

Cultural Factors Influencing the Transfer of Human Resources Practices for Employee Motivation: A Lebanese Offshore Petro-Engineering Firm in Iraq

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Cultural Factors Influencing the Transfer of Human Resources Practices for Employee Motivation: A Lebanese Offshore Petro-Engineering Firm in Iraq**Abstract**

The advancements in the field of human resource management, particularly in industrialized nations, have been extensively recorded in recent years. However, it has only just started to claim its presence in the Middle East. Due to the lack of sufficient study related to the transfer of best practices among Arab business organizations in the Middle East, the gaps in Human Resources (HR) practices related to employee motivation are filled by this research. This study aims to investigate the transfer of best practices for employee motivation from a business in Lebanon to its Iraqi counterpart. Despite the close commercial ties between Lebanon and Iraq, there is a lack of research to comprehend if employee motivating techniques in businesses operating in both countries need to be modified. Using a qualitative and case study approach, the study examines how culture affects this transfer. Data are gathered through eight interviews with members of the top management as well as Human Resources managers and Human Resources employees from (Lebanon and Iraq) and then analyzed using ATLAS. ti 23 software. The study results show that despite the geographical proximity of the two nations, the firm must alter or adapt its Human Resources practices to motivate its employees. This is because cultural issues were the primary barriers to the transfer of Human Resources practices. The two countries are more diverse than we realize, even though they are not that far apart.

Keywords: Best Practices, Adaptation, Employee Motivation, Human Resources Management Practices, Iraq, Lebanon, Culture

1 Introduction

The increased level of globalization and internationalization of business, the growth of new markets and the growth of new international business blocs, and an increased level of competition among firms at both national and international levels have raised interest in comparative Human Resources Management studies. Managers and policymakers now need to know how human resources are managed in different regions of the world and how their counterparts in different parts of the globe perceive or react to similar concepts and pressures e.g., when multi-national companies tried to work in different environments, they found themselves in front of lots of challenges. Study indicates that cultural variances deter the transfer of international management practices. As the expansion of multinational companies, on international levels exposes them to various, customs, traditions, and mentality of people resulting in what is applied in one country is difficult to implement as it is in the other. This study however aims to explore if those differences and their impact still hold when two countries are deep-rooted and geographically close.

This study shed light on two countries, both in the Middle East, Lebanon, and Iraq. The relationship between the two countries is old and deep-rooted. It had led to an increase in cooperation and exchange of services between these countries on several levels, most importantly commercial, agricultural, medical, tourism, and others, despite the close commercial ties between Lebanon and Iraq, there is a lack of study to understand if HR practices related to employee motivation require adjustments and adaptation in companies operating in both countries. This study fills the gaps in HRM practices related to employee motivation research. The study focuses on a single, but core aspect of the employee's relation to the company, which is the source of employee motivation. Employees play a crucial role in executing the overall corporate growth strategy. The organization's, overall success is affected by the performance of adequately motivated employees (Jigjiddorj et al., 2019). The study examines the best practices in employee motivation for a company headquartered in Lebanon and has a branch in Iraq. The study considers five specific motivation practices. The chosen criteria behind those aspects are based on the Ability, Motivation, Opportunity framework (AMO) framework. According to the model, people perform well when they have the capabilities, have adequate motivation, and their work environment provides opportunities to participate (Choi, 2014). The ability dimension is usually defined by the acronym KSA (knowledge, skills, and abilities) Thus, Ability- enhancing (A) practices aim to improve those three components. Examples of these practices are employee recruitment techniques or formal training (Kroon et al., 2013). This study focuses on training and development. Motivation (M) deals with an employee's desire to perform, which can be enhanced by extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. Examples of motivation-enhancing practices are incentives or career opportunities (Munteanu, 2014; Rizvi, & Johar, 2022). This study focuses on promotion and compensation & benefit. The AMO model introduces the opportunity dimension as well (O), based on job

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design theories, or empowerment literature (Kroon et al., 2013). Hence, opportunity takes into consideration not only individual characteristics but also the work environment. Practices contributing to the opportunity dimension are, for instance, quality circles or team working, this study focuses on teamwork and relationships between co-workers. This study aims to examine whether the company could implement the same best practices in motivating employees as they are from the source company or had to adapt and modify them to be more fit to the parameters of the host country constraints and traditions, and seeks to answer the following questions, 1) Do companies that expand to neighbouring countries of geographical proximity require them to adjust and/ or adapt their Human Resources practices? 2) How does the cultural factor effect the transfer of these practices? 3) What are the practices that need to be adapted and those that do not? To answer these questions, this study uses a qualitative method for collecting data through unstructured and semi-structured interviews of some previous studies questionnaires. The results are analyzed using ATLAS.ti 23 Software. Based on the analysis of this case study, the data incorporates face-to-face interviews with the CEO, active board members and chairman, HR managers (Lebanon and Iraq), and HR employees (Lebanon & Iraq). The exploratory findings demonstrate that the two neighboring countries adapted their practices to motivate their employees in the Iraq subsidiary; the methods of motivating their employees differ. The practices were completely adaptable due to cultural forces. Although the two countries are not that far away from each other, the people of the Lebanese & Iraqi communities have different customs, traditions, and even different mentalities leading the company to make adaptations/ justifications for its Best Practices in motivating their employees implemented in Lebanon, before transferring them to be used in Iraq to make them more fit to the Iraqi community. Lebanon & Iraq are more diverse than we might assume.

