

The contribution of the quality certification process to the improvement of human resources management practices

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ABSTRACT

The current highly competitive environment requires companies to attach crucial importance to Quality and Human Resources with a view to improve their performance. Several scholars and managers have affirmed that synergy and consistency between human resources management (HRM) practices are essential to the success of Quality Management System (QMS). However, there is relatively little empirical evidence to support this predication.

In this paper we will attempt to clarify the impact of ISO 9001 (QMS) on (HRM) practices. To achieve this objective, we have conducted an exploratory study followed by a qualitative study in 12 Moroccan companies certified ISO 9001.

The results of the thematic analysis of the interviews carried out on the observed sites, showed that the ISO 9001 standard influences positively the (HRM) practices such as recruitment, training, and more significantly communication and compensation. The findings also highlighted that effective (HRM) policies are essential for ISO 9001 certification programs to deliver their benefits. The paper then addresses some limitations of that research and provides suggestions for future research.

Keywords: ISO 9001 certification; Human Resources Management (HRM); Quality management system (QMS); Organisationnel changes; Involvement; Performance

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1. Introduction

Companies change and transform themselves according to technological, economic, legal or even social developments. A firm that would not be able to lead its people towards optimal change and transformation takes the risk of being overtaken by its competitors. The HR function plays an essential role in leading and succeeding organizational change and supporting its various transformations [1].

Today, we cannot manage human resources without efficiency. We must rely on human capital and then answer the question: how to improve the quality of human resources management?

Quality management is also a transformation project, giving it every chance of success means knowing how to involve employees and mobilize them for the well-being of their organization [2]. Moreover, the company's quality system depends on its human performance [3].

Our objective is to provide an answer to the question: "How does the implementation of the (QMS) ISO 9001 influence (HRM) Practices in certified companies? »

This question is crucial for both practitioners and researchers in Management. Despite its interest, it remains complex and difficult to identify due to the complexity of the two management areas [4]. Through this research, we have tried to bring some synthetic answers to the problem raised and let the perspectives of in-depth analysis of the set of variables that come into play in each of these disciplines.

The Quality Management and the Human Resources Management are two managerial fields, which have different relationships between them. Some authors argue that through the implementation of a (QMS), companies have been able to introduce better organizational approaches and then ensure a human resources management style that is beneficial to personal fulfillment and the sustainability of their company [5], [6]. While some authors have found a positive link between ISO certification and (HRM) practices, other authors have revealed that this link is negative, weak or non-existent [7]. We will try, in this article, to find points of liaison and to clarify further these possible links. To this end, we began this research with an exploratory phase, both theoretical and empirical: Theoretical exploration enabled us to establish a link between the two disciplines: Human Resources Management and Quality Management. Empirical exploration has enabled us to better understand the reality of the two disciplines as well as the modalities of their intersections in the Moroccan context.

First, we will examine the importance of the human factor in the quality management process, and then we will analyze the impact of ISO 9001 quality certification on the improvement of human resources practices.

2. Material and methods

In order to address this issue, we conducted two distinct qualitative and exploratory studies. The first empirical phase of our research is contextualization. It features in conducting expert interviews with researchers and professionals specialized in the subject. In total, 9 experts recognized for their legitimacy are interviewed in order to validate the relevance of the subject, the framework theory and the envisaged research method.

Secondly, we collected data from 12 certified companies in the city of Tangier, operating in 4 sectors of activity (Automotive, Industry, Textile and Service). We interviewed 31 people (Quality Manager, HR Manager, managers & technicians), based on a semi-structured guide. The data collected was the subject of a thematic content analysis.

3. Theory

3.1. The role of human resources management in the quality approach

The organization is a human system based on values, attitudes and experience of each actor that is why it is an assembly of immeasurable variables [7].

Human is by nature a complex being. Mastering the human resources function is first and before all understanding and identifying it. This confirms the difficulty of analysis in this area [8].

Company managers involved in the quality approach focused on satisfying the customer and improving the quality of their organization's products and services. However, since they have just realized that the success of this policy couldn't be achieved without the constant involvement and motivation of their human resources, HR managers are now entrusted with one of the key success factors of the (QMS) [9].

Human resources policies play a key role in facilitating the development of a new culture and the successful start of specific change projects such as quality certification. The effectiveness of these policies depends on taking into account the specific expectations of the members who make up an organization and contribute to its development [10]. The employee takes the place of the internal customer that the company must satisfy. It must strive to meet its needs in terms of training, career planning, skills management and monitoring of its organizational involvement [11].

Human resources management has become a key position in the overall process of improvement of the organization [11]. Skill become a required characteristic of the personnel assigned to tasks affecting the quality of the product, and training is one of the possible actions to reach the skills needs [12].

