# AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

# UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF HRM IN SYRIA IN

# TIMES OF CRISIS

by
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A project
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master in Human Resource Management
to the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business
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# AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

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# AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

Huda AlHafar    for    Master of Human Resource Management
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Despite an increasing scholarly interest in HRM in the Middle East in recent, there has been no studies focusing on HRM in Syria. Syria, a country ravaged by war since 2011, is an interesting case in point to explore the role of HRM in times of crisis and extreme uncertainties. Adopting a qualitative interpretive approach, and based on the narratives of 15 HR managers and 14 employees currently working in Syria, this study aims to understand HRM in Syria in times of crisis. We specifically examine HR manager's and employee's perceptions of how the war affected them personally, affected their work relationships and commitment, as well as the role of HRM in these difficult times. Our findings show that the war has created additional challenges to HR managers such as high turnover rates and difficulty in finding qualified talent, due to the fact that many Syrians have been displaced or fled out of the country. On the other hand, HR managers explained the vital role of HRM in times of war and the important role it plays in emotionally supporting employees. As for employees, our findings show that they perceive the HR function as administrative, yet extremely supportive. Their narratives are replete with examples about the negative impacts of the war on them and their work. However, these narratives also bring hope, as they highlight the positive impacts of the war such as bringing people closer together, creating a sense of family, viewing work as a space to do something meaningful and escape the realities of the war. Our findings present interesting avenues for further research to better understand altruism in times of crisis and the role of HRM during and post-war.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

Located in the Middle East, Syria has been suffering for 8 consecutive years from a non-stopping conflict that led to the destruction of most of its infrastructure. Nevertheless, Syria is a country with a strong history and heritage. Damascus, the capital, is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world and was known to be the center of industry, culture and development (Hopwood, 1988). March 15, 2011 marks a black day in Syria's rich history. It is the day the Syrian people entered a long chain of sufferings. Before that date, the country's economy was diverse. The most important sectors included agriculture (22 percent of the economy), industry and excavation (25 percent), retail (23 percent), and tourism (12 percent) (Mahamid, 2013).The total population of Syria increased significantly from 2000 till 2010, reaching 21.4 million inhabitants in 2010. However, due to the war that number decreased and the exact number cannot be determined (UNDP, n.d).

In the early 2000s, Syria was growing. The reforms were motivated by the challenges caused by the decline in oil production and proven oil reserves, and the effect that had on fiscal sustainability (IMFb, 2016). Structural reforms were aimed at deregulating and diversifying the tightly-managed, state-focused economy, while phasing out energy subsidies and restructuring the tax rules (IMFb, 2016). On the other hand, poverty and unemployment were on the rise. There were also considerable regional disparities. Rural poverty indicators were much higher than urban and national indicators as

the rural population did not benefit from the economic liberalization reforms (IMFb, 2016). Farmers in particular were affected by a multi-year drought; The northeast region had the highest poverty ratio at about 15 percent in 2007 and accounted for more than half of the poor in Syria (IMFb, 2016). The two main pillars of the Syrian economy used to be agriculture and oil, which together accounted for about one-half of GDP. Agriculture on its own accounted for about 26% of GDP and employed 25% of the total labor force.

The Syrian conflict has been a burden on the life of Syrians and their economy. The UN estimates that more than 250,000 people have died,6.3 million people are internally displaced and 4.9 million are registered as refugees in neighboring countries like Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan (World Bank, 2018) and many others have been displaced to Europe and North America (Connor, 2018). Reports also show that on average about 538,000 jobs were destroyed annually during the first four years of the conflict, and that young people now facing an unemployment rate of 78 percent have few options for survival (World Bank, 2017). "The fact that 9 million Syrians are not working will have consequences long after the fighting has stopped," said Saroj Kumar Jha, World Bank Director for the Mashreq. "The departure of nearly 5 million refugees, combined with inadequate schooling and malnutrition leading to stunting, will cause long-term deterioration of the county's most valuable asset, its human capital. In the future, when Syria needs it most, there will be a collective shortage of vital skills" (World Bank, 2017).

After 8 years of continuous conflict, the country is expected to move through a transition phase, influenced by increased globalization, growth of emerging markets and increased interdependence of the global economy. Foreign Direct Investments and Multinational corporation's trends are often taken as powerful integral drivers of globalization and its impacts (Rowley & Abdul-Rahman, 2007). These changes will surely affect the HRM function., which will experience shifts as the country develops and opens up to globalization, with impacts from MNCs (Rowley & Abdul-Rahman, 2007).

Despite being an important region (for example, for oil and gas reserves), the Middle East is left behind in terms of international and cross-cultural management research (Al-Hamadi et al., 2007). This is due to the lack of resources allocated for research, funding difficulties, cultural limitations, and data gathering problems such as obtaining access to organizations, obtaining reliable data and developing contacts (Al-Hamadi et al., 2007). Nevertheless, there is now a greater need to conduct research in the region especially in countries facing conflict in order to suggest ways in which companies can adjust their HR practices to their business strategies while taking into account external institutional realities (Afiouni et al., 2014). If we examine closely the emergence of HRM in different countries we notice that it has evolved at different rates as a response to socioeconomic and political elements in the local external environment (Namazie & Frame, 2007).

Developing economies have witnessed various inefficiencies on the institutional setup level including inefficient policy integration, disabled laws and regulations, lack of

transparency in information distribution, redundancy and duplication of efforts and functions in a culture that doesn't support change and development, and lack of collaboration among the different sectors involved (El-Badaway & Hady, 2014). In addition to that, economies with very low incomes suffer from poverty and lack of opportunity. Poverty is generally accompanied with an economic structure that is heavily based on primary production, weak human capacities, and a lack of good employment opportunities (Brown et al., 2011).

Despite an increasing scholarly interest in HRM in the Middle East in recent years (Afiouni et al.,2014; Afiouni et al., 2013), there has been no studies focusing on HRM in Syria. Syria, a country ravaged by war since 2011, is an interesting case in point to explore the role of HRM in times of crisis and extreme uncertainties. Adopting a qualitative interpretive approach, and based on the narratives of 15 HR managers and 14 employees working in Syria, this study aims to understand how the role of the HRM function has changed before and after the war, what challenges HR managers are facing because of the war, and how employee's perception and expectations from the HR department have changed before and after the war.

**Research Questions**

More specifically, the study aims at answering the following research questions:

- 🎬 How did the HR practices in Syria differ before and after the war?

- 🎬 What is the Role of HR in times of crisis?

- What challenges are HR managers facing because of the war?

- What are employee's perceptions of the HR department's role in the company?

- What changes did employees find in their company because of the war?

- Where do HR managers believe they stand now and how do they like their HR department to be functioning in the future?

- How did awareness of mortality affect managers and employees in the company?

# CHAPTER II

# LITERATURE REVIEW

**A.HRM in the Middle East**

Most Arab Middle East countries have fallen behind other parts of the world in many aspects such as knowledge and development (United Nations Development Programme, 2009a; 2009b; 2010) and one of the reasons why many Arab Middle East countries cannot compete well globally is because of their outdated infrastructures, outdated production and operational systems, poorly developed distribution channels, and weak educational systems (Zahra, 2011).