2. Literature Review

2.1 HRM Practices Diffusion

With the increased globalization of MNCs and the classification of HRM practices as a major measure of success or failure in international business, the emphasis on the diffusion of HR practices has increased, the transfer and diffusion of HRM practices within geographically dispersed operations of MNCs are receiving heightened attention, in particular, because it is believed to significantly influence the performance of MNCs (Chiang et al., 2017). This international transfer of practices, including HR practices, is a particularly challenging process due to the requirement to move between two geographical areas with disparate cultural features. Certain multinational corporations adapt to local and national norms throughout their foreign operations, whereas globalization has resulted in the standardization of certain parts of the managerial system, such as personnel, culture, and labor practices (Agarwal & Al Qouyatahi, 2017). According to Opong (2018), while companies may find it practical to have corporate-wide policy initiatives throughout all their international operations, they may find it inevitable to be sensitive to local circumstances when it comes to HRM practice transfer because they are more susceptible to local social norms than their overall practices and strategies. This demonstrates the importance of national culture in the transfer of HR practices to subsidiaries, even though there must be many similarities between nations in the same geographic region (Wijewantha, 2019).

2.2 AMO Model as an Explanatory Framework for the Impact of HRM Practices

The AMO framework was first developed by Bailey (1993), and later the model was extended by Appelbaum et al. (2000) in the context of high-performance work systems (HPWS), and its acronym represents the three factors that enhance performance: individual ability (A), motivation (M), and the opportunity to participate (O) (Bos-Nehles et al., 2023). The ability (A) component is commonly referred to by the abbreviation KSA (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities). As a result, ability-boosting activities seek to increase those three components. Employee recruiting strategies or formal training are examples of these activities (Kroon et al., 2013), in this study the focus on training and development. Motivation (M) is concerned with a worker's drive to accomplish, incentives and career prospects are examples of motivation-enhancing approaches (Rizvi & Johar, 2022). The emphasis of this study is on promotion, compensation and benefits. Opportunity (O) considers not just personal traits, but also the work environment, quality circles, and teamwork are examples that contribute to the opportunity dimension. The study at hand focuses on teamwork and establishing & strengthening relationships between co-workers.

2.2.1 Training and Development: T & D have a substantial outcome on the organizational success by elevating employee performance (Singh, 2024). In addition, several previous studies confirm the link between employee motivation and training (Gullu et al., 2018; Dwigita

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& Musliikh 2023; Arulsamy et al., 2023; Hasyim & Bakri, 2024). Cross-national studies demonstrate that training and development are embedded in their national context. The evidence implies that there may be some significant disparities in training and development approaches between nations (Drost et al., 2002). In the same context Budhwar & Sparrow (2002) & Cooke et al. (2017) contend that HRM practices which include training & development are powerfully formed by nationwide culture and institutional formations. These differences between countries really matter when we look at how multinational companies pass on and adjust their training and development practices in different cultural environments.

2.2.2 Teamwork: Although teamwork is extensively employed and beneficial in Western businesses, however, there is limited information on how Eastern firms' welcome teamwork, given their cultural background, Countries' cultural environment affects the perception of groups or teamwork, and what works in one culture may not work in another (House et al., 2004). Hofstede's cultural characteristics of collectivism and individuality are relevant to research that examine student or employee teamwork preferences and actions. Collectivist and individualist cultures approach group work differently, resulting in diverse group processes (Galanes et al., 2004). According to some experts, cultural values impact attitudes toward collaboration. For example, Flowerdew (1998), proposes that cultural values and background, namely the Confucian value of cooperation and the concept of "face" shape a preference for group work that may serve as a useful tool for teaching a second language. Ultimately, effective teamwork supports a person-centered workplace culture (Coetzee et al., 2021).

2.2.3 Compensation and Benefits (C & B): Various studies have attempted to explain differences in compensation and benefits between nations, from a cultural standpoint. For example, Adamovic (2023), found that Employees who hold more 'Americanized' values—such as strong individualism, low power distance, and high masculinity—generally prefer rewards to be based on task performance. Meanwhile, employees with more 'equality-focused' values—like high collectivism, high femininity, and low power distance—are more likely to favor rewards being distributed equally. In the same context, research by Posthuma et al. (2023) shows that the effectiveness of pay-for-individual-performance (PFIP) differs widely across cultures, as it tends to have a stronger motivational impact in more individualistic societies, while its effect is weaker in cultures that are more collectivist or have high uncertainty avoidance.

2.2.4 Promotions: Studies have attempted to discuss discrepancies in promotion between nations. For example, (Segalla, 1998) surveyed 100 European managers intending to detect variations in promotion and pay across nations. The main distinction was found between German managers who prefer objective performance criteria and remuneration based on measurable individual performance factors and French managers who prefer seniority and group loyalty and remuneration based on group performance rather than individual performance. Aycan, Z. (2005) suggests that in cultures that are collectivistic, low in

performance orientation, and high in power distance, promotions are more likely to be based on seniority, loyalty, and strong interpersonal relationship, especially with supervisors, and that in-group favoritism tends to play a larger role.

2.2.5 Relationships with Co-workers: Coworkers are an important element of the workplace, and employees are expected to work well with their coworkers and superiors. Positive interactions with coworkers have been shown to increase an individual's degree of organizational commitment and motivation. As a result, firms must focus on developing good relationships between employees and their supervisors. According to Kuvaas (2008), the quality of the employees' relationships has a substantial effect on the motivation behind their behavior. Because an engaged workforce has a significantly positive influence on organizations, promoting employee engagement with an emphasis on strengthening the employer-manager relationship must become a priority for firms of all sizes (Johnson, 2020). Cross-cultural research shows that the motivational value of relationships with co-workers varies from one country to another. Zhao & Pan (2017) found that employees in Asian, Latin American, and Arab cultures tend to draw strong motivation from teamwork and peer relationships, while German employees are less influenced by peer relations and respond more strongly to individual-focused incentives.

2.3 Heenan and Perlmutter's EPRG Model

Multinational corporations have several choices for developing effective IHRM practices for implementing multinational strategies. When it comes to strategy and staffing senior management roles abroad, multinationals can select between four IHRM orientations. According to Heenan & Perlmutter (1979) the EPRG model provides a good lens for considering MNC attitudes toward international human resource management (IHRM). They suggest four types of EPRG-abridged management strategies: (1) Ethnocentricity (2) Polycentricity (3) Regiocentricity and (4) Geocentricity.

