

CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND THEIR RELEVANCE FOR THE TUNISIAN ARMED FORCES

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In line with the changes taking place in the private sector, most armies in the world have been working to develop ways to manage their resources in order to achieve more performance and governance, knowing that they live in a changing and highly competitive world. In this context, the Tunisian army in general, and the air force in particular, have engaged in this new trend. In terms of provision of financial resources and to achieve these noble goals, we speak today of budgeting by objectives, which are now in its early stages. As part of the “Vision 2030”, the Air Force has undergone major changes in the way human resources are arranged, sending in 2018 a new structure that has a strategic role in the management of these resources in terms of planning, monitoring and development, especially in light of recent trends in this area. This is what we will address closely in this research. In the first part, we will discuss the current situation of human resources management in the Air Force, and then in the second part, we will explain the importance of applying modern trends in this field which goal is to increase performance and governance in Human Resources Management (HRM).

Key words: *Vision 2030, human resource management, performance, governance.*

1. INTRODUCTION

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2. THE ACTORS OF THE HRM FUNCTION, THEIR MISSIONS AND THE LIMITS OF THE PRACTICE

The actors of the HRM function and their missions

To meet the organizational and planning needs of the Air Force, there are a number of stakeholders serving the Air Staff such as: the Office of Human Resources, the Air Military Zones and the Human Resources and Financial Affairs Division.

These actors are responsible for managing the personal interests of the Air Force in collaboration with other agencies.

Therefore, it would be wise to specify the role and tasks of each agency in order to understand how the system works.

The Office of Human Resources

The Office of Human Resources is in charge of assessing personnel requirements, in peace and wartime, establishing general administration rules concerning the units and military and civilian personnel of the Air Force, establishing rules relating to the dress of personnel, acting as an administrative advisor within the Air Force, giving an opinion on common texts which are of interest to the Air Force. It is also responsible for advising on the application of laws and regulations concerning the general organization of the air force, military justice and all matters relating to the status of military and civilian personnel.

The Office of Human Resources is also in charge of the follow-up and coordination of all social action issues.

Air Military Zones

After the last reform, and within the framework of decentralization, two military air zones were created: one in the north and the other in the south. Within each zone, there is an office in charge of the management of the personnel attached to it, i.e., each zone has the role of manager at the level of its geographical perimeter, especially with regard to the mobility of its subordinates.

Each commander of a zone has the full authority to move his individuals between the organizations present on his territory. This action, for example, was the responsibility of the Air Force Office of Human Resources. It can be concluded that this office has the same role as the Office of Human Resources but in a regional level, which reduces the burden of the office mentioned first, and regarding the matters requiring a decision of the General Staff, the two offices of these zones serve to collect and centralize the elements requested from the command, make proposals and forward them to the Office of Human Resources for decision.

Human Resources and Financial Affairs Division

The main mission of this division is to know all the data related to the human resources management in order to help the command or the leaders to take the decision related to the identification of the needs concerning the recruitment, the training, the designation of the personnel.

The main tasks of this division are to establish statistics and future scenarios to meet the needs of the Air Force in terms of human resources according to the objectives set and according to the structural pyramid.

This division consists of two offices that oversee human resources management:

- Office of Studies, Planning and Prospecting.

This office is responsible for studying the needs of the different formations of the Air Force from the human resources at the level of number and jurisdiction, determining the needs of the Air Force at the level of human resources in the medium and long term and providing the staff with proposals and arrangements in accordance with its objectives and future programs, preparing a program of assignment in order to meet the future needs of the different specialties, Conducting the necessary studies in the field of human resources management to ensure the recruitment of people according to the specialization and needs of the units and air bases and schools, scheduling and implementing periodic awareness forums for the administrative staff, this office is also responsible for preparing reports and studies according to the topics determined by the Office of Human Resources of the Air Force.

- Office of Human Resources

The Office of Human Resources is responsible for the development of an annual social work program for the Air Force in collaboration with the relevant structures, for its

approval by the General Staff and for its implementation, as well as for the improvement of individual skills through the creation of training programs in the administrative field. It establishes mechanisms to evaluate and encourage performance in the case of recruitment in order to guarantee the appropriate quality and the required empowerment of the recruits in collaboration with the schools and training centers of the Air Force. It is responsible for monitoring the execution of the Air Force training programs to develop individual skills and to follow the knowledge control procedures to ensure the proper performance. Finally, this office verifies the correct application of the instructions issued by the General Staff in the field of Human Resources.