Recruitment and selection procedures, leadership styles, and retention of talent in politically volatile regions are concerns that make HRM a real challenge (Afiouni et al., 2014). Most of the Arab countries are very rich in natural resources such as oil and gas. However, many of these countries suffer from shortages in skilled and professional manpower. Brain drain is a persistent issue for many Arab middle eastern countries such as Egypt, Syria, Algeria, and Jordan who have been among the countries most affected by this syndrome (Zahra, 2011). All of these countries' well-educated youth immigrate elsewhere and the Arab gulf states seem to be the only ones that have escaped this issue (UNDP, 2009a).

An analysis by Al-Jahwari and Budhwar (2016: 115) highlights that HRM is a growing phenomenon in the Middle East but its practices are still largely traditional and reactive. The various HR processes are often designed with Western practices in mind. However, when implemented, the practices are often not well aligned with business strategies, they are for narrow administrative purposes and remain loosely connected with each other (Budhwar et al., 2018).

Countries in the region are realizing the need to further incorporate into the global economy especially when human resources are known to play a significant role in the economic development of nations (Debrah et al., 2000; Tayeb, 1995). They have noticed the significance of investing in education, supporting local R&D activities, and participating in international conferences as they are keys to build innovative and strong organizations (Zahra, 2011). This shift is toward a value-added ideology of widening the scope of the HR function to not only service employees and line managers, but also shareholders, customers and the community at large (Afiouni et al., 2013).

Changes in economies are continuing and inevitable. Understanding changes in organizations is particularly important when changes and fluctuations emerge from the external environment, e.g. the economy, technology and society (Gerick, 1991), and in the internal environment of an organization. In order to become active participants in the global marketplace, Arab Middle Eastern countries must improve their technological base, which is well behind international standards. We are now in a time where access to information is becoming vital and easily accessible. This is not the case in some Arab countries that report

the lowest scores globally on the technology preparedness index, a measure that captures a country's access to modern technology, the existence of a modern technological infrastructure, and technological literacy (United Nations Development Programme, 2009a). Libya, Syria and Algeria are well behind the international technological curve, and their economies lag others in the use of innovative technology that enhances productivity. Moreover, when ranked on the technology preparedness index (TPI) Libya, Syria, and Algeria rank 104th, 105th, and 113th, respectively (Zahra, 2011).

One of the challenges facing the HR function in some countries in the Middle East is the lack of credibility at the organizational level. Instead of being considered as a trusted business partner and being allocated important funds, the HR function is perceived as a purely administrative function with limited budgets, decision making authority and lack of expanded HR processes. Another well-known phenomenon affecting business life is 'Wasta'. Wasta refers to a reciprocal use of favors instead of worth to get things done (Hutchings and Weir, 2006). Because Wasta infers reciprocity it remains engrained in society and this affects the applicability of HR practices (Ahmed and Hadia, 2008). Wasta has been found to affect the hiring or promotion processes where positions would be assigned based on friendship and family connections instead of being based on qualifications and competencies (Giangreco et al., 2010). As Western business practices become more widespread, both globalized Western organizations and modernized ME organizations begin to adopt practices, like Performance Appraisal Systems (PAS), that

potentially can diminish the pervasiveness of wasta (Khoury and Analoui, 2004). However, Khoury and Analoui (2004) found that PAS has its limitations when applied to the ME due to cultural differences, contextual constraints and lack of financial resources.

Changes tend to emerge gradually, but sometimes drastic and massive external developments also affect the operations and development of an organization. These external and internal influences have a strong impact on the organization's subsystems, such as finance, marketing, IT, R&D and Human Resource Management (HRM) (Khoury and Analoui, 2010). Today, it is essential for HR departments to develop appropriate policies and practices to respond to internal developments in management systems such as in technologies and human capital, as well as to external influences, such as war, damaged infrastructures, shortage of talent and high uncertainty. Gradual, external or internal developments are more easily adopted and absorbed than dramatic and major external changes such as a subprime crisis, war, etc. (Khoury and Analoui, 2004). Such changes require great effort, flexibility and advanced HR knowledge to retain high quality employees in a firm or dismiss those of lower quality. Klimecki and Litz (2004) argued that "HRM can and must intervene in the emergent evolution process in order to influence the speed and direction of the development as it can either enhance or hinder the dynamics of evolutionary change…".

Managers play a critical role in the success of the business. One way to develop managerial competencies and effectiveness is by providing managers with opportunities to attend management training programs (Pickett, 1998; Willcocks, 1998; Analoui, 2002).

Management training development in developed economies has become an increasingly important part of business life. In Arab countries, like other developing economies, management and development have become an increasing concern. Unfortunately, they often lead to poor results and failure to contribute to the effectiveness of the managers involved (Mintzberg, 1975; Analoui, 1999). Most training specialists and managers in Arab states describe training effectiveness in their countries as being generally low (Al-Ali and Taylor, 1997, p. 4). The Middle East faces several other issues like recruitment, selection and retention of talent, work attitudes of nationals, nationalization policies, gender issues, labor migration, religion in the workplace, gender and ethnic discrimination in the workplace, leadership style, retaining talent in politically volatile regions and management of expatriates. All of the above are issue that make HRM a real challenge in this region. (Afiouni et al., 2014).

**B.HR in Conflict Areas**

Post-World War II, due to the shortage of skilled labor, high turnover and tense labor relations, businesses felt the need for a scientific personnel management function that would support the firm's finance, production and sales departments, and manage employee relations and related problems (Purcell, 2001). Thus, the personnel function was developed from a welfare activity in some factories to a core activity in all organizations regardless of their size (Watson, 1977).

HRM practices are found to contribute significantly to the accomplishment of a firm's objectives and to the creation of an added value chain for customers and physical resources. In general terms, HRM comprise practices and activities of acquiring, retaining, empowering, and motivating employees. Prior studies have shown that training is also critical to organizational success (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2006). Education is found to be a key to rebuild society and prevent overcoming future conflicts (Vargas-Baron and Bernal, 2005).

During conflicts, systems deteriorate and employees start to lack skills and knowledge which affects their productivity and the performances of companies. Studies have shown that employees start to lack administrative skills and experience where some areas become overstaffed and other functions misaligned. In some countries affected by the conflict, the guidelines governing the basic elements of employment, promotion, termination, recruitment, and performance evaluation are not even in place or endorsed yet (East and Region, 2006).

Some countries' systems got affected, destroyed, and most employment data becomes unreliable because basic data-gathering functions get affected (El-Badaway & Hady, 2014). In addition to that, budgets are not settled and financial safeguards are weak which lead to strong suspicion that fraud is persistent (El-Badaway & Hady, 2014).

Therefore, developing countries are in a critical need for outlining a clear, multilevel and highly collaborative strategy for HRM which would provide the foundation on which a sustainable economic policy can be set. This policy would ensure consistent long-term

growth and prosperity. Without a sound HR strategy base, economic growth cannot be sustained and will certainly collapse (El-Badaway & Hady, 2014). Developing economies have witnessed various inefficiencies on the institutional setup level, including inefficient policy integration, disabled laws and regulations, lack of transparency in information distribution, redundancy, duplication of efforts and functions and an unsupportive culture (El-Badawy & Hady, 2014). It is worthy to mention that a general atmosphere of lack of collaboration among different sectors involved is governed. (El-Badaway & Hady, 2014).

