minority inclusion as well as flexible working arrangements.

4.4 Receptivity to advanced recruitment issues

Based on the results of past surveys, actions programs to improve participation in the workforce remained limited. The number of non response (NR) is very high, a fact that may be interpreted in three manners: first, respondents are not aware of the existence of such programs as current trends in improving the workforce participation and thus performance. Second, more than 50% of the companies have not changed the number of total employees since three years ago. Third, they are not concerned with these programs as findings reveal the prevalence of a short-term personnel orientation characterized by administrative issues.

Nonetheless, we may infer companies' orientation related to these issues and assess any improvement realized in the domain of improving the participation of specific groups in the workforce as well as of introducing working arrangements.

As far as innovative programmes aimed at improving the participation of specific groups in the workforce, some remarks may be withdrawn from table 4 below:

Table 4. Measures of workforce participation improvement in Tunisian firms (2010)

Action programmes relating to:	Recruitment		Training		Career progression	
	% NR	% yes	% NR	% yes	% NR	% yes
A. Minority ethnics	43.1	6.9	43.1	6.9	43.1	6.9
B. Older workers (aged 50 plus)	43.1	3.4	45.1	21.4	43.1	27.6
C. People with disabilities	40	**38.7**	43.1	31	39.2	25.8
D. Women	46	**53.6**	45.1	**39.3**	45.1	**35.7**
E. Women returners	**48**	29.6	45.1	**39.3**	47.1	18.5
F. Low skilled labour	**48**	14.8	43.1	**48.3**	47.1	**29.6**
G. Younger workers (aged under 25)	42	**60**	45.1	**60.7**	45.1	**39.3**

An apparent policy of diversity characterized by better receptivity to specific groups mainly younger workers, women, people with disabilities; and to a less extent older workers and low skilled labour comparing to the results of previous study on diversity policy in the Tunisian context (Bouzguenda & Gargouri, 2008). This may explain the fact

that 34% of surveyed companies declare disposing of a diversity statement, though unwritten for 75% of the cases.

An increasing awareness of social responsibility is noted when it comes to hiring and training these groups more than assuring career progression. Similarly, two thirds of the companies have an unwritten social responsibility statement.

Moreover, usage of working arrangements is limited particularly with respect to flexible and technology-based working formulas. In fact, 88% of respondents report not using flex-time at all, nor home-based work (92%) or job sharing (94%).

In accordance with our findings, companies' policies are more favourable to keep using more traditional working arrangements in diverse degrees such as overtime (94%), shift work (74%), and weekend work (66%).

Given this state of affairs, an attempt to make sense of the real dynamic in recruitment practices is carried out. The pattern is still, as Grint states, "fuzzy" and embryonic since some signs of bias and errors prevail in selection decisions depriving Tunisian organizations from human potential and competencies. As a matter of fact, the revolution at the end of 2010 unveiled that HRM system contained its own pitfall for failure. It turned out that the recruitment system has been built on unequal opportunities of employment, unfair treatment, regional considerations, and loyalty to political party. These factors have largely contributed to the upsurge of the revolution and the breakdown of social and managerial systems in the country.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The interaction among different cultures and structures has led to the emergence of a general framework explaining staffing policies. Such profile seems to be based on a certain reasoning associated with the predominance of some information in making recruitment and selection decisions. Nonetheless, when it comes to analyze specific or individual countries, the underlying logic is likely to be mixed up and the pattern is rearranged. That is the case when we attempted to compare staffing practices in Tunisian organizations to the general scheme of practices in countries which are members of CRANET.

With this respect, Zghal (2004) argues that changes in Tunisian organizations were made under the state's impulse and did not emanate from managers' will. External pressures such as the state, consumers' role, competitors…etc seem to shape management patterns. Our findings suggest the existence of some internal and institutional pressures marked by decision-makers' orientation and power concentration, as well as their representation of individuals at work (Martory & Crozet, 1986). Based on Peretti's typologies (2002) of HRF's missions, the predominance of an administrative mission (focalization on processes and the present) has led to certain "decline" and "retrenchment" if not "stagnation" of HRF's role in the organization.

From a managerial perspective, we notice the existence of a divergence between discourse and action. In fact, respondents pronounce being preoccupied by the new trends of HRM, yet act otherwise. Some signs of loosing sense come to surface as companies are subscribed to the national program of up-grading (90%) and some of them got their ISO certification (10) while others are in the process of getting certified (10).

This state of affairs allows delivering two main explanations. On one hand, universal staffing practices do not exist according to contingency theory; the context plays a key role in shaping managerial practices leading to various "success stories" and "best practices", a fact that touches the phenomenon of benchmarking in the domain of HR practices and performance. On the other hand, harmonization of HRM practices -as an objective of CRANET- calls for smoothing (or methodologically speaking moderating) the general framework whereby actors' representation and reference frame account for evaluating staffing practices in individual countries. The weight of culture may be best expressed in the following assertion of D'Iribarne (1998, pp. 124-25):

> "The continuity of each culture, though it is marked by multiple evolutions, comes from the stability of fundamental oppositions' system upon which it is created [...]. In a general manner, the existence of a cultural continuity is not at all incompatible with the evolving nature of society's organization. It relates to the fact that such organization gets its meaning in references which are more stables than it is [...]. The coexistence of the culture unity and the variety of organizations' concrete functioning is to be well understood when one understands culture a reference of meaning."