The limitations of HRM

Certainly, the adopted system of human resources management has some weaknesses or limitations. The most restrictive limitation is the lack of an efficient information system for human resources management, the lack of a career path for the air force specialties - which is also the case for other armies - the lack of organization and equipment charts for each organization, and finally the fact that in some cases the air force is not able to retain its personnel and

that they leave for other professional fields

Limitations in HRM functions

- In terms of recruitment:

As the number of annual departures remains high, the Air Force is obliged to ensure an increasing number of recruitments each year. The success of recruitment campaigns is therefore a major concern for the HRM function. In addition, the sudden increase in recruitment volumes has temporarily dried up the recruitment pools.

In addition, the competitive examination is the preferred method for the majority of recruitments that are carried out. One year in advance, the Air Force defines its needs according to the different categories of personnel and according to the allocated budget. The duration of the recruitment process is very long.

Finally, the Air Force is unable to implement operational action plans based on their strategic objectives due to their cumbersome bureaucratic structures. For example, there are significant discrepancies between the number of recruitments planned and those actually carried out.

- At the training level:

For the Air Force an annual training plan is prepared each year in consultation with the heads of

the various departments. However, training plans are rarely carried out in full due to the heavy workload, the resistance of certain managers or external factors such as what happened in 2020 (coronavirus). In addition, there is no continuous training for the various military personnel.

- On the evaluation level:

Air Force personnel are subject to evaluation, most often by means of a form that groups together a set of criteria. Periodically, usually once a year, a grade is given to subordinates by their immediate superior. Theoretically, this mark is used essentially to award a performance bonus, the amount of which depends on the mark obtained. In practice, however, all subordinates, with rare exceptions, obtain excellent marks and thus benefit from the maximum amount of the bonus. This state of affairs makes the evaluation process “a mere administrative formality”, “more paperwork”.

Non-efficient human capital maintenance

This conclusion is drawn through an observation of the lack of motivation among some soldiers, translated in cases by an increase in the number of resignations among the military or by the appearance of the phenomenon “burn out” which

presents a professional exhaustion resulting from a stress at work that has not been properly managed and which has a negative effect on the professional efficiency, this phenomenon can lead to the departure following health reasons.

Moreover, the appointment in the different functions is done according to the grade without taking into consideration the competences of the person appointed.

Moreover, even if the Human Resources(HR) strategy development aspect is present in the Air Force, it does not come from the awareness that placing the individual at the center of the organization allows it to be more efficient but from a budgetary necessity.

For this reason, the implementation of a personnel condition policy, contributing to the morale and cohesion of airmen, is also an essential determinant of HR policy.

Lack of organization and equipment charts and non-existent career paths

Human resource needs were often identified by the lack of a specific position. Consequently, the need for numbers or specialties is an immediate response to an urgent situation. The use of an in-depth study or a schedule of organization

and preparation ((Forward-looking management of jobs, staff and skills (FMJSK)), is not put in place despite the important role it plays in determining the number of personnel as well as their career path.

The Ministry of National Defense clearly does not have a Cartesian roadmap that serves to specifically identify future recruitment needs, despite various attempts in this area.

In this context, given the remarkable evolution of its needs, the Air Force is facing a complexity which is spread over several points such as the insufficiency of a provisional management of jobs and skills and the absence of a clear process in the management of professional careers, in addition, there is no framework that defines the different stages covered by a military officer throughout his career.

Lack of an efficient information system

Since its creation on June 15, 1965, the Air Force has undergone several organizational and structural evolutions. While the constituents, human resources remain confused due to the difficulties and limitations they present during the application.

These limitations are mainly reflected in the absence of a database and a clear process, reliable and

capable of managing in a dynamic and interactive way the relations between the offices and the different departments and groups.

The Air Force, like other armies, has adapted to a constantly changing societal and economic environment in order to meet the challenges posed by their increased power. It now intends to meet these challenges by implementing both traditional and innovative solutions.