Poverty is generally accompanied by an economic structure that is heavily based on primary production, weak human capacities, and a lack of good employment opportunities (Brown et al., 2011). There are several features of low-income countries which present particular challenges for economic recovery. The most important one is shortage of human resources (Brown et al., 2010). Not only is this apparent in low-income countries, but also countries that have suffered civil war. Such countries find that large numbers of their educated population have fled. They have also suffered from the destruction of social infrastructure during the war and reduced social expenditure (Brown et al., 2011). In Uganda, in the early 1980's, it is estimated that half the doctors and 80 per cent of the pharmacists have fled (Dodge and Wiebe 1985). Even in Afghanistan there was massive migration movement. In some cases, educated people are targeted and killed. This drastically weakens a country's human resources, such was the case in Burundi, Rwanda and Cambodia. In Mozambique almost 60 per cent of primary schools were closed or destroyed (Brück, 2001).

The Indonesian experience also provides guidelines for economies just beginning to achieve industrial investment and economic growth after being in a state of conflict. It also highlights the fact that a low manufacturing cost position alone is unlikely to be achieved by exploiting labor. Instead, achieving higher levels of quality and productivity derived from people is essential. Enlightened HRM practices could be used to achieve these aims in most emerging economies in the region, as well as in those that are only beginning to experience economic growth such as Syria (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2006). Youth should also be taken into consideration post crisis by heavily investing in their education and development as they represent over 50 per cent of a country's population. This is contrasted in Syria as too often youth are not considered as a community per se and little or no attention is paid to the formation of a clear vision for their future (Brahimi, 2007).

Youth should also be taken into consideration post crisis by heavily investing in their education and development as they represent over 50 per cent of a country's population. It is usually young men and women that drive armed conflict, and it is the physical and psychological wounds sustained by them that make the transition back to peace over the long-term so difficult as in the case in Syria. These young people, who have been raised in a culture of violence for years, are often released back into society without any opportunity for productive employment or means through which to change their thought processes. This explains why most of them turn to crime or take up arms again in order to improve their circumstances (Brahimi, 2007). The rule of the gun cannot be converted into the rule of law without the economic incentives for this process to take

place. This does not mean that peace-making should be correlated with job-creating but political security in any post-conflict society is also of high importance. Political security is based upon the economic security of its citizens, and disappointed youth groups must be given an economic stake in the future (Brahimi, 2007). This involves not only job creation but also training programs and vocational courses for the development of new skills, and thus the removal of legal and administrative obstacles to employment and as Brahimi mentioned in his article "Concerted attention to youth makes the critical difference between consolidation of security and the fragmentation of authority" (2007).

**C.HRM in Syria**

Contrary to many outsiders' perceptions, the last decade in the Middle East has been one of steady economic expansion (Afiouni et al., 2014) and partly was the case in Syria. Syrian government figures show that the population growth rate is 2.37%, with 65% of the population under the age of 35 and more than 40% under the age of 15 (IBP, 2015). Statistics also show that the unemployment rate in 2009 was 8.1; one of the lowest percentages in the history of Syria. However, it was on a gradual incline and the war increased it even more making it reach 15.2 percent in 2017(Trading Economics, 2017). Employment in various sectors of the economy was 5.5 million in 2008 divided as the following: Services (including government) 26%, agriculture 19%, industry 14%, commerce 16%, construction 15%, transportation 7%, and finance 3% (Publications, U. I, 2008).

The ongoing conflict in the Arab region, the Arab uprisings and their political, social and economic implications, the conflicts in Syria and the sectarian divide among people and nations keep on presenting the Middle East as a region that is volatile and uncertain place for doing business (Afiouni et al., 2014). The war in Syria has caused depreciation in the currency over 300 per cent against the US dollar which has devastated purchasing power (UNRWA, 2013). Since the start of the conflict, 2.3 million jobs have been lost, as the unemployment rate has risen steeply to 48.8 per cent. Syrian human development indices have been rolled back 35 years. Money metric poverty continued to widen across the country as the result of rising prices for goods and services, job loss and increasing unemployment, growing numbers of the internal displaced people who lost their properties and assets, and weakened economic activity (UNRWA,2013).

Studies have shown that there is opportunity for increasing productivity by raising the skills of its labor force and improving its technological base (IMFb, 2016). For even before the conflict, Syrian workers appear uncompetitive by regional standards (IMFb, 2016). Moreover, as the crisis extends, the remaining private sector activity is turning towards lower unskilled, labor-intensive activities with lower remuneration (UNRWA, 2013). Major upgrading of the quality of the human resource base would be required, including the quality of education in schools, universities, and vocational training systems. Though countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) occupy a central position in the research on HRM in the Middle East, countries such as Syria, Yemen and Iraq have

received very little attention (Afiouni et al., 2014), hence the novelty and relevance of this study.

# CHAPTER III

# METHODS

Given the nature of the research questions and the objectives of this study qualitative research methods has been adopted to collect and analyze data as they yielded the richest data, and new insights. Such an approach is suitable to better understand how HR is being implemented in Syria, and how its practices and the way it is perceived have changed in times of crisis. This method is inductive, interpretive, and iterative, with the aim of building emergent theory that gives voice to the interpretations of those living an experience (Corley & Gioia, 2004). It allows for an understanding of the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings to emerge and to be further informed by pre-existing theoretical constructs (Rynes & Gephart, 2004). The iterative (back-and-forth) reading between the data and theory allows for insights to be drawn and a more holistic understanding to be established.

**A.Sampling and Data Collection**

A purposive sampling strategy has been used to sample the companies, as the intent of this study is to have a concrete understanding of HRM in Syria. The inclusion criterion for companies is that they had at least 10-15 employees in order to be able understand how employees are being managed there. Companies were chosen from different industries (Hotels, Education, Pharmaceutical, Hospitals, Money transfer, Industrial factories, Banks,

Restaurants chains, different ministries, and international organizations) to have a broader coverage and eliminate any industry effect.

A sample of 15 HR managers and 14 employees from various levels employed at the chosen companies has been contacted for the purpose of gathering data to target our research objectives and answer our research questions. The inclusion criteria were the following: a tenure in the company of a minimum of 8 years in order to study what has change before and after the war.

Data has been collected through a 40-minute in-depth interviews with both HR managers and employees and resulted in detailed answers which helped develop a real sense of the interviewee's attitudes, beliefs, and opinions. It also allowed us to triangulate sources to make the findings more robust and trustworthy (Shenton, 2004). All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim capturing the original language preference. When conducted in Arabic, each transcript was translated to English, and the accuracy of the transcripts was double checked by the second bilingual researcher who listened to the tapes. Table 1.1 captures the demographic characteristics of the interviewed HR managers and Table 2.1 those of employees.

Note: The interview protocol for HR managers can be found in Appendix A and the interview protocol for employees can be found in Appendix B.

**B.Recruitment Process**

We started the process by getting the approval from the IRB. The participants of this research project were primarily recruited through telephone and/or e-mail. The e-mails and telephone numbers have collected through LinkedIn. The email will explain the objective of the study and the importance of their contribution. Interviews will be scheduled through email, or by telephone if the participant requests so. There will be 2 emails scripts, 2 consent forms, and 2 interview protocols: 1 for HR managers and 1 for employees. This research does not involve any possible risks / harm. All participants will be ensured confidentiality. When reporting data from their accounts, interviewees' names will be changed to a pseudonym the demographics are presented in the tables below.