An ethnocentric staffing approach, according to Heenan & Perlmutter (1979), indicates that corporations predominantly recruit expatriates with parent country nationality to assume top management positions in abroad subsidiaries. This is a home-country-oriented approach, which is typical when launching a new business or when technical skills are unavailable in the home nation. IHRM oversees finding eligible expatriates for abroad postings. They believe that home-country standards and procedures should be prioritized in abroad operations, which can assist ensure consistency and reproducibility (Lee et al., 2022). This is a host-country-focused approach, from top to bottom, host country nationals are commonly utilized in the subsidiaries. It gives local workers the authority to lead subsidiaries and establish sections of their management practices. This is a significant adaptation to the local environment because MNCs believe that each country is unique, and effective management should be produced by

subsidiaries and monitored by local managers (Chung, 2024). Expatriates from the parent country are rarely utilized in polycentric IHRM strategies.

Regiocentric IHRM is a branch of polycentric IHRM. Employees can be hired from a third nation inside the area, according to a Regiocentric IHRM, as the third nations are situated near the borders. However, the subsidiary manager is required to speak the language of the MNC's headquarters. Polycentric and Regiocentric multinational corporations typically hire parent-country citizens for senior or technical jobs, mainly when strategic control or technology transfer is required (Tarique et al., 2022). Its mission is to control overseas international operations and transfer technologies to production sites in the host country. Geocentric Staffing Approach is a global perspective. When MNCs want to integrate all international subsidiaries on a worldwide scale, they use the geocentric method, according to Heenan & Perlmutter (1979). Given that senior management roles are filled regardless of nationality, MNCs try to attract the most capable people who can readily adapt to any culture and are generally bilingual or multilingual. Global MNCs attempt to govern their subsidiaries through the socialization of their organization's ideals while being flexible enough to accept the variations in the cultures of their subsidiaries. This method preserves a high degree of decentralization while maintaining overall cohesion and alignment with global HRM standards (Dowling et al., 2023).

2.4 Culture as Influence the Transfer of HRM

National culture is a key influence around IHRM, out of all the elements recognized as impacting the transmission of HR practices (Evangelia & Myloni, 2023). Cross-cultural differences in business arise because MNCs apply attitudes, expectations, work methods, and behaviour shaped in their national and organizational cultural environments to their business relationships (Ojatorotu, 2024). The impact is especially severe for any MNC with a diverse workforce since different cultures lead to varied points of view and reactions to the transferred HRM practices (Baroun, 2024). MNCs must comprehend and analyze the host country's culture to succeed while establishing a company there. They must thoroughly comprehend each employee's expectations, as different cultures and subcultures have varied preferences for work scripts and procedures (ABYABA & Achibane, 2022; Fehér, 2022). In terms of the transmission of ideas and HRM practices, the cultural approach leads to a better understanding of the links between national culture and management practices, as well as identifying the primary barriers to the spread of HRM practices (Eisend et al., 2016). The concept of "cultural distance" is commonly used to better comprehend and operationalize the cultural gap, referring to the difference between host and home nations (Beugelsdijk et al., 2018).

Many studies have utilized Hofstede's cultural dimensions as significant explanatory factors to explain how human resource management policies and practices differ across borders (Hofstede, 1980; Kirkman et al., 2006; Taras et al., 2012). Hofstede defined culture as the software of the mind in his research on the influence of culture on managerial practices

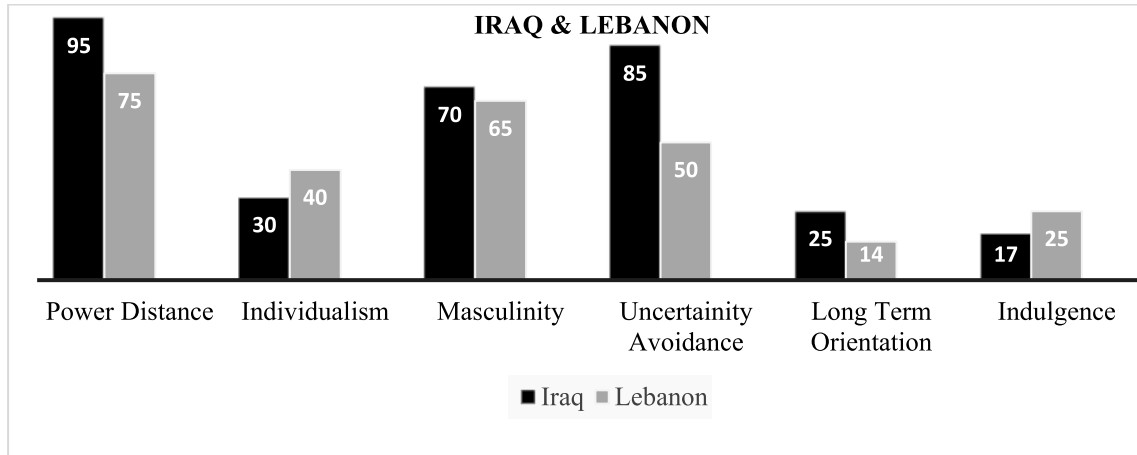
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(Hofstede,1980). The framework specifies six (firstly four) cultural characteristics that contribute to the formation of distinct national cultural profiles, namely: Power Distance (PD), the degree to which individuals of a community accept that power is dispersed unequally (Hofstede, 2011). Individualism Versus Collectivism (IDV) refers to how well each member of society is incorporated into a group (Hofstede, 2011). Masculinity Versus Femininity (MAS), refer to the extent to which members of society are more forceful, materialistic, and value accomplishment (Hofstede, 2011). Uncertainty avoidance (UA), the degree to which people feel intimidated by ambiguous and unclear situations (Hofstede et al., 2010). In addition to the four dimensions, Hofstede later introduced two further cultural dimensions: Long-Term Orientation (LTO) and Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR).

