On the traces of a relatively new phenomenon in management sciences -- Territorial-human resources management: What it is and how it works?

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Abstract

The study aims at highlighting a relatively new phenomenon in management sciences. This is called Territorial-Human Resources Management (T-HRM). Since its inception in the Francophone literature more than fifteen years ago, this topic has been subjected to a growing body of research, including both empirical and theoretical development. The study relies on a theoretical approach that stands from recalling T-HRM historical perspective to shedding the light on the following questions: how does T-HRM emerge? How is it defined and what are the main practices? On the basis of what line of research it may be associated? Limitations derived from the French model of T-HRM allow providing a new and extended definition quite useful for future research that merely will be based on the Anglo-Saxon perspective of T-HRM that we lay the foundation for. In contrast to previous studies that still confine T-HRM in the Francophone literature, our study goes beyond these precursor works and provides new insights for worldwide scholars. This may be the first study conducted in English about the topic and the paper may be helpful for those new in this field.

Keywords: Territorial-HRM, history, practices, francophone literature.

INTRODUCTION

Territorial-Human Resources Management (T-HRM) emergence can be traced back to the 2000s in the French academic world where it is considered as the extension of HRM scope to the territory (Defélix et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the phenomenon has drawn a number of scholars’ attention in becoming a particular research focus. A leading literature with a French connotation often attempts to describe it with the use of several theoretical framework: network actor theory (Mazzilli, 2010, Mazzilli and Pichault, 2015), social network theory (Loubès et al, 2012), theory of institutional entrepreneurship and network actor (Calamel et al, 2016). These works go beyond describing and characterizing the phenomenon but also make it possible to understand what it is about. They put out strong insights in terms of understanding and defining the scope of Territorial-Human Resources Management (T-HRM). However, in spite of its proliferation in the underlined Francophone literature, it is obvious to notice a poor description of the phenomenon in the English-speaking world. Studies that rely on both Anglo-Saxon context and style to alert about the relevance and promising outcomes of such a topic are rare. From a much broader perspective, except for the particular work of Rivière et al. (2019) published in English version by the French journal « @grh », it is difficult to observe works that make a big step in terms of providing in-depth insights to understand the basis of such a phenomenon for worldwide researchers. The authors focus on the « Mechanisms for the construction and appropriation of a GPEC tool expanded across the territory (GPEC-T) in the healthcare and medico-social sector ». They found that a Forward-Looking Management of Jobs and Skills tool (GPEC tool) expanded across the territory allows for building territorial skills through a collective approach. Nevertheless, their work is far from being a seminal one due to the fact that it does not attempt to put out the ins and outs of such a phenomenon.
Hence, there still be a lack of empirical and theoretical work based on the Anglo-Saxon context that really focus on the phenomenon: T-HRM is little explored in the English-speaking academic world. Thus, there is a need to develop both significant descriptive and empirical contributions that help introduce it to a large public of scholars. In light of this, the paper contributes to first providing useful insights to understand T-HRM and then constitutes a reminder for researchers from other parts of the world about the importance and relevance of such a phenomenon, if conducted in territories whose socio-cultural realities differ completely from those of French-speaking countries. The study is structured as follows: We begin by tracing back the history of T-HRM, we then define and underline its main practices prior to highlighting it from the lens of two lines of research. We further put out limitations that allow proposing another definition of T-HRM.

TRACING BACK THE HISTORY OF TERRITORIAL-HRM

The recent Francophone literature, as the birthplace of Territorial-HRM, informs that the idea of extending HRM to the level of the territory was first put forward in the renowned report by Henri Rouillault (2007) on the three-year requirement to negotiate forward-looking management practices delivered to the French Minister of Employment. In that report, he gave a special emphasis to a territorialized approach for the forward-looking management of jobs and skills (Défèlix et al., 2013). Once the initiative was launched, then the phenomenon definitively emerges during the same period with the basic principle of broadening HRM practices at the territorial level. By this time, numerous conferences, seminars, and scientific days specifically dedicated to the topic of territorializing HRM took place (Défèlix et al., 2013). More specifically, the 2008-2010 period is mainly marked by the first communications on Territorial-HRM at the Francophone Human Resources Management Association (AGRH) series of conferences (Bories-Azeau et al., 2008; Bories-Azeau and Loubès, 2009; Defelix et al., 2010). In the same vein, the French journals named « @grh » and « Gestion des Ressources Humaines » respectively devoted the works of Defèlix et al. (2008) about considering the human dimension in Competitiveness Clusters and that of Beaujolin-Bellet (2008) who viewed the territory as a laboratory of innovation in the management of restructurings consequences. In the line of these seminal works, it must be emphasized that two main factors generally lead to the territorialization of HRM: internal factors such as the shortness of breath of internal HRM practices in companies and external factors as political pressure (Défèlix et al., 2010). The authors put out nine parameters that characterize an HRM territorialization process. These are the leading actor, the partnership composition, the target site or sites, the components of the territory, the nature of developed actions, the time horizon of mobility, the targeting of a protected or exposed domestic market, the distinction between dialogue and negotiation processes with the social partners or not, and the notion of territorial attachments (Mazzilli, 2010). In sum, these pioneering works clearly shed the light on the process of territorializing HRM, and give rise to promising new literature that is being more and more prolific. We now should take an interest in what the French literature means by Territorial-Human Resources Management.