Table 1.1: HR demographics

| Pseudonym | Gender | Age | Marital status | Educational level and background | University | Undergraduate background | University | Number of years as an HR | years of experience in HR across career |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sandy | Female | 45 | divorced | Bachelor now pursuing MBA | Switzerland | BA in business | Moscow | 5 | 15 |
| Tracy | Female | 48 | divorced | Bachelor now pursuing Masters in marketing | HIBA | BA in history | Damascus university | 2 | 20 |
| Maria | Female | 23 | Single | Bachelor in Business management | Paris graduate school | | | 3 | 3 |
| Ismail | Male | 65 | Married | Doctor/Surgeon | Damascus University | | | 1 | 1 |
| Nadia | Female | 29 | Single | Masters in HR | SKILLS | HR | HIBA | 2.5 | 5 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jida | Female | 63 | Married | Baccalaureate | | | | 13 | 13 |
| Nayla/Wadi | Female | 59 | Married | Bachelor in architecture | Damascus University | | | 19 | 19 |
| Rami | Male | 46 | Married | PhD in engineering | Russia | engineering | Russia | 4 | 15 |
| Issam | Male | 43 | Married | Bachelor in Law | Damascus University | | | 16 | 16 |
| Sally | Female | 38 | Single | Bachelor in English literature | Damascus University | | | 1.5 | 12.5 |
| Magy | Female | 42 | Married | MBA | European university in Syria | French literature | Damascus university | 8 | 19 |
| Noura | Female | 43 | Married | MBA | HIBA | English literature | Damascus university | 9 | 11 |
| Hala | Female | 46 | Married | MBA | AASTM | | | 17 | 17 |
| Leila | Female | 45 | Married | MBA | university of west Virginia | | | 21 | 10 |
| Asseel | Female | 52 | Single | Bachelor in English literature | Damascus University | | | 10 | 10 |

Table 1.2: Employees Demographics

| Pseudonym Name | Gender | Age | Marital status | Educational level | Educational background | University | Number of years in the company | Department |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jane | Female | 33 | Single | Bachelor | Business administration | HIBA | 11 | Credit retail approval |
| Faysal | Male | 59 | Divorced | Bachelor | Aviation | US | 30 | Pilot |
| Dana | Female | 31 | Single | Bachelor | Economics | Damascus University | 8 | Accounting |
| Sandra | Female | 31 | Single | Bachelor | Graphic design | IUST | 6 | Creative department |
| Lea | Female | 20 | Single | still earning Bachelor | Kindergarten education | Damascus University | 1 | Volunteer |
| Jad | Male | 18 | Single | still earning Bachelor | Medicine | Damascus University | 1 | Volunteer |

| Bassel | Male | 40 | Married | Bachelor | Business administration | Damascus University | 4 | Administrative affairs |
|--------|------|----|---------|----------|------------------------|---------------------|---|------------------------|
| Farah | Female | 48 | Single | Bachelor | Business administration | Damascus University | 22 | Internal control department |
| Karam | Male | 54 | Married | Bachelor | Engineering | Boston University | 16 | Factory/production |
| Ahmad | Male | 38 | Married | MBA | Business administration | Damascus University | 9 | Compliance and risk |
| Lari | Male | 35 | Married | Bachelor | Business administration and Computing | SPU | 14 | Industrial automation and technical department |
| Bader | Male | 35 | Married | Bachelor | English literature | Damascus University | 13 | Product marketing |
| Hani | Male | 51 | Married | still earning my Masters | MBA | Kuwait university | 8 | Security and business continuity |

### C. Research Site

All interviews had been conducted in the space selected by the interviewees as well as during the date and time of their convenience within Syria and findings of the research will be presented upon request once the study is completed.

### D. Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded (with the respondents' consent) and then transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data was then read and re-read again to ensure accuracy. The interviews resulted in extensive textual data, which was analyzed using thematic analysis in order to identify similar activities among HR managers of different companies and thus

understand the overall picture. Template analysis is an effective qualitative research method for an experiential approach. It is a style of thematic analysis that allows a researcher to maintain structure in the method of analyzing textual data while adapting it to the need of the study (King, 2012). We pinpointed, examined, and recorded patterns within the data in order to get a clear description associated with the research questions. These themes became the category of analysis through the process of coding. Thus, template analysis is a flexible technique, and can handle large data sets comfortably (King, 2012). Data collected from employees were also analyzed in the same way using a thematic analysis approach. Meaningful themes related to propositions and objectives were identified which in turn helped in answering our research questions.

# Chapter IV

# FINDINGS

**HR managers' Findings**

By analyzing the narratives of HR managers, five themes emerged: (1) Revolving role of HR, (2) Scarcity of Talent, (3), Awareness of the vital role of HR during the war, (4) Increased emotional support for employees, (5) giving up to the situation. Table 2.1 represents a thematic table that summarizes the main themes, categories and codes identified through the thematic content analysis of the HR managers. The "sources" column reflects the number of respondents who mentioned a given category and the "references" column reflects the number of instances a given category was mentioned, as one category could have been mentioned several times by one single respondent. We will discuss each in turn.

Table 2.1: HR Managers Thematic table

| Theme | Subtheme | Code | Source | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revolving role of HR | Decreased level of professionalism | Searched for basic qualities in recruitment | 12 | 19 |
| | | Very basic recruitment process | 4 | 4 |
| | | Basic evaluation process | 3 | 5 |
| | | Basic promotion scheme | 2 | 3 |
| | No change | No promotion scheme | 7 | 7 |
| | | No new trainings | 4 | 4 |
| | | Same processes | 3 | 3 |
| | Lack of understanding and fear from HR | Employees resistance to HR | 4 | 4 |
| | | No HR function | 3 | 4 |

| | | No mentality of HR | 3 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scarcity of talent | High turnover rates | Retention programs | 4 | 6 |
| | | High turnover rate | 4 | 4 |
| | | No more available labor | 3 | 5 |
| | Lack of qualifications | Lack of qualified people | 10 | 15 |
| | | Lack of training professionalism | 2 | 2 |
| Awareness of the vital role of HR during the war | Importance of training | Awareness of the importance of training | 9 | 13 |
| | | Continued and added trainings | 7 | 8 |
| | | Lack of training professionalism | 2 | 3 |
| | Importance of technology | Foresee HR to be technologically advanced | 4 | 4 |
| | | Adapted to some technological tools | 2 | 3 |
| | | Started using E-learning programs | 2 | 2 |
| | Structured processes | Structured evaluation processes | 7 | 9 |
| | | Structured training processes | 4 | 4 |
| | | Structured promotion scheme | 3 | 3 |
| | | Framework based qualities | 3 | 3 |
| Increased emotional support for employees | Supportive | Different kinds of benefit | 7 | 10 |
| | | Flexibility | 5 | 6 |
| | | Moral support | 4 | 6 |
| | | Cohesive culture | 3 | 7 |
| Giving up to the situation | Downsizing | Company shutdown | 3 | 3 |

| | | Downsized | 2 | 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unknown future | Ambiguous future | 2 | 2 |

Note: for confidentiality purposes The HR managers and employees' names have been changed to fictious names that will be used through the analysis.

### *Revolving role of HR*

Revolving role of HR has been identified as a main theme. It includes three categories relating to decreased level of professionalism, no changes during the war, and lack of understanding and fear from HR.