3. NEW TRENDS IN HRM AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE AIR FORCE

The objective of the “HR maneuver” is to ensure that the armed forces have sufficient numbers and quality of personnel. To achieve this in the years to come, faced with a changing pool of talent and in-depth changes in the operational environment, tomorrow’s recruiters and managers will first have to develop the HR process throughout the career. But they will also have to influence the human environment of the soldier to help him or her better live the job and fully develop. Finally, HR departments will have to increasingly consider the impact of new technologies, both on the resource itself and the needs of the armed forces, but also in the management of career development.

Acting on processes

In order to support a sustainable and qualified HR policy, it is crucial for the Air Force to act directly on the processes. To do so, it is necessary to improve management, to adapt recruitment to the evolution of supply and demand on the job market, to improve retention and to ensure a good reconversion.

Improving management

This requires, first of all, measures of a general nature applicable to the entire Ministry of Defense. On the budgetary level, the Air Force must plan to finance measures aimed at improving living conditions and better reconciliation of personal and professional life.

In addition, the Air Force's priority is to transform the way of working and the internal organization to make it more flexible and dynamic, leaving behind the hierarchical structures of the past and being able to respond quickly to changes.

In terms of management, the individualization of career paths meets a strong expectation of the military. Everyone wants to be accompanied and advised at each milestone in their career. The corollary of this individualization is the development of a complete career path in all specialties, in order to offer good visibility in the development of one's career.

The New Military Pay Policy project is intended to simplify a pay system that has become so complex that it is difficult to understand. While the aim is to increase and harmonize pay, it will be necessary to ensure that the armed forces are given a certain amount of freedom in awarding bonuses, so that they retain this essential HR policy lever.

Adapting recruitment to technological change and the requirements of new generations

Recruiting is a strategic function for the military. To meet the Authorized Manpower Cap, they must meet their initial recruiting goals.

To recruit well, the Air Force must take into account the characteristics of the population entering the workforce. This generation is accustomed to the personalization of data and the immediacy of digital technology and would have difficulty tolerating long recruitment times. It must therefore adapt its recruitment strategy by better targeting individuals, modifying their process and playing on training. But before taking targeted measures, it is necessary to monitor the health of the recruitment pool, which is tending to deteriorate.

One of the obstacles to recruitment is the fear of immediately

taking up a position too far from home. This is why the Air Force must increasingly develop local recruitment.

The best way to reach Generation Z is naturally through digital tools. Each army must have its own website dedicated to recruitment. These tools are also used for individual follow-up of candidates.

In addition, the Air Force needs to review their recruitment process by improving the training of recruiters, especially their knowledge of the job offers through on-base immersion courses and improving their mastery of language elements as well as sales techniques.

In addition, reducing the length of the recruitment process also helps to address candidate impatience. Being more reactive in defining needs and updating files in real time are ways of reducing waiting times, as is the simplification of recruitment procedures.

Finally, for recruitment, it would be a matter of using artificial intelligence for low value-added tasks to let recruiters focus on activities where human intelligence is still necessary. It's not about replacing humans, but rather augmenting them by using artificial intelligence to pre-select the most relevant profiles. In sourcing, artificial intelligence

can help in sorting and prioritizing applications according to the characteristics of the positions to be filled.

It is also possible to create an "intelligent" algorithm fed by the data of potential candidates in order to broadcast job offers within digital advertising spaces. The profiles of the candidates are compared to the missions proposed by the recruiter so that the targeting solution generates job offers adapted to the candidates' profile. The tool also allows to measure the performance of recruitment campaigns. This could be used by the military. The chat-bot, already successfully used for recruitment, could be used for individual management. Thus, a direct and regular dialogue, although virtual, could take place between the soldier and his manager.

Recruit and retain talent

In an economy based on knowledge and human capital, the acquisition of talent is vital for the success of the army. Hence, finding the right people who are complementary, flexible with their environment, aware of what they bring, mobilized on what they can bring in turn and who never forget that they need others to produce this result, represents a major challenge for managers.

To recruit (and then keep) the best professionals, human resources managers should use social networks, new cognitive technologies and Big Data.

In a flow management, recruitments must compensate for departures, or be superior to them in a period of increase of the workforce. While “natural” departures are inevitable, spontaneous departures can be limited or even avoided by good retention.

Attractiveness is based on the combination of an assumed military identity and the guarantee of a decent professional and personal life. This implies a fair remuneration, a reduction of the constraints linked to the profession, signs of consideration and targeted category measures. Hence, human resources managers in the Air Force must improve the motivation and commitment of their soldiers, offer them better training opportunities and, above all, pay special attention to the new requirements of Generation Y.