The HR manager is concerned about quality insofar as:

If his company is committed to a "quality approach", he is involved as a coordinator of a global project that sometimes generates resistance [13].

- New quality approaches (The EFQM model or the latest version of ISO) now takes into account employee satisfaction, it is necessary to put in place measuring instruments.

- Finally, in his own department, he will have to ensure the quality of human resources management processes [14].

3.2. The contribution of the quality approach to improving HRM

The implementation of a quality management system (QMS) in a company represents a significant organizational change. This strategic choice must be the subject of concrete action in a participatory approach. Indeed, if managers impose it on employees, it can cause tensions if the system of representations and values shared by employees oppose the values conveyed by management who wants to establish a Quality Management System.

Several studies have shown that the implementation of the quality approach and certification introduce systematic changes to the organizational structure and to the improvement of the company's performance [15], the (HRM) as a subsystem of the organization is obviously affected by these changes.

The quality approach is a project of change, it can be experienced in a painful way as it can be experienced enthusiastically by the company, this project like any business project, involves radical organizational changes [14].

As far as the individual is concerned, the aim of these changes is to make their daily lives better and to ensure that the worker is more satisfied, willing to work and being able to increase his skills and knowledge; in order to be able to do his job better, to take on more motivating positions and to take on more responsibility.

A strong-shared "Quality" culture is very consistent with the principles of the ISO standard. The implantation of this one is a generated dynamic around the quality, which reinforced this culture.

The notion of quality is becoming an increasing concern for human resources departments. The ultra-competitive environment in which companies operate leads them to seek out new niches of competitiveness.

This logic now applies more and more within organizations. It's a way of demonstrating that the management of human capital is a priority in terms of quality and is once again a competitive factor. The employee takes the place of the "customer" for whom it is necessary to try to meet his needs in terms of business planning, career, skills management and monitoring in his organizational involvement (both emotional and calculated involvement). The company is now distinguished by the human skills.

The quality approach through the ISO 9001 standard [16] is a guide that enables the company to move from its traditional organization (HRM) to quality-oriented human capital management.

4. Result and discussion

The results of our empirical study are broadly in line with the theoretical contributions and empirical work presented in the first part of this thesis. This allowed us to refer to it to draw relevant interpretations.

The results of the lexical analysis by categories of research topics conducted at the sites observed were grouped by sector of activity (Automotive, Industry, Textile and Services) and by theme.

Quality certification has been confirmed as an approach to organizational change that positively impacts all of the company's processes and specifically human resources practices (Recruitment, Training, compensation and Career Management, Communication and Staff Engagement).

4.1. Sectoral analysis

All of the interviewees (31 individuals) from the various sectors of activity confirmed that their human resources practices have undergone a considerable evolution and improvement thanks to quality certification. The automotive sector is the most influenced by quality certification (40,3%), The second most important sector is the industrial sector(27,6 %), then the service sector(17,1%) and finally the textile(14,9%) . The car manufacturers recommend the sharing of a common quality culture that promotes communication at all levels, training, recruitment of the best potential and compliance with the normative requirements of the positions. The improvement of career management and the permanent revision of the salary range within the framework of incentive policies. The HR manager from major companies operating in the automotive sector confirmed that the IATF standard that is specific to the automobile aims at the overall performance of the company and its excellence and enhancement of the link between quality and human resource management in the automotive sector.

Companies in the industrial sector or the automotive sector, their certification process influence the practice of communication and employee involvement in the first place, then compensation, training, recruitment.

The service sector has recently faced radical and structural changes in the context. We've seen very significant improvements in the management practices of these companies, we've interviewed two companies that are operating in this sector and are very well known in the northern region. Given the sensitivity of this sector and the evolution of customer requirements, the latter took an important place after the Automotive and Industrial sectors, it constituted (17,1%) of all respondents for the 4 sectors interviewed.

Communication is the most important practice affected by quality certification, representing (33%) of all HR practices and then compensation (29, 5%), which is always a predominant element, then training (19,8%) and finally recruitment (17,1%), which remains a poorly important approach in this sector, which is confirmed by (82%) of respondents.

The Textile Sector ranks the last in terms of the impact of certification on its human resources practices. Since it is still traditional but constantly evolving and adapting to changes in the market, a very important element that was cited by 80% of respondents and which explains this place. It's the fact that textile companies are generally family businesses and therefore the mindset of managers influence the certification results, something that needs to be reviewed and studied within this sector. (See - Figure 1).