*Decreased level of professionalism.* Several HR managers have mentioned that their HR practices regressed to basic ones such as very basic recruitment and selection processes, basic promotion schemes, and basic evaluation process. This is illustrated by the following quotes:

> "I stopped working on the recruitment principle because the recruitment principle that we've learned and worked upon have changes in this situation – Rami"

> "Training wise, it used to be better because we were able to reach more people to do the training to our employees more than now, now we're suffering from that - Ismail "

> "One of the biggest challenges was finding an HR in this area. not HR, HR but qualified people to employ in the company. - Issam "

*No change* is the second category identified. Several HR managers mentioned that their HR practices have always been very basic, and that their companies have no promotion scheme, no new trainings, and have been following the same processes. The following quotes illustrate the issues mentioned above.

> "We don't have. I have a policy but it is not applied yet, because we do not have this concept yet. They don't know the meaning of HR you want them to know the meaning of promotion- Tracy".

"We stopped training -Asseel"

"When we need employees. I announce that there's a competition in the newspaper, tv. They come fill a form. We then assign them dates in order to come and do a written exam. After that people that pass have to go through an interview with a panel -Issam"

*Lack of understanding and fear from HR.*is the third category. Many HR managers are suffering from employee's resistance to HR, while some do not even have the mentality of HR nor an HR function in their company. These issues are illustrated by the following quotes:

"We did not have the concept here, so when I first joined X, they did not know what HR is – Nadia"

"So, when I first came here everyone was like what are you coming to do here? is he coming to give us orders and supervise us – Rami"

"The Syrian mentality "that wow we know everything "they don't accept changes at all so this the challenge – Tracy"

### Scarcity of Talent

The second theme that emerged and which also shows the challenges that were faced by HR managers during the war is "*Scarcity of Talent*". This theme includes two categories which are the *High turnover rates* and the *lack of qualifications* in trainers as well as in candidates and employees that wanted to join the company.

*High turnover rates* has been an issue that all HR managers have reported to be suffering from as many employees have left to flee the country. Some have been trying to implement retention programs in order not to lose key talents, but with very little success:

"And the work was very difficult. Some came to work for a month or two and then leave in the last period - Najla"

"New ways in order to keep our employees not only financially but also by offering even sentimental and non-valuable things – sandy"

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> "We also have pressure to get people to work now in the centers that have opened again after the war – sally"

*Lack of qualifications* is the second category that has been identified as all HR managers have complained of not being able to find qualified talents, nor to find professionals to train employees:

> "More educated people have left the country and its very hard to find someone with good and professional experience and available to work here – Leila"

> "There has been a lack of professional people in the country – Nadia"

> "Training wise, it used to be better because we were able to reach more people to do the training to our employees, now we're suffering from that –Ismail"

### *Awareness of the vital role of HR during the war*

Despite the various challenges caused by the war, HR managers seemed to be aware of the vital role of HR during war as many saw the importance of training during the crisis and adapting to the technological movement happening in the world.

Some managers stated that they focused more on training during the war. Many also complained from the lack of professionalism in training. Many were in the desperate need of qualified and trained talents as the following quotes demonstrate:

> "Plus, more training. We need more trained employees - Issam"

> "I hope for it to become better and better but now we are working on training were everyone is given a chance to have different trainings during the year. - Leila"

> "The thing I wish for to be better in the future is the training and development – Maria"

> "Training wise, it used to be better because we were able to reach more people to do the training to our employees more than now, now we're suffering from that – Ismail".

Many managers started providing e-learning training programs to their employees and others also started using technological tools in their processes. In addition to that, many

managers foresee their HR department technologically advanced. This following is evident in the quotes below:

> "We've started using more channels like Facebook, social media more than before – Leila"

> "I see it using very improved and new methods. for example, using a system that filters the CV and gives you what you are looking for.  – Wadi"

> "We also started implementing e-learning programs – Sandy"

Some managers were trying to *implement structured processes* during the war such as structured evaluation process, promotion schemes, and training process and searched for candidates based on competencies and objectives. The following is illustrated by the quotes below:

> "Then I look at his experience and as you know every job has KSA, knowledge, skills and abilities for doing the job so according to the job description of each job - Tracy"

> "We have something called a training matrix. It includes all the positions in X company and what training programs related to their nature of work that they must go through. We start on a yearly basis and implement it on all employees so if his plan includes to take 30 courses during his path then he has to take at least 2 as per our company's strategy that is done quarterly basis that we check with our managers. We relate it to performance. For example, if the employee has certain gaps in the assessment, if he has an issue in delegation or communication or leadership, we train him/her upon that.  – Hala"

> "We have a promotion scheme and a promotion policy but according to the needs, we used to do it case by case because during the crisis we were in much need of junior levels in order to do the work especially when we faced a huge turnover, we were not able to promote the employees but rather focused on filling the gaps- Magy"

> "We have an annual evaluation where we have the strategy and then we set objectives and then cascade them to departments later to cascade them to employee objectives and then set deadlines. we then review them in the middle of the year and then we have a final review. -Sandy"

*Increased Emotional Support for employees*

During the war several HR departments offered different kinds of support such as providing moral support and flexibility, building a cohesive culture and offering different kinds of benefits in order to retain their people. The quotes below show the different kind of support HR managers provided their employees with:

"We were more considerate and disregarded lateness – Magy"

"We'd stand next to them during their hardships – sandy"

"In fact, for me I have a saying from one of the movies which is the gladiator which is 'Win the crowd'. So, my strategy that I've learned through my experience as an HR and that I'm known for inside the country and outside is that I'm very close to people and near the people. This is my strategy, they trust me, they believe that when they come to the HR there is someone who stands beside them and if someone did anything wrong, they know they will be punished and at the same time, they know that if they enter this door, they will get their rights. -Tracy"

"Every now and then we also have activities, we have competitions where we have a draw and each 2 are put in a team... They choose any topic they want and for example, we chose two competitor companies like apple and android. They have to do create a creative presentation and then the whole office joins to vote for the best team. -Nadia"

"Yeah, they've provided danger pay for international and national staff. We didn't have this before because the staff had to travel further and stop on check points so it took them more time to get to work and something to make up for the danger… -Leila"

*Giving up to the situation*

The last theme identified was "*Giving up to the situation*" under which we identified two categories: "downsizing", and "unknown future"

*Downsizing.* Many HR managers reacted by shutting down some factories and subsidiaries while other went with downsizing the number of employees in their company. This following is evident in the quotes below:

"We started downsizing – Asseel"

"The company closed completely.  – Rami"

*Unknown future* is the second category that we identified under this theme. Many managers like Rami saw the future as ambiguous and were unable to foresee how their HR department might be in the future when he said:

> "I can't answer you now because nothing is clear yet. You're talking about a country which is in war, there's no future yet. When you're talking about the future you're talking about a strategy, and now we do not have any strategy we go with a daily strategy. For one week ago the Syrian Jordanian border was closed where I had something in mind and now since it opened, I have something else – Rami"

Similarly, Asseel and Ismail saw an ambiguous future for the HR department when they said:

> "I cannot tell you because I don't know whether we will be operating or not in the future. - Asseel"

> "Prices in the country are now multiplied by 10 but how can I give them 10 times more than their salary if my work has not increased times 10 – Ismail"

**Employee's Findings**

By analyzing the narratives of employees, we found that employees perceive HR as an administrative function. However, they simultaneously see it as a supportive function that stood by them during their hardships. The crisis in Syria has affected employees dramatically, in their personal and work spaces. Nevertheless, employee's narratives depicted not only a negative picture of the war, but also highlighted some of the positive changes it brought to human relationships in organizations. Overall, we were able to organize employee data around three main themes: (1) Employee's perceptions of the HR department, (2) Employee's perceptions of the positive impacts of the war, and (3) Employee's perceptions of the negative impacts of the war. Table 2.2 captures the main findings. We will discuss each in turn.