People in a long-term orientation (LTO) culture are more concerned with the future and their ability to adapt to changing situations (Hofstede, 2011), whereas Short-term orientation societies (STO) prefer to follow tradition, protect face, and fulfil social duties (Hofstede et al., 2010). Indulgence Versus Restraint (IVR), is described as the amount to which people attempt to control their urges and impulses due to their upbringing. Weak control is referred to as "indulgence," whilst comparatively strong control is referred to as "restraint." (Hofstede, 1980). In this segment, this study looks at the cultures of Lebanon and Iraq using Hofstede's 6-D Model (www.hofstede-insights.com, 2025). Hofstede has assigned a number (from 0 to 100) to every aspect. If a score is less than 48, culture scores are regarded as very low on that scale, whilst scores more than 52 are regarded as reasonably high on that scale. Scores between 48 and 52 are classified as moderate (Djekic et al., 2021). According to the Hofstede 6-D model (Figure 1), Iraqi and Lebanese cultures appear to be quite similar. Both Lebanon and Iraq score high on Power Distance (Iraq 95; Lebanon 75), low on Individualism (Iraq 30; Lebanon 40), in terms of Uncertainty Avoidance Iraq scores 85 on this dimension, indicating a strong desire for the avoidance of uncertainty, while Lebanon scores 50 on this dimension, indicating no obvious preference. Both countries are masculine (Iraq 70; Lebanon 65), short-term oriented (Iraq 25; Lebanon 14), and low in Indulgence (Iraq 17; Lebanon 25).

Figure 1 Culture Comparative Between Lebanon and Iraq Cultures Based on Hofstede's 6-D Model

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Source: www.hofstede-insights.com, 2025

The cultural approach is founded on the performer, persons, or a group of people, who are molded by the programming of the mind, from the socialization course, such as upbringing, education, and work careers that are variant from one country to another. The definition and scope of the concept of culture are, of course, debatable (Tayeb, 1994). It is therefore sensible to examine the impact of those aspects of national culture on HRM, which have a sound theoretical base. Studies must first hypothesize how national culture is deemed to influence the operation of HR practices. Different aspects of national culture have been identified by researchers and the focus of this research will be on the following factors:

- The socialization process through which managers are made (Hofstede, 1983) impacts the skill sets that firms believe are essential to resources and for subsequently shaping the selection and development systems (Kobrin, 1988). Examples of socialization methods, relocating expatriates abroad to spread company culture, choosing people who share the core objectives, and bringing host nationals in-house to learn how things are done.
- Common values and beliefs (Tayeb, 1995; Hofstede, 1983) have an impact on people's preferences for certain HR practices as well as how well such practices will work.
- The assumptions shaping managers behavior (Hofstede, 1983; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) This factor has an impact on the perceived relevance of human resources management practices.
- Mindset, the findings of earlier research on mentality show that the "black box" perspective of human resources significantly affects the types of practices developed (Ramesh, 2019; Demortier et al., 2014).

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- The meaning of work (MOW), is directly tied to strategic human resource management (SHRM) and may have some practical repercussions on a variety of programs relating to employees' motivation, recruiting, training programs, and payment methods, to mention a few.
- The impact of the above-mentioned aspects of national culture on HRM is said to vary from region to region (Budwar & Debrah, 2001).

As acknowledged earlier that Budwar & Debrah (2001) framework deals with the transfer of the best practices from MNCs countries to their subsidiaries in the Middle East this research examines the transfer of these practices between two countries within the Middle East using the case of geographical proximity and examine if the transfer of HR practices need adaptation. As in any qualitative research, the research propositions based on the literature review inform the data collection and analysis stages, and these propositions continue to be developed throughout the processes of each stage, According to Yin (2003), returning to propositions during the data analysis stage is very significant. This is for several reasons. First, data analysis needs focus, particularly with data outside the research questions' scope. Second, the possibility of an alternative explanation for a phenomenon due to the exploration of challenging propositions is increased. Third, confidence in the findings is increased due to the iterative data analysis process. And as qualitative research is used to create theories. Therefore, through qualitative research, propositions are made that will benefit researchers in the future to test hypotheses experimentally and quantitatively (Flick, 2013).

Based on all that mentioned above, we can list the following proposition:

Proposition 1: Companies should adapt their human resources practices even if two countries are in geographical proximity.

Proposition 2: National culture influences human resources practices relating to employee motivation through a series of identifiable mechanisms.

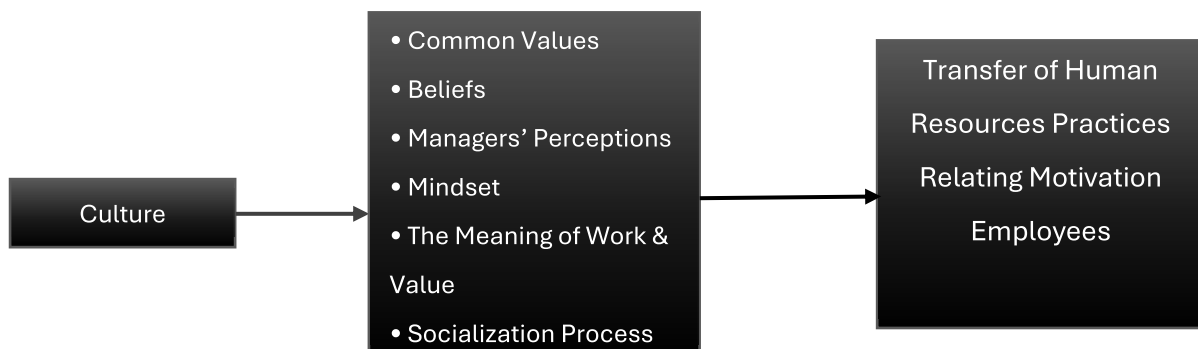


Figure 2 Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

Unstructured and semi-structured in-depth interviews are used in this study's data collecting process. The unstructured interview helps to gather information about the topic, this lack of structure can help the researcher gather detailed information on their topic, while still allowing the researcher to observe patterns in the analysis stage (George, 2022). Also, semi-structured interviews have been conducted to collect data for this study. Participants are prepared in a way that facilitates the achievement of our objective through collecting the information. The answers to this study questions are captured through the extensive discussion that takes place with participants. A total of eight interviews are conducted with the chairman, Executive Board Member Shareholder, CEO, human resources managers (Iraq and Lebanon), and three HR employees (two from Lebanon and one from Iraq). Case study research is defined as "an empirical inquiry to investigate "a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2016). The study followed Eisenhardt's (1989) recommendation to perform case study research using four to ten instances.