Moreover, the findings of the present survey substantiate the conclusions of previous case study on issues related to the implementation of total quality management in a well-established Tunisian public firm in which the authors

demonstrate the existence of some signs of loosing sense in adopting managerial practices (Bouzguenda & Chalghaf, 2007). The authors argue that even though the studied firm is profitable, it faces a "crisis" in fostering a management model favourable to organizational competitiveness and development.

Research contribution and future work

The contribution of the present study is double fold: On the theoretical level, it proposes a better understanding of the underlying driving factors and concepts nourishing HRM practices around the world. On the empirical level, the research provides some guidelines aimed at reducing the gap between theory and practice and thus seeking a 'legitimated' harmonization among diverse systems. From a methodological perspective, Steinmetz, et al, (2011) proposes structural equation modelling using Cranet data allowing group comparison. From a contextual perspective, it would be interesting to assess the post-revolution staffing policy. What is the incidence of coercive pressures exerted by the state on the quality of staff and productivity? Would people's impulse and pressures be regulatory mechanism or constraint to develop high performance firms given the high rate of unemployment? All these questions converge towards the need to sense making in terms of Weick (1995). Another research perspective is related to a more future-oriented vision of HRM systems expressed in terms of actors' roles and competencies in "modern" Tunisia. In fact, recent trends on HR function emphasize the key role of HRD as well the urgent need for professionalism in the domain in order to enhance the function's performance.

References

Autissier, D. & Wacheux, F. (2006), *Manager par le sens*, Editions d'organisation.

Ben Ferjani, M. (1998). Nouveau contexte de l'entreprise et pratiques de GRH: Cas de quelques entreprises "performantes". In R. Zghal (Sous la direction), *La Gestion des Entreprises : Contextes et performances* (pp. 61-65), CPU, Tunis.

Behrends, T. (2007), Recruitment practices in small and medium enterprises. An empirical study among knowledge-intensive professional service firms. *Management Revue*, 18(1):55-74.

Bouzguenda, K. (2005), *Gestion des carrières et glass ceiling : Cas des femmes cadres en Tunisie*, Thèse de Doctorat en Sciences de Gestion (Doctorate thesis), Faculté des Sciences Economiques et de Gestion, Sfax- Tunisia.

Bouzguenda, K. & Chalghaf A. (2007), Le management par la qualité et performance des organisations publiques : Spécificités, enjeux et effet de mode, Symposium International « *Modèles et pratiques de management entre convergence et contingence »*, Fès–Maroc.

Bouzguenda, K. & Gargouri, C. (2008), Perceiving diversity in Tunisia**,** In. D*ocument de travail du MAGE* (**MA**rché du travail et **GE**nre en Europe)*,* n°11, 403-420, MAGE-France,

Brewster, C. (1995), Towards a 'European' model of human resource management, *Journal of International Business Studies*, 26, 1-21.

Brewster, C. Wolfgang, M. & Reichel, A. (2011), Riding the tiger? Going along with Cranet for two decades- A relational perspective, *Human Resource Management Review*, 21, 5-15.

Citeau, J.P. (2003), *Gestion des Ressources Humaines*, Armand Colin.

D'Iribarne, P. (1989), *La logique de l'honneur : Gestion des entreprises et traditions nationales*, Editions du Seuil.

Gooderham, P. & Nordhang, O. (2010), One European model of HRM? Cranet empirical contributions, *Human Resource Management, review*, 21, 27-36.

Grint, K. (1997), *Fuzzy Management: Contemporary ideas and practices at work*, Oxford University Press.

Hofstede, G. (1980) *Culture's consequences, International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Sage Publications Inc. Beverly Hills California.

Nifle, R. (2000). Conférences Vanves CPO, *Journal Permanent de l'Humanisme méthodologique.*

Peretti, J.M. (2002), *Gestion des Ressources Humaines,* Vuibert.

Martory, B. & Crozet, D. (1986), *Gestion des Ressources Humaines*, Edition Fernand Nathan.

Steinmetz, H. Schwens, C. Wehner, M. & Kabst, R. (2011), Conceptual and methodological issues in comparative HRK research: The Cranet project as an example, *Human Resource Management Review*, 21, 16-26.

Ulrich, D. (1998), A new mandate for human resources. *Harvard Business Review*, (January – February), 124-134.

Vercauteren, P. (2000). La crise de l'Etat dans l'Union Européenne : une sortie de crise par une refondation du sens ?

in. *L'Etat en crise : souveraineté et légitimité en question ?* FIUC Editions.

Weick, K. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations.* In. Autissier et Wacheux (2006). *Manager par le sens*, Editions d'organisation.

Zghal, R. (2001), Human resources management in Tunisia: An evolving process under state's impulse, *Proceedings of the Global Management Conference: Comparative HRM - Learning from Diversity*.

Zghal, R. (2004), Globalisation et transformation du processus de gestion des ressources humaines sous l'impulsion de l'Etat, Symposium AGRH et Euromed Marseille.

Notes

Note 1. Etude Ipsos/Acor, 2005, www.ipsos.fr.

Note 2. These dimensions are Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, and Uncertainty Avoidance.

Note 3. The school of Economics and Management of Sfax joined the network in 1998 under the representation of the research unit on management of organizations 'URGE'. Two rounds of surveys have been conducted by professor Zghal (1999 and 2004).