TERRITORIAL-HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (T-HRM): WHAT IT IS AND WHAT ARE THE MAIN PRACTICES?

Territorial-Human Resources Management (T-HRM) refers to a model that « implies fostering close links between public and private actors, reinforced by collective actions and structured by links where HR issues are gradually brought to the territorial level where they can be jointly addressed » (Bories-Azeau et al., 2008). This new model breaks with the so-called Traditional HRM historically confined inside the company and aims at taking into account the territorial dimension of HR actions. More specifically, it is considered as the « implementation of a consultation approach, developed jointly by several legally independent organizations, associating private and public actors and attempts to regulate, in a sustainable way, human resources at the level of the territory where they are located » (Mazzilli, 2011: 335). This definition underlies several components that characterize T-HRM. First, it deals with broadening the HRM scope of action to its territory. Second, Territorial-Human Resources Management (T-HRM) is supposed to include the criterion of actors’ heterogeneity (public, private, and institutional) and coordination. Third, it requires close collaboration between actors for a sustainable rather than a momentary resolution of HR issues on the territory. Such a collaboration is justified in most cases by the fact that they are relatively close to each other, that is, they are locally close or practically reside on the same territory. On top of this, a practice of T-HRM can be defined as « one or more HRM activities which are established between at least two companies and in which various third party organizations (administrations, associations, etc.) may participate » (Mazzilli, 2008: 4). In this regard, three grouping levels of T-HRM practices can be listed: Acquisition practices, Networking and communication practices, and Resource regulation practices (Mazzilli, 2010, 2011). The first one refers to mutualizing recruitment procedures (creating common recruitment platforms, posting online common CVs, lending labor and also communicating to attract the territory’s employees). The second deals with sharing information between members of the same network,
sharing HR data, holding exchange meetings or HR clubs such as initiatives that aim at producing links between HR managers of companies of the same territory, and also creating common remote working platforms (Mazzilli, 2010; Calamel and Roquelaure, 2014; Bobulescu and Calamel, 2009; Everaere and Glée, 2011). The third one is concerned with the mutualization of training procedures between companies of the same geographical area, inter-trade supply, career management and, above all the deployment of Territorial Forward Looking Management of Jobs and Skills (Mazzilli, 2011; Dagand, 2010). However, behind these underlined practices, lies something interesting related to the place where they are generally undertaken. This is to say unlike the so-called traditional HRM which stands from the individual scope of companies, T-HRM practices are often developed in spaces labeled as ‘territorial networks’. The following section provides more insights about this.

**TERRITORIAL -HRM: ON THE DISCOVERY OF TWO LINES OF RESEARCH**

Most of the promising works on the present topic focus on how territorial networks guide and structure a type of HRM extended to the territory (Bobulescu and Calamel, 2009; Bories-Azeau et al., 2008; Calamel et al., 2011, 2016; Calamel and Cateura, 2014; Colle et al., 2009; Everaere and Glée, 2014; Loubès et al., 2012; Loubès and Bories-Azeau, 2016). Territorial networks with a « French or Western style » such as Competitiveness Clusters (CC) or Local Productive Systems (LPSs) are assumed to be mostly formal in that they are governed by contractual links (Joyeau et al., 2019). In their seminal work, Ehlinger et al. (2007 :156) define territorial networks as «coordinated sets of heterogeneous, geographically close actors who cooperate and collectively participate in a production process ». This definition allows putting out several aspects such as the actors’ heterogeneity, the existence of certain proximity between them, and above all the cooperative dimension of the network. These three core elements stand as the cement that promotes the interactive dynamic of the interconnection between various networked actors around a territory. The current literature shows several forms of labeling territorial networks, depending on the context or the area of evolution. For instance, we have Clusters in the USA, Industrial Districts in Italy, Competitiveness Clusters and Local Productive Systems in France (Levesque et al., 1998). These latter two types of networks remain, in our view, the most coveted by researchers of the French model of Territorial-HRM. These networks may be considered suitable spaces for the development and resolution of human resources management issues due to their flexibility, the proximity effect, and their inclusion in a social and territorial dynamic. They provide interesting perspectives for all actors involved in a Territorial-HRM approach (Lethielleux, 2017). Thereby, the resolution of employment and skills problems traditionally done within the individual scope of organizations is gradually disappearing and giving rise to a model extended to the territory where the common HR problems of the network’s organizations are taken into account. We therefore keep in mind two lines of research on HRM in territorial networks: HRM in Competitiveness Clusters and HRM in Local Production Systems (LPSs).