Table II: employees Thematic table

| Theme | Subtheme | Code | Source | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employees perception of the HR department | Administrative | Solving problems and issues | 8 | 9 |
| | | Recruitment | 4 | 5 |
| | | Attendance | 4 | 5 |
| | | Evaluation | 3 | 3 |
| | | Promotion | 3 | 3 |
| | | Handling compensation | 2 | 2 |
| | Supportive | Helpful | 3 | 4 |
| | | Impactful | 3 | 3 |
| | | Developmental | 2 | 2 |
| Employee's perceptions of the positive impacts of the war | Change in employees' characteristics | Change in attitudinal orientation | 3 | 3 |
| | | Change in perception | 2 | 3 |
| | Job value | Valued by their manager | 11 | 11 |
| | | Job utilizes skills and abilities | 10 | 10 |
| | | Valued by the company | 9 | 9 |
| | Change in internal relationships | Created cohesion between people | 9 | 9 |
| | Change in company's behavior | Positively changed behavior | 6 | 6 |
| | Work relationships | Positive change in the basics of the work | 4 | 4 |
| | Work commitment | Increased motivation | 3 | 3 |
| | | Dedicated to deliver their task | 2 | 2 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Cause of the work | 2 | 2 |
| Employee's perceptions of the negative impacts of the war | Work relationships | Negative change in the basics of work | 6 | 9 |
| | Change in employees' characteristics | Negative change in attitudinal orientation | 4 | 4 |
| | | Insecurity | 3 | 4 |
| | | Pressured | 3 | 3 |
| | Change in internal relationships | Relationship deteriorated | 2 | 2 |
| | Change in company's behavior | Emergence of Wasta | 3 | 3 |
| | | Negative change in behavior | 2 | 3 |
| | Work commitment | No specific reason for joining the company | 5 | 5 |
| | | Only company related to field of study | 2 | 2 |
| | Job value | No utilization of skills and abilities | 4 | 4 |
| | | Not valued by company nor managers | 3 | 3 |
| | | Strategy of the company changed completely | 3 | 3 |

**Employee's Findings**

Table II above represents a thematic table that summarizes the main themes, categories and codes identified through the thematic content analysis of the employees. By analyzing the narratives of employees, we found that employees perceive HR as an administrative function. However, they simultaneously see it as a supportive function

that stood by them during their hardships. The crisis in Syria has affected employees dramatically, in their personal and work spaces. Nevertheless, employee's narratives depicted not only a negative picture of the war, but also highlighted some of the positive changes it brought to human relationships in organizations. Overall, we were able to organize employee data around three main themes: (1) Employee's perceptions of the HR department, (2) Employee's perceptions of the positive impacts of the war, and (3) Employee's perceptions of the negative impacts of the war. We will discuss each in turn.

### *Employee's perceptions of the HR department*

Employee's narratives allowed us to capture their perceptions of the HR department, that fall under two main categories: "Administrative" and "Supportive.

*Administrative* is the first category identified under this theme. Many employees still view their HR department at as a function that is only responsible for recruitment, solving problems and issues, handling compensation, promotion, attendance and evaluation and this is evident in the quotes below:

> "X is responsible for recruiting candidates with good skills and abilities – Jane"
>
> "They find issues and fix them, they also see if someone needs to be punished or not. -Faysal"
>
> "Everything training, employee welfare, know there wants, their issues, holidays, leaves and evaluation. These are the main stuff that I believe they are handling according to my contact with them. -Bader"
>
> "Everything related to employees. Their issues their attendance, their absence their salaries. -Dana"
>
> "It is responsible for all the employees in the company they re-allocate employees and keeps track on our vacations and days off. -Farah"

"Task report, evaluation of the task report, they're responsible of the internal process system, as in the communication between departments. -Lari"

*Supportive* is the second category identified under this theme, most employees reported viewing their HR department as very helpful, impactful and developmental. It is perceived as offering them moral and financial support, and a visible interest in training and developing their employees. The following quotes exemplifies the different types of support that the HR departments offered its employees:

"He's very nice he listens to everything I say -Dana"

"HR plays a big role in the company – Karam"

"Make sure that the person is provided with the right training before he starts -Jad"

"Some were chosen by the company and some by me. Sometimes I go and tell them that I want to take this course, and sometimes the CEO comes and tells me that there's this course why don't you go and sign up for it. – Sandra"

"They did help me in the certified accountant certificate that I took – Dana"

### Employee's perceptions of the positive impacts of the war

Employee's narratives allowed us to capture the positive perceived impact of the war. Their narratives are rich with examples showing how the war made people care more for each other, and support and help each other.

The first subtheme/ category we found was *change in employees' characteristics*. The change in people's attitudinal orientation was clearly evident. Employees recounted

viewing their work as a relief and a way to escape the realities of an external environment

full of stress and anxiety. The quotes below are some examples of the perceived positive

impacts of the war:

> "However, the work was more of a relief to us. -Bader "

> "The positive thing is that you feel that everyone wants to make a difference in the country especially us that have stayed here in the country. -Sandra"

> "They tried to take care of their employees, -Lari"

> "People have become more helpful, if someone has something they'd help cover up, -Jad"

> "The war has made us closer because we started caring more about the psychological aspect. -Ahmad"

Employees perception *of their job value has also increased*. Employees feel valued at their

job due to feeling valued by the company itself and by their managers valuing their

feedback or because they feel that their job utilizes their skills and abilities as exemplified

below:

> "Yes, of course I've actually stayed here because I feel valued where you won't find this value given to you somewhere else -Lea"

> "Yes, this is the reason why I have decided to come back here and work because I feel valued for my contributions – Jad"

The *internal relationships between employees has changed positively*. Furthermore, the war

brought people closer together in a cohesive community that feels like family as mentioned

below:

> "They all stood next to each other and helped each other in all times -Lea"

"Of course, it has made us closer, the crisis has made all the Syrian community closer -Bader"

"We are more like family now – Dana"

*A positive change in the company's behavior* has also been deduced from employees' narratives. Employees noticed the hard effort companies were trying to provide them with, the continuous aid, support and guidance that was being provided throughout their hardships as mentioned below:

"For other companies were downsizing and laying off employees. Here they were employing more people and trying to improve the salaries – Lari."

"There has been a lot of workload on the managers and the HR department in order to be able to understand all these people and know how to use their potentials in the right place- Ahmad."

Employees further described how their *commitment to work has increased* as they became more attached to their jobs. Their commitment increased due to the war and that made them believe more in the cause of their work. The war also made people become more dedicated to deliver their task and increased their motivation as demonstrated below:

"It actually created motivation for employees and made them want to continue as when you see your company not lagging behind, and in the middle of the war you find the CEO in the company before all employees and you receive your salary one day ahead of its due date, you feel the urge to come and help him -Lari"

"Because of the nature of the organization since its humanitarian, and during the crisis it was the best choice. – Hani"

"At the end of the day I'm responsible for my work and my job so I have to forget what happens and deliver my tasks. -Dana"

It *affected employees basic work positively* and made them believe in the value of their

work, structured processes, and opened opportunities for people to grow as mentioned

below:

> "It has impacted my job in a positive way, because we have become more focused on work. -Bader"

> "It has made us believe more in our work as we have a cause and if we don't believe we do not work. We believe in our humanitarian cause – Hani"

> "The war has actually opened up positions in the bank that we wouldn't have been able to reach before – jane"

> "There was no organization structure. Now it is more organized than before. -Dana"

### Employee's perceptions of the negative impacts of the war

The third theme that emerged was "*The negative impact of the war*". Here,

employees describe the negative impacts of the war on them personally, their relationships,

treatment as well as on their working relationships and work commitment, and work value.