3.1 Participants

The study can evaluate a real case study of an existing company, which is the STC s.a.l. Initially, A total of eight interviews was conducted with the chairman, Executive Board Member Shareholder, CEO, human resources managers (Iraq and Lebanon), and three HR employees (two from Lebanon and one from Iraq), then data coding started. Two more participants were interviewed because we weren't sure whether data saturation had been reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Consequently, two additional subjects were interviewed. We reach data saturation from the additional two participants, as most themes begin to recur.

3.2 Procedure

The interview follows a set of questions that the research has provided. The set of questions was mostly inspired by (Akhile, 2019; Nakhle, 2011). Then, based on thorough literature assessments, we constructed the question list through a number of iterations. There are two copies of the questions list, one in English and one in Arabic, since to obtain correct information from the responder, the interviewer must ask the questions in a way that the respondent can grasp their substance (Briggs, 1986). The questions would be delivered to the participant two weeks prior to the interviews, the major goal of gathering information in this manner was to give informants enough time to consider the questions' replies and the examples they would use in their everyday operations before we performed the interviews. Then, Interviews were run, the interview duration time was between 1 and a half to 2 hours. The questions were designed to give a deep understanding of the culture factors that might be behind the choice of the branch to adapt their practices, or the parent's choice to go for an adaptive approach. The study's core factors are directly related to the final questions. They seek to clarify which

practices are standardized and which practices have been modified to match Iraq's culture. It contains a thorough explanation of the best practices put in place at the Lebanon headquarter and the procedure for transferring these practices to the Iraq branch. After being taped, the interviews were transcribed. The transcripts were coded and analyzed using Atlas.ti23, each participant was a distinct case.

4. Findings and Discussion

The main objective of this study is to investigate how the culture factor influence the best practices that organizations use in motivating employees, the company implemented at its headquarters in Lebanon, and the process of transferring these practices to be applied at the company's subsidiary in Iraq, the practices are (training and development, teamwork, promotion, compensation and benefits, and relationships between co-workers), and answer the following questions?

RQ1: Do companies expanding to neighboring countries of geographical proximity require them to adjust and/or adaptations to their HR practices?

The study reveals that the two neighboring countries have adapted their practices to motivate their employees in the branch, and the way to motivate their employees is different and the practices are fully adapted due to the cultural differences between the two nations.

CEO," *The practices that we implement in Lebanon cannot be implemented in Iraq. For example, the motivation in Iraq for our employees most of the time is materialistic in general. In Lebanon, it's both materialistic and moral.*"

HR manager Iraq," *Guidance on the best practices in human resources to motivate employees in Iraq and Lebanon had been placed by each culture's nature, mentality, and customs to boost the company's profitability and preserve its most important asset, the employee.*"

The result is consistent with the literature that motivation is not homogenous, some research indicates differences in employee motivation (Koziol & Koziol, 2020), Such distinctions are geographical and cultural in nature (Hitka et al. 2019). At the same hand, some of the findings contradict the literature, according to Kostova (1999) the greater the cultural distance between the home nation and the host country, the greater the likelihood of rejecting transferred practices.

RQ2: What are the factors that influence the transfer of HR practices related to employees' motivation?

There is a need to identify the extent to which cultural difference between Iraq and Lebanon influence the transfer of human resource practices from the parent company to another culture in which the branch company operates. According to the interviewees, these practices directly or indirectly affect employee motivation and thus productivity at work. It is worth noting that the factors do not have the same effect on practices. This is consistent with the literature that

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confirms (Bae et al., 1998) that there are factors that influence significantly and there are factors that influence moderately, while there are factors that are not affected by the differences between the parent and the host country. The cultural factor and its sub-factors are discussed below:

Culture Factors. The research found that the cultural factor is behind the adaptations and adjustments of HR practices in motivating employees in the Iraqi branch, and this is consistent with the literature. The literature is rich with research about the effect of national culture on HRM practices (Botelho, 2020; Tayeb, 2005; Rosenzweig & Nohria, 1994; Hofstede, 1993). Besides, the findings of (Park & Doo, 2020) indicated that organizational culture directly affected HR practices and indirectly affected employee motivation. This study confirms that cultural factors influence human resource practices relating motivation employees even between two geographically adjacent countries. The various social and cultural elements that have been identified that have arisen from the interview data are listed below:

Active Board Member, *“From my experience to ensure that the employee loves his/her work and sense of belonging to the company, the human resources department should appreciate these things and is from the same environment or the country, so he appreciates the culture, society, customs, and protections in the host country.”*

HR manager Lebanon, *“The nature of the cultural differences between Lebanese and Iraqi societies has a substantial impact on the application of best practices in the HR department.”*

Beliefs. Beliefs are one of the cultural factors that influence in one way or another human resource practices. Findings indicate that beliefs influence practices. HR managers in the host country believe that there are completely different beliefs from the home country. Therefore, there is a need to adapt some practices to suit the host culture. This is in line with the results of the study (Hewett et al., 2019), which argued that beliefs were and still among the most important factors influencing human resource practices. Some examples of the influence of beliefs can be found as follows:

CEO, *“When a Lebanese employee doesn't know something, he immediately admits it and says I don't know and I want to learn; however, an Iraqi employee does not behave in this manner; he considers it a shame if we discuss something, and he doesn't understand it.”*