**HRM in competitiveness clusters**

The first line of research refers to unpacking HRM practices in Competitiveness Clusters and it seems to be caught in the eyes of many researchers (Arnaud et al., 2013; Calamel et al., 2011; Chabault and Hulin, 2011; Defelix et al., 2008). Competitiveness Clusters (CC) have a French particularity and were set up by the Government in 2005 to meet industrial competitiveness and innovation challenges (Calamel et al., 2016; Defelix et al., 2013). They are defined as «a combination, in a given geographical space, of companies, training centers and public and private research units engaged in a partnership approach intended to generate synergies around joint projects of innovative nature» (DATAR, 2004). This way of designing Competitiveness Clusters allows underlining a certain specificity related to the diversity of actors throughout the presence of the Industry-Training-Research triptych. Therefore, what distinguishes them from other forms of inter-firm collaboration lies in the plurality of involved partners and the impulsive force of public authorities (Calamel and Roquelaure, 2014). In this regard, the issue of taking into account the human dimension may be essential in Competitiveness Clusters and constitutes so far a challenge to be taken up for Human Resources specialists and managers who have to deal with overlapping people of diverse origins and cultures. Defelix et al. (2006) affirm that the recognition of the human dimension in Competitiveness Clusters was proposed along four axes in the DATAR report (2004): encouraging forward recruitment plans, providing collective training, providing collective management of Human Resources within the network and encouraging common structures as employers’ groups. However, we owe Colle et al. (2009) one of the first concrete experiences in understanding and describing HRM practices in Competitiveness Clusters. In the course of their work on the Competitiveness Clusters of the Rhône-Alpes region in France, the authors compile HRM practices they found through four levels: The Member-Organization, the Collaborative Project, the Cluster itself, and the territorial level or intercluster level (Colle et al., 2009). The first level refers to raising employees’ awareness and offering mutualized training. The second deals with a more or less permanent test of groups of workers who belong to different employers. The third level represents the HRM
practices to be used on behalf of all member organizations of the Cluster (for example, the joint recruitment procedure). The fourth level of HRM which is that of the territory, refers for example to the construction of a Territorial or sectorial Forward-looking management of jobs and skills. Following these initial observations, it was revealed that HRM practices used in Competitiveness Clusters can also be grasped through the mobilization of two main reading grids: the contextualist approach (Pettigrew, 1987) and the proximity approach (Bouba-olga and Grosseti, 2008). On the one hand, research carried out by Calamel et al. (2011) through the contextualist approach provides an overview of HRM practices identified in Competitiveness Clusters based on two dimensions: the time horizon of the expected major impact and the preferred level of intervention. The authors in turn retain several levels of the established HR practices: the practices developed bilaterally between the Cluster and a single organization, the inter-firm practices, the practices which affect the whole Cluster and particularly those that go beyond the Cluster, that is to say the HR practices extended across the territory (Calamel et al., 2011). Calamel and Cateura (2014) use the same contextualist approach and discover the emergence of new HRM practices with certain particularity in CompetitivenessClusters: advance planning of upcoming training that can subsequently fit with skills evolution or even the creation of a LinkedIn Group in parallel with HR and training workshops. On the other hand, the proximity approach (Bouba-olga and Grosseti, 2008) helps distinguish a list of HRM practices that are more or less extended to the territory. They are among others the creation of a joint recruitment platform (CV and application), the inter-firm training offerings, the setting up of an HR unit, the common HR diagnostic, and especially the labor loan between member organizations (Calamel and Roquelaure, 2014). Finally, these observations derived from both contextualist and proximity approaches are in line with the work of Mazzilli (2010) who makes similar conclusions by putting out three axes of Territorial-HRM-practices in her research on the « HRM Program » of a Competitiveness Cluster in France. These are the establishment of Forward-looking management of jobs and skills for all members of the Cluster, the development of a « GTEC » tool, and the inter-firm training offer for employees of member organizations of the Cluster. In summary, it must be emphasized that these works clearly indicate how human resources management practices in Competitiveness Clusters strongly draw researchers’ attention (Calamel et al., 2016).