The war has *affected employee's basic work negatively*. Negatively, in the sense that it

has affected employee's productivity, the risk in the work involved and the work itself

as illustrated by the quotes below:

> "Before I was able to take more risks. Now I have to be a little bit more conscious and conservative -Karam"

> "So, the situation won't be that well it will affect the productivity of employees -Ahmad"

> "We lost many transactions as well because of the war-Farah"

> "The type of work, the quantity of work – Sandra"

The War has *changed employees' characteristics*. However, this time negatively in the

sense that it changed their attitudinal orientation and made them feel insecure, pressured,

and even tired. The quotes below capture well how these sentiments:

"We felt insecure - Jane"

"Yes of course, because the war has affected the people. They've become tired and
some started coming late to work because of the war – Ahmad"

"The negative thing is the way the war has affected the life of people. -Sandra"

*Internal relationships* have also been deteriorated because of the war which affected the

bond between people and the way they deal with each other as demonstrated below:

"Yes of course, because the war has affected the people. – Ahmad"

"The same thing, it's even getting worse not better because in the organization we
have a war going on like the war outside. You'd find employees with the
government and others against so those employees have another war inside the
organization Plus, the Syrian employees in X are trying to "climb on the backs of
each other in order to please the foreign -Hani"

The *change in company's behavior* has also been observed. Employees themselves have

noticed how "wasta" took charge of the Syrian social life and way of living and thus

affected the way they should be treated as illustrated by the quotes below:

"No of course not because there is "Flan" ou "Flan". -Dana"

"The nature of the employees working in the company, In the last 2 years we started
getting employees "from above" "wasta yaani". -Hani"

> "Many things because of individual mistakes have impacted the whole company and created new regulations in order for the company to protect its own benefits. – Bader"

Some employee's *work commitment has even decreased* and this is evident as several employees mentioned that there is no specific reason for choosing their company to work for but it was the only job offer they got or it was the only company they found that was related to their field of study as mentioned below:

> "It was by coincidence. There was a vacancy, the company was still new. I applied and I got the position – Sandra"

> "No, because it is one of the few and leading companies that work in industrial control so I applied here. I think it's the only company here that offers solutions to the market – Lari"

The war not only affected employee's commitment but also the perception of their *job value* as many find no utilization of their skills and abilities, nor do they feel valued by the company and in some cases the strategy of the company itself changed so their work changed completely because of the war as mentioned below:

> "No, it's definitely not like the stuff and certificates that you do. You only use 5 or 6% of what you studied. – dana"

> "No, throw 50% of it away. – Sandra"

> "Somehow yes, I won't tell you a 100% because I have a special case. The direct manager and I have started together -Lari"

> "We're not focusing anymore on the business and on the strategy of the business but rather on the crisis, crisis management. -Ahmad"

# CHAPTER V

# DISCUSSION

The study explored the role and perceptions of HRM in Syria in times of crisis. The findings of the study point to a series of findings from both employees' and HR managers' point of views. The country was going through advancements before the war.  Syria was a middle-income country capable of providing a decent living for most of its people. Almost all children went to school, and literacy rates were above 90% (UNICEF, 2015). Companies were opening up, and developing and this can be noticed as several HR managers have mentioned during the interviews that they had professional HR departments before the war which were performing all kinds of activities.

Due to the war, some companies either returned back to their basic activities or lost their professionalism which was noticed during the interviews. We found out that companies are offering the basic if not even any of the benefits to its employees and this itself may cause a crisis. Although offering benefits to employees is costly, however on the long term is rewarding. Studies show that countries that had effective and efficient social security systems in place before a crisis hit were much better equipped to cope with its consequences than those who didn't (ILO, 2010). Previous crisis also show that social security systems are by design powerful economic and social stabilizers of economies and societies. They stabilize income of individuals who are affected by unemployment or

underemployment and hence help to avoid hardship and social instability which is clearly noticed during the interviews as all employees are suffering from the high inflation in cost of living and purchasing power (ILO,2010).

The war has affected the country drastically with talents leaving the country which reflected back on companies as it led to a very high turnover rate and lack of qualifications to be found. Large death tolls, internal displacement, and refugees fleeing to other countries reduce a home country's labor force. More generally, there are negative consequences to emigration for sending countries (IMFc, 2016). A large proportion of refugees are skilled workers, representing a significant brain drain from conflict countries (IMFa, 2016). This can be noticed as during the interviews most HR managers mentioned that they were suffering from the lack of unqualified talents. The world has evolved now that knowledge is needed in any job. Management guru Peter Drucker predicted years ago, the center of gravity in employment is moving fast from manual and clerical workers to knowledge workers (Dessler, 2015).

HR has also been found to be an essential department during the war as it offered support to all employees and was trying to implement structured strategies and procedures. Human resources management during crisis becomes essential in terms of the decision-making process, since it not only takes the organization's interests into consideration but also those of its employees (Vardarlier, 2016) Nevertheless, HR is still found to be an

administrative one as many companies are still facing personnel challenges where no HR department is present or employees still resisting the HR department in their company.

Some people gave up during the war and so did some companies which was evident during the study as many did nothing to help their employees and many saw the future as vague while some even shutdown completely. Some followed a downsizing strategy in order to respond to the crisis scenario as downsizing during a crisis is said to reduce costs while improving efficiency and sustaining efforts to meet production and performance goals (Sahdev et al., 1999). However, downsizing and closing down should not come alone without having a strategy in mind as it leads to a greater chaos. This can be noticed as many have suffered negatively of the war. The consequences of a crisis can be "victimization" of employees who are physically or psychologically harmed by an incident, the shattering of employees' basic assumptions about themselves or the organization, or the creation of a belief that one's personal system is threatened (Pearson and Claire, 1998: 63). Many people have suffered from death of relatives or people they know. Others suffered from insecurity and pressure. Nevertheless, each person dealt differently with the situation.

During crisis, companies' strategies change. Organizations main priority becomes survival and thus they follow a crisis management approach which is necessary for the guarantee of stability and continuous success in an organization (Koushafard, 2013). Each company has its different approach to manage the crisis. Some go with downsizing, others with changing the cause of the company. However, many do not predict such an outcome

and are unprepared for such a crisis and thus are not able to cope with the situation which thus makes them close down and stop operating.

The war has shed light on essential and critical factors to HR managers during the war which were the importance of training and the technological movement.  Technology is found in almost everything we do. Human resource managers now list critical thinking/problem-solving and information technology application as the two skills that are most likely to increase in importance over the next few years (Dessler, 2015). It is increasingly being used for many human resource management type applications, such as looking for jobs (Dessler, 2015). Facebook recruiting and LinkedIn is one example. Companies in Syria have acknowledged the importance of adapting to such tools as they help organizations enhance their operations. Rapid technological innovation and the increase of Multinational organizations are driving the formation of a global economy (Muroyama & Guyford, 1988). Advanced manufacturing technologies have altered long-standing patterns of productivity and employment and thus, developing countries like Syria must harness technology more efficiently in order to create a higher standard of living for all involved and be part of the global economy (Muroyama & Guyford, 1988).