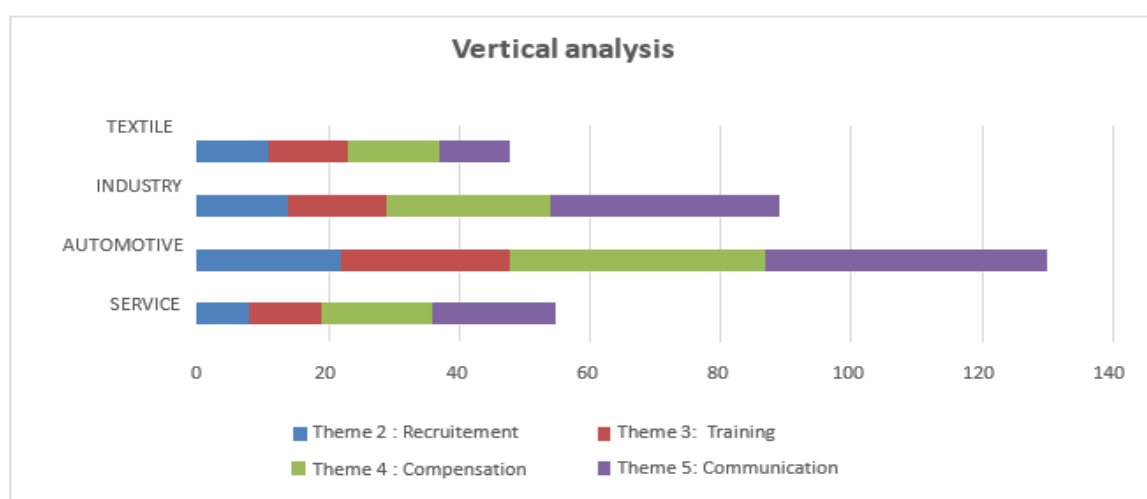


Figure 1. Vertical analysis

4.2. Thematic analysis

A thematic analysis of the 31 interviews carried out within (12 companies), identifies four broad topics relating to Human Resources practices: recruitment, Training, compensation, Communication. The data collected was coded based on these themes. The aim is to draw global interpretations from all the statements made by the interviewees.

4.2.1. Recruitment

The recruitment practice has undergone a considerable development in the certified companies interviewed. We were able to conclude that the recruitment practice in its approach and results was positively influenced by quality certification. The quality certification process requires competent human resources who are able to adapt to the change that contributes to the company's performance [16]. Human resources are attracted to the company through recruitment. As a result, the field of recruitment is experiencing many improvements, both in the tools and in the criteria used to find the profiles most suited to the needs of the position and the culture of the company.

"Human is at the heart of all challenges", "Human is our principal wealth", "training human is meeting the challenges of tomorrow" and "successful recruitment is not obvious, but action must be taken on integration and subsequent assessment": These statements were announced by the interviewees and became today in Morocco imperative especially with globalization. In fact, globalization will be won with Human.

The most of interviewers confirm that the recruitment process have be improved recently *"Certification has introduced a new way of working"* (HR Manager - Site 7).

4.2.2. Training

The (HRM) has highlighted the major effects of continuous training on the development of the company. In fact, the improvement of skills allows both productivity gains and the achievement of a high level of quality.

In this study, Training comes in the third position (figure 2) and many managers confirm net evolution in this practice: *"Certification requires consideration of requests; it also formalizes training"* (HR Manager of site 2); *" We're improving from one day to the next thanks to the structuring projects; We're also setting up thanks to the implementation of corporate tools (group tools)"* specifies the HR Manager of the site 9.

The quality Manager of (site 9) adds: *"In addition to having created our institution in order to perpetuate our know-how and pass it on to the people who will take over from us"*.

4.2.3. Compensation

The implementation of a system of remuneration and career management requires transparency which the standard and its requirements can satisfy.

The management of skills and careers is a normative and contextual requirement for the current company. A major strategic tool allows flexibility, individual and collective response to get the organization evaluated and to better satisfy the customer.

It's also a mean for the development and well-being of employees, which is a determining factor in the implementation of a quality approach; since quality requires the involvement of employees for a better competitiveness.

Compensation comes in second place after communication. Social equity after the certification of the company's quality remains relative from one individual to another, *"It's something intangible that is difficult to standardize and measure"*(Quality Manager - site 10).

4.2.4. Communication

Communication has made considerable progress recently and especially thanks to the implementation of the quality certification process. In order to adapt to the evolution of the environment and comply with traceability requirements, the companies interviewed have developed modern communication tools and controlled document systems. However, the communication points out certain anomalies observed, in fact certain information remains reduced to a specific category of employees.

Yet, the communication points out some anomalies. In fact, some information remains reduced to a specific category of employees.

The Figure 2: shows that the communication is very influenced by quality certification ISO 9001 in the majority of companies.

All the companies interviewed confirmed the strong interaction between the quality certification approach and the improvement of communication practices within the companies: "*Controlling our organization and communication channels is a quality priority*" (Quality Manager -site 12).