HR employee Iraq, *“For example, in Lebanon, it is difficult to hire a veiled woman, but in Iraq, it is difficult to appoint a woman without a veil.”*

Managers' Perceptions. Manager's perceptions of cultural differences also greatly influence the nature of practices. Managers have an initial impression about the culture in which they will operate in terms of social, cultural, and religious aspects. Based on managers' initial perceptions, it affects their formulation of human resource procedures and practices. Practices may be modified later if managers' initial perceptions are not correct. These results are

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consistent with several studies (Wang et al., 2022; Styles & Knowles, 2019). Examples that support this conclusion can be found in the following quotes:

HR manager Iraq, *“The Iraqi society is relatively closed, and this affects the employee's mentality concerning his interactions with his co-workers.”*

HR manager Lebanon, *“The Lebanese employee has a more flexible mindset and can accept differences much more readily, which makes it easier for them to work in diverse environments and with foreign companies.”*

Mindset. Mindset of employees, which varies from one environment to another and from one culture to another, greatly influences the best HR practices to motivate employees. Thus motivation lies in the arousal of the internal components of the individual that are controlled by the mind of the individual himself (Ramesh, 2019). The results of the previous literature indicate that the “black box” mindset of the human resource greatly influences the nature of the practices formulated. Some support for these results can also be seen in the following examples:

CEO, *“With Iraqi employees, not only do I have to explain things to them in Iraq, because they are frequently stubborn Iraqis who refuse to change their minds.”*

CEO, *“I'll have to work hard to motivate them because they have a lot of ego and pride. Mentality is complicated.”*

The Meaning of Work. Meaning of work varies from one culture to another. There are lazy cultures, and there are cultures that see work as the meaning of life. The results extracted from the interviews indicate that the meaning and value of the work differ between the culture in Iraq and what it is in Lebanon. On this basis, human resource practices must be adapted between the parent company and the host company. These results are in line with several studies for instance Gerhart & Fang (2005). This is evident in the following quotes:

Active Board Member, *“I must be very careful when dealing with them whereas, in Lebanon, there is no difference if I am there or not because they work very professionally.”*

HR Manager, Iraq, *“Companies hire foreigners, justifying their actions by stating, ‘I want people to work, the Iraqi procrastinates and takes his time while all laws protect him.’ In another word, the productivity of foreign workers is higher than that of Iraqi workers.”*

Common Values. Common values are the most obvious attributes to distinguish one culture from another. Individuals within any culture have mutually agreed upon values related to the way of life, prohibitions, or permitted. On this basis, the results of the current research confirm this aspect in terms of its impact on human resource practices. These values are imposed on human resource managers more than others because they are of a collective rather than individual nature. The results indicate this in line with many literature (Benson et al., 2020; Hayat, 2014). This is evident in the following quotation:

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Active Board Member, *“Female employees frequently need permission from their husband or father, and not everyone in Iraq's culture and environment is so open. They do not accept this idea even though I tried again and again. In Lebanon it is totally different.”*

Active Board Member, *“There is a girl in the Iraq who is meant to train outside Iraq, it is difficult to accept, but it is very rare to have such cases, but in Lebanon, it is ok, and she travels by herself and there is no problem.”*

Socialization Process. In multinational companies, socialization has an important impact on the interaction between employees of different nationalities or cultures. The results indicate that there is a difference in the nature of the interaction of employees with employees from different cultures accordingly. This result is similar to the results of a study Caligiuri & Stroh (1995). This required combining the local reaction with the multinational human resource management plan. The following quotations support this idea.

HR Employee in Lebanon, *“Since the start of relations with the Lebanese side, the Iraqi side has developed a sense of dissimilarity. The challenge lies in getting them to interact with and accept others.”*

Active Board Member, *“On the Lebanese side, the issue is much simpler because, due to their society's adaptability and openness, they readily accept the other and attempt to work with him.”*

The findings consistent with the work of (Wong et al., 2017) the needs for socialization and achievement have been reported as key drivers in employee motivation, as people with strong social and egoistic desires are virtually unmotivated by guidance and control.

In conclusion, the cultural gap between the two countries is behind the decision of the company to adapt its practices. The company's choice to change its methods due to cultural factors is consistent with the findings of a research (Gaur et al., 2019), which concluded that national culture is an essential component in human resource practices. Recognizing dynamics aids in comprehending the linkages between national culture and management practices, as well as identifying major constraints that have hampered the development of HRM practices (Eisend et al., 2016; Gannon & Pillai, 2015).

RQ3: What are the practices that need to be adapted and those that do not?

These practices include training and development, teamwork, promotion, compensation and benefits, and co-worker relationships.

Training and Development. The average Lebanese employee considers how to improve his or her knowledge and professional abilities. After completing training, the Lebanese worker attempts to study and apply it rather than ignoring

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it, and in many circumstances, he or she is the one who requests it. The transfer of the same practice to motivate employees failed for the Iraqi employee due to the concept of training and development is completely different between the employee in Lebanon and the employee in Iraq. The company faced difficulties in motivating the Iraqi employee to take training, especially since the company relies on the implementation of all its projects, especially from a technical point of view on the Iraqi employee. When training is provided for Iraqi employees, the company must explain the value of the training as well as the purpose of the training in order to persuade him of the training process and its effectiveness. When an Iraqi employee learns that he/she is a training candidate, he asks questions and is more concerned about which country he/she will travel to, what hotel he/she will stay in, and how much of the financial budget is granted to him/her. This difference is explained in the following quotes:

HR employee, Lebanon, *“As Lebanese employees, we are self-motivated to acquire the training we desire in order to advance in our careers and earn a higher salary, and we consider how this training will benefit us.”*

HR manager, Lebanon, *“Iraqi training opportunities revolve around travel, place of residence, and country of travel; the Lebanese are more interested in experience and how this training can be used; and the Iraqi employee is more interested in taking training for the vacation portion. The Iraqi worker is more motivated to take training for the vacation part. These differences are a result of the difference in mentality and will not change.”*

As a result, training and development practices have to be altered. The Iraqi employee is concerned country of destination and the place where he or she is going to for training. Employees have stated that he or she might not be able to attend the entire course. As a result, the “best practices” that the company has modified to motivate the Iraqi employee to take the training in full, understand it, and apply it directly is to provide an additional amount of money for an additional 4 days outside of the training days, with the requirement that the training process be completed completely.