While pay is one of the main levers for retaining soldiers, the armed forces are also seeking to reduce the constraints associated with the profession and thus make it more attractive and bearable. In this respect, one promising avenue is to limit the frequency of transfers. The same is true for housing policy,

which strives to offer a wider range of accommodation to transferred soldiers.

Recognition is also a lever for retention. Although it is less tangible than an increase in pay, it contributes to the feeling of usefulness and service that characterizes the military. Military personnel need consideration, commensurate with their commitment and sacrifice. Recognition is also expressed through the quality of command. A close command, in which the leader is close to his men and shows that he is interested in them, is a factor of loyalty. The trend today is towards younger and more diverse leaders, capable of leading digital technologies.

Ongoing staff training

A soldier’s professional career typically lasts 30 to 40 years. Given the rapid pace of technological change, and to prepare for the challenges of the next few decades, the solution is continuous learning. We can no longer simply go to college and build our professional future on what we learned in those years; *today, our professional career has become a continuous learning experience.*

In order to provide their soldiers with the necessary skills and knowledge, training and development

managers should develop less rigid and more personalized teaching models that can be used anywhere and anytime by introducing new technologies. For example: the disruptions to Air Force training imposed on us by the coronavirus pandemic since 2020 could have been avoided if training had been adopted remotely.

Outcome or goal-oriented evaluation

The way to move up in the organization or get a pay raise is changing. Years of experience and degrees are no longer the primary form of evaluation; now the Air Force must move to a faster, more flexible model. Human resources departments must look for new evaluation models based on well-defined objectives and continuous feedback.

Competency-Based Appointment

The Air Force should apply a managerial approach that allows the value and recognition of the skills held by its soldiers. Moreover, it allows the latter to become aware of their current situation and the skills to be acquired. Both of these facts will motivate a soldier to progress professionally, if the follow-up is done correctly. It also gives the

employee an idea of his or her capabilities. Personnel who know their limits and possibilities will be all the more efficient and professional in their duties.

This management tool allows managers to better understand the capabilities and shortcomings of their subordinates. With this information, the possibility of delegating responsibilities or new tasks is facilitated and improved, because the manager will be able to designate in the different processes he manages the most appropriate people to do so. This way, the Human Resources Department (HRD) will be able to work on performance and optimization of the organization with a set of concrete and available information.

Acting on the environment

Process improvement measures are primarily aimed at individual members. They are often targeted and technical. But the military member does not work alone. They serve in society and have a family. Acting on this environment is also a way for the military to meet HR challenges.

Make a better living from your job

A soldier who makes a good living from his profession is fulfilled and entirely focused on accomplishing his mission. Beyond

the mere increase of pay, a policy of action on the environment implies an improvement of the household income in general, by ensuring the good employability of the spouses through a support during transfers.

Nowadays, there are applications that regularly invite employees to answer surveys in order to detect the weak and strong points of the company in real time. The objective is to improve their working conditions, as well as their productivity. Each week, employees receive reduced questionnaires created by work psychologists. The machine then takes care of making the figures speak and identifying their needs to transmit them to the managers. The latter can then implement actions to strengthen internal dialogue. This application could be adapted to armies to support their human relations centers.

Development in the service of operational efficiency

The accumulation of burdens on the military due to a lack of manpower sometimes makes it difficult to perform the job. The use of subcontracting or the reduction of certain burdens is a solution envisaged by the armed forces.

To do one's job well, one must have operational equipment. This is obviously vital in operations, but

also during training and exercises.

Improving living conditions on the premises is also a guarantee of security for the personnel. But without forgetting the role of the command, which must be "at the level of the man" and care for each individual. It must also be experienced and in sufficient numbers, hence the need to limit quota measures and to leave it to the armed forces to set up the staffing levels that suit them. It is also important to develop esprit de corps, which is a powerful cohesive factor. This sense of belonging is not innate, it is acquired by learning the history and traditions of the arms and units.

Towards computerization and digitalization of human resources

The Air Force should provide its human resources with a reliable information system and make them more digital.

The implementation of a reliable human resources information system

The Air Force must overcome the limitations of their existing information systems.

Hence the implementation of reliable information systems will lead to profound changes in the HR function, their impact can be summarized through three

main dimensions: decentralization, personalization and communication.