HRM in Local Productive Systems (LPSs)

The second line of research is concerned with the construction of HRM practices in the particular site of territorial networks labeled ‘Local Productive Systems’ (LPSs). The latter refers to «groups of firms and institutions that are geographically close and which collaborate in the same line of business » (Largier et al., 2008, p.44). In contrast to Marshallian districts, Local Productive Systems are marked by some strong coordination links and financial support from public authorities (Loubès and Bories-Azeau, 2010). In addition, unlike the Competitiveness Cluster trajectory, LPSs emerged well before and have been the subject of several experiments on joint HRM. From the « Club des Districts Industriels Français » (CDIF, 2005) perspective, it is generally accepted that most LPSHRM practices deal with inter-firm training, joint or mutualized recruitment procedures, creation of HR exchange clubs, skills sharing and so on (Colle et al., 2009; Le Bulaire et al., 2010). These results are supported by the work conducted by Bobulescu and Calamel (2009) who focus on six LPS of « Bretagne, Rhône-Alpes et Centre » regions. The authors stress four stages of developing a mutualized HRM at the LPS level: communication which facilitates the sharing of information between network members, mutualizing training that involves various actors in the training of network members, and mutualizing recruitment procedures illustrated by the posting of online CVs, lending labor and at last managing skills common to all members of the SPL which seems to be the most advanced phase (Bobulescu and Calamel, 2009). Loubès et al. (2012) make similar remarks by highlighting the existence of collective learning and training between members of the « CAMDIB » LPS in France. Thus, the above clearly outlines that practices found in Local Productive Systems converge on the same idea of a mutualized Human Resources Management and extended to the territory than that of Competitiveness Clusters. This is mainly characterized by inter-firm training, common recruitment procedures, the creation of collective learning platforms concerning the territorial management of skills, etc. (Bories-Azeau et al., 2008; Loubès and Bories-Azeau, 2010). Finally, the underlined HRM practices found on both sides allow affirming that they rely on collaboration between territorial actors; suggesting that one of the main features of HRM in territorial networks (Competitiveness Clusters and LPS) lies in its ecosystem approach including a diversity of public and private actors (Calamel and Cateura, 2014). It has a mutualizing nature and is considered as a constructed concept, driven by a certain public and entrepreneurial initiative (Fedida and Saint-Germes, 2018). In other words, the implementation of a Territorial-HRM approach in formal territorial networks is not fortuitous, it stems from a long construction process that involves a range of public, private, and institutional actors. Furthermore, the term ‘construction project of a T-HRM’ has become famous in the literature (cf. Mazzilli, 2011; Everaere and Glée, 2014). This is to say that T-HRM propelled by formal territorial networks (Clusters and LPSs) has a normative dimension and is supposed to be under public governance.
TERRITORIAL-HRM: APROTOTYPICAL MODEL WITH LIMITATIONS

In light of the extant literature on Territorial-Human Resources Management (T-HRM) we have shown the relevance, it is obvious to keep in mind the collaborative dimension of such a model. Territorial-HRM generally deals with consultation, dialogue, anticipation, and, above all, the mutualization of resources and actions on both sides. It is therefore a prototypical model of HRM, of which we bear in mind three following identification parameters: the existence of a common willingness to bring HR issues to a territorial level, the consideration of the territory as a reference unit (Mazzilli, 2008) which means focusing on a territorial issue, and the transformation of the latter into a strategic variable (Mercier and Colin, 2017), becoming a source of territorial social dialogue. These given parameters make it now possible to identify some limits that could compromise the HRM territorialization process:

- The existence of a social dialogue based on a win-lose strategy, potentially in disfavor of one of the stakeholders. This could somehow threaten the sustainability of employee exchange or recruitment practices at the territorial level;
- The failure of some companies to comply with the environmental and legal constraints of the prescribed territory.

The above-mentioned limitations then mark a path for proposing another definition of T-HRM which takes into account failings that may affect its process of implementation. We, therefore, define Territorial-Human Resources Management (T-HRM) as a voluntary approach undertaken by two or more organizations to extend their common HR issues to the territorial level where they can be treated via territorial cooperation (with various territorial actors) based upon strict respect for ethics, equity and transparency principles. This definition brings out something essential for conducting a T-HRM approach: the sustainability of practices. This should be accompanied by the central role of institutions that are responsible for the public governance of the human resources management territorialization approach.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to highlight the basis of a relatively new phenomenon in management sciences: Territorial-Human Resources Management (T-HRM). This phenomenon emerged in the French academic world in the 2000s where most of the studies have been remaining confined. The paper goes beyond reminding the history of T-HRM by defining and characterizing it with a focus on two lines of research. The study then contributes to laying the foundations for a new research perspective that could be useful to researchers worldwide by proposing a new definition of T-HRM inspired by Francophone works. Based on our study, it will be possible to rely on a clearer groundwork that will make Territorial-HRM the subject of promising research in both French and Anglo-Saxon academic contexts. We thus urge for future research about the phenomenon derived from a worldwide context and not to consider it as a research area that is exclusively suitable for the French academic world.

REFERENCES


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