Active Board Member, *“We infer that motivating the Iraqis financially is more important to them than the self-development.”*

CEO, *“We place a high value on our employees, so we spend a lot of money on them in the dispatch so that they can visit the manufacturers and see the products and the factory and the flow of manufacturing.”*

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In conclusion, training and development practices were modified, and new practices are implemented. This is consistent with the research, for example, in research done by (Child et al., 2001), training approaches were differed among nations. In the United States, for example, training is broad and primarily course based. In Japan, most training is done on the job. Training in Germany is highly technical.

Teamwork. The implementation of the practices to motivate employees are different, employees in Lebanon place a high emphasis on teamwork and prefer to work in groups, with each member playing a distinct function in achieving the task at hand. They like competing to demonstrate to management that they are the most distinctive member of the team. They also believe that no one individual can achieve a task on their own.

HR Manager Iraq, *"The Lebanese prefer to work in groups, with each member fulfilling a specific role in completing the task at hand. Teamwork is very popular among Lebanese, so we can easily ask them to work in groups."*

HR manager Lebanon, *"Teamwork is definitely better in Lebanon than in Iraq, where employees prefer unilateralism. In Lebanon, we value teamwork more. In Iraq, many people prefer to say things like "me, I did that," "I am like this," "I am so," and "I am much bigger than teamwork.""*

The organization tried to replicate the practice that exists in Lebanon, but they encountered several challenges, including an inability to integrate the notion of cooperation. The fundamental explanation is that Iraqis have a large ego and enjoy privacy at work. In addition to the Iraqi employee's lack in thinking, he or she believes that his or her effort in teamwork would be wasted and given to others.

Chairman, *"I almost gave up hope in Iraqi Teamwork. It is difficult for an Iraqi, by nature, to take and follow orders, and he always considers himself to be a manager who wants to lead."*

CEO *"The Iraqi employee has a high ego; everyone wants to show that he is the one who accomplished the work."*

To motivate and encourage employees to work together, the company have implemented best practices by appointing a team leader on the condition that everyone is loved and that the team members are in direct contact with him. After each employee completes his work, each employee writes a report on what he/she has accomplished and delivers it to the team leader, who then writes the final report and delivers it to the senior management. In conclusion, teamwork practices are modified, which is consistent with earlier research. The cultural background of nations effects the perception of groups and cooperation, and what works in one culture may not work in another (House et al., 2004).

Promotion. The results demonstrate that, among all other practices, the practice of "promotion" has only been standardized in both the headquarters and the branch because the company's structure is restricted, limiting the opportunity to promote personnel. The promotion

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is generally depended upon; if one of the employees leaves the position, the replacement person is promoted to him, or a new "job title" is created. However, if a new role is required, it is filled from outside the company in order to eliminate potential complications and disputes. The following quotes demonstrate this:

HR manager/Iraq, *“Due to the company's status as a small business, promotions are still conducted on a limited scale. There are plans and a clear vision for expansion soon, which strengthens and supports the company's promotion policy.”*

CEO, *“Employee motivation through promotion, whether in Lebanon or Iraq is rare. We have employees who have worked in the same position for years and are only promoted when, for example, the director of human resources quits and is replaced by a human resources employee.”*

Compensation and Benefits. Regarding this practice, senior management emphasizes that compensation differs between the parent and the branch, and even between the employees themselves, it is obvious that they are both over market value. The Iraqi employee is paid and rewarded more than his Lebanese counterpart. The factors that drive the firm to encourage the Iraqi employee are as follows. First, Iraqi employees care more about the material side than the Lebanese employees. Secondly, the nature of work in Iraq and the tasks performed by employees are also somewhat difficult because employees face a lot of administrative difficulties with state institutions and government departments and ministries, with extracting transactions, going to ministries, getting official papers, and communicating with the concerned committees in the ministries. So, when they resolve the issue, they earn the incentive.

CEO, *“In Iraq, this is the most motivating aspect of their understanding, and they are also looking for it, particularly engineers, for-profits from completed projects.”*

HR manager, Iraq, *“For Iraqi employees, however, money comes first. According to management's experience, if a better financial offer than the current one is made, the Iraqi employee will immediately leave the job*

In conclusion, the compensation and benefits practices are different between the two countries, and the company adapted these practices. The study's findings are in line with previous research, for instance, it was discovered individual performance-based schemes are preferred in nations with high levels of individualism, or the degree to which the self comes first (Hofstede et al., 1990), as opposed to nations with low levels of individualism, where group performance-based schemes are preferred.

Relationships Between Co-workers. In Lebanon, interpersonal relationships at work are crucial. The employees are friendly with one another and the senior management. For the Lebanese, socialization is incredibly essential and affects productivity. The firm planned and organized frequent outings, dinners, and other social gatherings to develop the bonds between

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its Lebanese staff. The organization adopted a model that encourages workers by fostering better relationships between them and their bosses.

HR manager, Lebanon, *“We are a family in Lebanon who feels a sense of belonging and loyalty. I enjoy my job, and I'll reiterate that the company's lifestyle has an impact on the family atmosphere; we have gatherings and go out together. Remember that this mainly happens because our culture accepts it, and this has greatly motivated strengthen employee relations with one another and motivating us as employees.”*

However, the construction of affective relations seems to be far away from the essence of Iraqi employees which private questions are not permitted in the workplace. Respect for private life is essential, and the separation between family and work life is a central element that must be valued and factored into the equation to create a comfortable work environment for the employee.