Internal communication objectives were clearly expressed by the interviewees. In addition, the company's quality organization is not rigid and that "*everyone can express himself and become strongly involved*" (Quality Manager of site 10).

It is also specified that "*this quality policy is consistent with our operating system, which provides broad delegation*" (Logistics Manager - site 7).

(HRM) practices, mainly communication and involvement of staff are ranked first in the answers to our problematic question which is the impact of quality certification on human resources practices. Communication is a normative requirement and is among the foundations of quality and its principles. It is both the input and output element of the quality approach and certification of the quality management system. By visualizing the Graph, we observe that this practice is very important and strongly influenced by quality certification (see-figure 2).

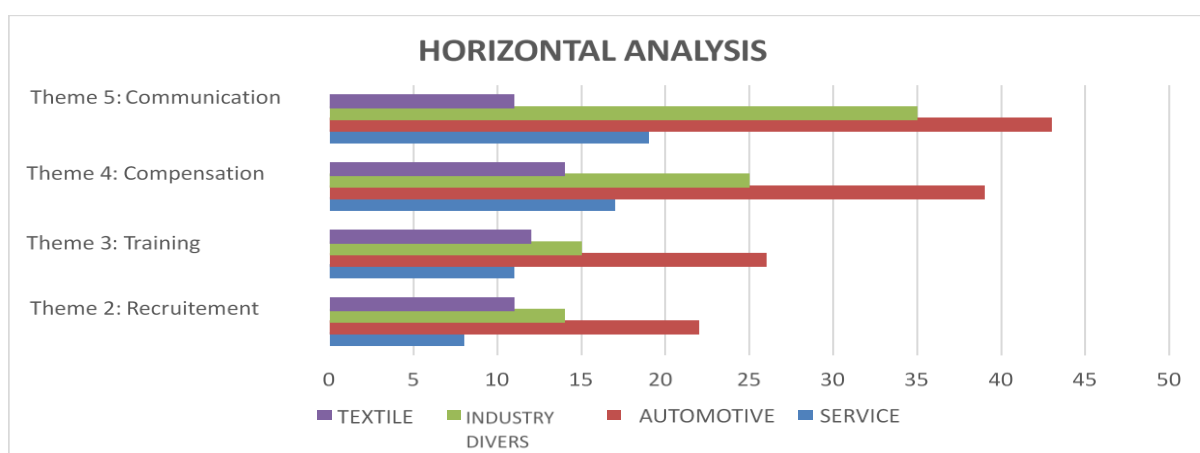


Figure 2. Horizontal analysis

5. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the analysis of the contribution of ISO 9001 (QMS) to the improvement of (HRM) practices and conceptualizes it as a complete system with contextual and methodological elements. For many companies, certification leads to a new organization that has an impact on the operation of the various departments, including human resources. Internally, it's first and foremost an opportunity to review organizational patterns, optimize them and sustain them; it allows everyone to find their place in the processes and has a strong power of motivation within the teams.

Our case studies on the twelve ISO 9001 certified companies enabled the identification of two dimensions in the analysis of (HRM) practices and the improvements made to their following certification. The vertical dimension consisted in the study of the interdependencies between the different levels of analysis of human resources practices and the elements of the context of certified companies. The horizontal dimension aimed to make comparisons to links between these various themes in different contexts according to the same reference framework. We sought a balance in the evaluation of these four categories (4 HR practices) between the context, the (HRM) processes, the discourses of prescription and expression on the different companies.

The analysis demonstrates the evolution observed since the introduction of ISO 9001 concerns mainly the communication and the compensation in the 12 companies interviewed.

In addition, the results have showed that the quality certification process is concerned with human resources management and requires considerable effort on the part of the partners in order to unify the results and make this relationship stronger for better performance.

A certification project leads to major changes in management methods. There is no point in going ahead if all project management, from design to implementation, is centralized. Upstream, it's imperative to involve employees and empower them. Studies that have focused on the impact of the quality approach on employee attitudes, and the management of human resources on the quality approach showed the existence of a positive correlation between the two. In other words, employees get involved and mobilized following the implementation by the company of a quality program. The quality approach is employee-focused emphasizing the role of the human factor and causing changes in behavior, as it enriches it work; it's reflected in the participation of all in the areas that concern them, the need for training for continuous quality improvement and a climate of frank open dialogue and communication [17].

To sum up, our research can help improve our understanding of the links between quality certification processes and Human Resources practices. However, our results remain purely theoretical. Thus, as an extension of our research, we will conduct a quantitative study to test our hypotheses, consolidate and enrich our conceptual framework.

The limitations of this research raise the need to generalize the results of our research. The first proposed idea would be to extend the search to a larger sample in order to strengthen the external validity of our research.

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