- Personalization

The personalization of the HR function has resulted from the fact that the organization's personnel can, thanks to the multiple Human Resources Information System(HRIS) tools (intranet, company portal, self-service, etc.), manage a large part of their activities remotely.

The various HRIS software and programs have turned users into customers whose requests must be satisfied as best as possible (consulting schedules and dashboards, reporting, managing absences and working hours, updating individual data, etc.).

The personalization of the HR function represents a major asset for the Air Force. It simplifies processes, reduces the risk of errors (data entry at the source) and saves considerable time. HR managers can offload administrative tasks and focus on higher value-added activities such as management, reporting and decision making.

- Decentralization

The decentralization of the HR function is manifested by the transfer and delegation of authority within the function and has as a direct consequence the change of organizational structures. Indeed, the category of middle managers

has appeared whose role is to liaise between the personnel and the HRD. They collect information from the base, ensure the operational management of the personnel, thus allowing the HRD to focus on strategic activities in relation to the global objectives of the organization (training plans, recruitment plan).

- Communication

The HR function is driven by an internal communication network that ensures the maintenance of relations between the hierarchical levels. HRIS tools are used to disseminate HR information between the various players.

HR software has become a vector for rapid and unhindered communication. They contribute to the circulation of different types of information: various schedules, work instructions, leave requests, pay slips, internal regulations, organization charts, personal information, etc., and to feedback between the various management levels.

Nowadays, human resources management is faced with many challenges: to take care of classic administrative functions (payroll management, time management, employee file management...), while contributing to the achievement of management's objectives and thus ensuring a strategic function of the organization. Being both

an administrative expert and a strategic partner is a contemporary issue facing the HR department. The implementation of an adequate Human Resources Information System (HRIS) seems to be the appropriate solution to this problem.

Finally, a security policy must also be put in place to guarantee the confidentiality of information and its integrity.

Towards a digitalization of HR

Modern armies are at the cutting edge of technology. They must keep up with this evolution and apply all the resulting transformations to their field, otherwise they will be downgraded. HR must therefore adapt to these changes by recruiting and training personnel capable of operating in this new environment. A soldier must now be able to implement complex information systems, which require new technical skills and cognitive abilities to master. Even though the generations entering the workforce are very comfortable with digital technologies, the Air Force should adapt its recruiting and training tools to these new requirements while maintaining the core skills necessary for resilience.

While digital technologies allow for rapid data acquisition and flow, they generate a large and continuous stream that must be

analyzed, evaluated and processed. Whether in the command posts or in the machines, this flow can quickly overwhelm the capabilities of the human brain. Hence the use of artificial intelligence is increasingly becoming the key tool to process the flow of information arriving on the terminals in real time. This implies the adoption of new processes in headquarters and of course the recruitment of developers and data scientists capable of providing the keys to reading these processing algorithms and identifying any bias.

While these new technologies support human resources, they can also replace them in certain tasks, implying a reduction in staffing requirements or at least a transformation of needs. In fact, innovations and technical progress are already having an impact on the workforce of certain units.

In non-military occupations, the development of artificial intelligence may have effects in terms of automation and downsizing. Administrative work in particular could be greatly reduced.

Although many people worry about the negative consequences of this technological revolution, it is actually a great opportunity: this combination of humans and machines (which some define as an “augmented workforce”) can

help create more jobs, increase productivity and allow employees to focus on the more human aspects of the job.

It is clear that the Air Force should invest more than ever in human resources management by adopting new methods that are beneficial to all levels of management.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The recent reforms made by the Air Force at the structural level, despite their importance in making human resources management one of its most important priorities and with a strategic dimension far from the bogged down bureaucracy, so much work remains to be done for future challenges in this field.

After the health crisis with the Coronavirus disaster, which, although it paralysed the world, woke it up and pushed it to manage human resources in a different way.

This, together with the emergence of contemporary trends in this field, made it necessary for the Air Force to take these transformations seriously and take advantage of them to achieve greater efficiency and governance in the management and preservation of the resources placed in it and to streamline decision-making at all levels, relying on an efficient and secure information system as well as modern technologies to become more attractive for skills and talents that have become very scarce nowadays.

And this cannot be done without the implementation of a modern, dynamic and networked structure.

Finally, if this change initiative succeeds, the Air Force will become an inspiring example for other armies at the level of the Tunisian Ministry of Defence.