Active Board Member, *“Iraqis prefer to keep personal and professional relationships separate. In Iraq, we simply respect their privacy, which is both comforting and motivating for them.”*

According to what was agreed upon between the human resources department in Lebanon and workers, the corporation employed a variety of methods to stimulate its employees in Lebanon, such as monthly activities and corporate outings. While the “best practices” to strengthen the relationship between the Iraqi employees are to respect their privacy and conduct lunch invitations at the company only.

In conclusion, the company adapted its practices relating to employee motivation (training and development, teamwork, compensation and benefits, and relationship between co-workers). The company tended to conform to the local environment and was locally responsive, while the practices of “promotion” has been exporting from the headquarter to the branch due to the limited of the company structure. The cultural factor had an impact on HR practices linked to employee motivation. As a result, the business decided to adopt an adaptable strategy. Despite their physical proximity, the two adjacent nations are more varied. The findings reveal significant variations between them. The organization encountered opposition to employing the same methods since the culture is different, making it difficult to transfer HR practices for employee motivation. The finding is consistent with the work of (Wijewantha, 2019), which highlights the relevance of national culture in the transfer of HR practices to subsidiaries, even though nations in the same geographic region, may have numerous similarities. At the same time the findings of this research are contrary to the literature as the literature suggests that the more the cultural distance is large between the home country nation and the host country, the more the probability of resisting transferred practices (Adler, 2001; Hofstede, 1983). Despite the classification of Hofstede that Iraq and Lebanon are Arab countries, it is seemed that,

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according to Ayyash-Abdo (2001) states, “Lebanese culture is Arab colored by Western influences mainly French and American”. Therefore, the company applied different practices in motivating their employees in a way to fit each local environment. In light of the above, we can conclude the following about the propositions of this study:

Proposition 1: Companies should adapt their human resources practices even if two countries are in geographical proximity.

Proposition 2: National culture influences human resources practices relating to employee motivation through a series of identifiable mechanisms.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the transfer of Human Resources practices for motivating employees from Lebanon to its Iraqi branch. The key research question, however, was: Do companies expanding to neighboring countries that are geographically close need to adapt their HRM practices? the two neighboring countries adapted their practices to motivate their employees, the methods of motivating their employees differ, despite the geographical proximity and Hofstede’s classification that the two countries are similar, yet the transferring of best practices in employee motivation between two nearby nations are different. Therefore, the practices are completely adapted. The cultural differences between the two countries had a strong impact on the transfer of Human Resources practices that pertain to employee motivation. In summary, the two neighboring countries Iraq and Lebanon, which are both located in the Middle East are more diverse than one might assume. The substantial Western influences in Lebanese culture create a hybrid culture (Western-Arab culture), Kikoski (2000) states, Lebanon has long had a sizable Christian population, making it unique among Middle Eastern states. which has been according to Khashan (1992) historically accepting of Western cultural norms. Whereas Iraq is a wholly eastern country ruled by conventions and traditions (pure eastern culture). These variations led the company to adjust and modify its best practices in employee motivation that had been applied in Lebanon before transferring them to be employed in Iraq to make them more fit to the Iraqi population.

5.1 Company Recommendations

1. Company management should study regional cultures and subcultures before setting human resource practices. Culture is the most influencing dynamic in international companies' activity in general, especially the activities related to human resources. It is noted from the comments obtained, that the working human resource managers were surprised by many of the cultural factors that faced them. This indicates that these factors have not been thoroughly studied. Therefore, there were implications for this ambiguity that they faced, which made the adaptation of human resource practices take longer and by relying on the method of trial and error. As a result, the management of companies that plan to enter new markets must study

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seriously and in-depth the target cultures. It's insufficient to study culture in general or rely on the general impression of those cultures. In this context, it is possible to benefit from consulting organizations or the experience of managers of companies that have practiced their business in those markets.

2. Companies should be ready to adapt practices based on regional cultural needs even if the subsidiaries are close in proximity. The findings show the certain practices are adapted.

3. Companies should be overall flexible and adaptable. Any business must be adaptable, and ready to construct its best practices to make them more suitable for the host environment, which will result in the maximum benefit of the firm.

5.2 Academic Recommendations

1. The results of this study have many implications, in theory, there is a need to test the framework and its variants on larger companies and in different cultures within the Middle East.
2. Since this study has used a qualitative approach, the findings of this research could be tested further by conducting quantitative surveys to increase the credibility of qualitative results as, the use of quantitative will give more accurate and clear results.
3. Conducting comparative research between the governmental sector and the private sector to find out the extent of similarity or difference concerning the essential variables covered by the current research.
3. Transforming the methodology of researchers in data analysis by transitioning from paper-based to computer-based systems, since some qualitative researchers exhibit reluctance to utilize software due to the apprehension that it may autonomously conduct the analysis or dominate the analytical process. (Garcia-Horta & Guerra-Ramos 2009).

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

The methodology is the first limitation of this research. Even though the qualitative case study is considered an appropriate approach for this study, this can be viewed as a limitation due to the issue of generalizability. It would be interesting to use a combined methodology in future research (qualitative and quantitative) because the case study done in this study involved a smaller number of participants than would have been included if using survey questionnaires. The willingness of respondents to provide reliable information is another limitation. Some of them were afraid of providing information they thought might be used against them, especially when the questions are related to the other country, they avoid give judging when they talked about the attitude of the other country for instance, their culture, attitude at work.

The study emphasizes on the best practices relating to employee motivation the company implements to motivate its employees in Lebanon and Iraq, future research may extend this study to include more HR practices, for instance, performance appraisal, also, further research can concentrate on one practice to better understand the practice-related host-country effects. The need to improve and develop the model of this research from researchers in this field may be achieved by adding more variables, that are not covered by this study, for example institutional and the relationship between the parent company and the branch, as the use of other variables would give more useful results. As the focus of this study is on two Middle Eastern nations (Lebanon and Iraq), it is relevant to add other comparative studies in the region where (to my knowledge) no research on the transfer of HRM practices has been conducted. Further regional comparative studies generate more findings that would generalize the results.

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