Many companies have become aware of the importance of training during and after the crisis and this can be noticed as several managers have mentioned that one of the challenges they've faced was lack of professional trainers during the war and the lack of qualified and trained candidates. Plus, one thing that most of the managers wish to be doing

differently is to be able to focus more on training as studies have shown that conditions for successful solutions can be created by acquiring professional knowledge and skills, having mastered technical and technological readiness to manage critical crisis situations (Mayerová, 2016). Moreover, in a survey done by BNA bulletin to Management, Training has been found to be essential as companies invested more in training despite economic setbacks (Dessler, 2015).

Conflict situations undermine human development. They destroy both human and physical capital, deteriorate institutional capacity and forces replacement of labor (Kim & Conceição, 2010). Thus, a country experiencing conflict cannot secure long term returns for investments in both physical and human capital which results in low investment in training and education (Kim & Conceição, 2010). All of these factors lead to low levels of human development. Furthermore, a country with low levels of human development has more difficulty in improving institutions, and in increasing productivity especially with evidence that economic recovery solely depends on its human capital to recover (Kim & Conceição, 2010). Therefore, companies in Syria, recognized the importance of training and continued with providing trainings to its employees and managers in order to help the economy thrive again.

Employees findings were very similar as well during the interview. They still view HR as administrative in its nature, in their companies. For them, HR is responsible for implementing basic functions only. Nevertheless, they view it as essential in the company

as it offers support to them during the war. The war has divided people with some being with the crisis and other against and so was happening in companies as some saw the positive aspects of it while others focused on the negative aspects of it. The war has impacted employees positively for some, and negatively for others affecting their health, relationships and work. Nonetheless, it made them believe in their work and opened opportunities for people to grow. Employees commitment has been affected as some became attached to the company and to the cause of the company while others lost commitment and only worked for their company because it was the only job they found. Studies show that crisis situations encourage employees to be more devoted to the organization (Ştefănescu & Dărăbăneanu, 2011). Nevertheless, if not managed properly, conflicts can lead to deterioration of relationships (Turley, 2013). This is evident as the crisis in Syria has turned its people against each other due to difference in political affiliations.

This type of altruism has been noted particularly in harsh contexts where individuals demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice and work hard to serve others and to serve the greater good (Münster & Staal, 2011). Indeed, a recent 2016 study on the World Giving Index published by Charities Aid Foundation suggests that two countries, both ravaged in the past decade by both man-made and natural disasters and war, topped the country lists. Where Myanmar ranks first overall for donating money, volunteering and helping strangers; Iraq ranks the highest for helping a stranger. Indeed, this result suggests that in times of war or disadvantage people often band together to help each other. This emergence of altruism and

a call toward others in times of harsh realities has been documented early in social science

and has broadly been referred to as the conflict-cohesion hypothesis (Markides & Cohn,

1982), with more recent evidence that in war people are more willing to provide help,

assistance, and guidance to others (Perry & Lindell, 2003).

# CHAPTER VI

# PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

**Practical Implications**

In this project we have explored HR in Syria from the perspective of managers and employees in order to understand the role of HR during the crisis. In order to increase the effectiveness of the HR department in times of crisis and overcome the numerous challenges experienced, we suggest the following practical steps that can be adopted by HR managers to better support the needs of their employees in light of the current constraints faced. Based on the insights gained throughout the project, we recommend the following:

- Encourage peer-to-peer training in-house whereby highly skilled employees can provide trainings to less skilled or less experienced employees. This will help address the challenges of the shortage of training professionals. This can be further leveraged through the use of on-line training portals.

- Implement internship programs in companies for university students in order to teach them soft and hard skills and attract them to the company.

- HR managers can think of creating a national association for HR where they can share experiences, and further enhance the effectiveness of their practices. They can also sign up to online-training courses and subscribe to professional HR

associations worldwide such as the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) in the US or the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) in the UK.

- HR managers could benefit from further engaging with general management and line managers to ensure a better responsiveness to business needs, and better strategic alignment.

**Future Research**

Based on our findings, future research might benefit from further examining the heightened altruism in times of crisis that was salient in our findings, and how this in turn shapes the role of HR. We also call on career scholars to further investigate how technology can be leveraged to support HR activities in times of crisis. This is very essential as crisis offers change and reconstruction opportunities to organizations, besides threats (Tutar, 2001: 95). In addition to that, when facing challenges, managers have to execute organizational change programs. Thus, scholars might also be interested to study how these programs may aim at changing the company's strategy, culture, structure, technologies, or the attitudes and skills of the employees (Dessler, 2015).

# APPENDIX A

**The interview protocol for employees**

- 🎬 Gender: - female
    - Male
    - Prefer not to say
- 🎬 Age:
- 🎬 Marital status: - Single
    -Married
    - Divorced
    - Widowed
- 🎬 Education Level: - Brevet

    - Baccalaureate

    - Bachelor

    - Masters
    - PHD
- 🎬 Educational Background:
- 🎬 Number of years in the company:
- In which department?
- Any specific reason for why you chose to work for this company specifically?

- Professional Qualifications: Were the additional certifications, training, conferences chosen by you? Or did your company suggest them?

- Did your company support you in any additional trainings, certifications that you did? (as in pay for it)?
- 🎬 Can you tell us about your overall experience with the HR Department?
- How was it before the war and what changes occurred because of the war?
- What activities do you believe the HR department is handling?
- 🎬 Do you believe your company's treatment has changed in any form before and after the war?
- Do you feel valued for your contributions?
- What do you believe has changed because of the war?

- Do you think that work is distributed evenly across your team? Was it the same before the war?

- Do you believe the war has made you closer and more connected to your coworkers? Or has your relationship stayed the same?

- Do you feel like your job utilizes your skills and abilities as much as it could?

- Do your managers value your feedback? Was it the same before the war?

How does awareness of your own mortality, or awareness of death, impact you at work?

Probe – Tell us how thinking about death influences how you approach your work and what you do at work

# APPENDIX B

**The interview protocol for HR managers**

- Gender: - female
            - Male
            - Prefer not to say
- Age:
- Marital status: - Single
                    -Married
                    - Divorced
                    - Widowed
- Education Level: - Brevet

            - Baccalaureate

            - Bachelor

            - Masters
            - PHD
- Educational Background:
- Company Size:
- Year of establishment:
- Type of the company: - Family business
                        - Multi national
                        - Start up
                        - NGO
                        - Corporation
                        - Other
- Areas where it operates:
- Number of years in the company:
- In which department?
- Number of years as an HR manager in this company
- Years of experience in HR across career:
- Professional Qualifications relevant to HR (Certifications, trainings, conferences etc.)

- Can you tell me about your experience as an HR manager in this company before the war and during the war?

- probe: To what extent has the current war altered your job and the way you manage people?
- Probe: what are some challenges you faced before the war and what are the current challenges you are facing now?

How does mortality awareness, or thinking about death, impact your employees and your organization?

Probe: What are the most effective ways of managing employee awareness of mortality?

- 🎬 Can you tell me about your company's culture?
  - Do you implement any activities to build a cohesive culture between your employees?
  - Can you tell me how mortality awareness factors into your company's culture?
- 🎬 Can you tell me about your recruitment process before and after the war? (How did you recruit your employees before the war and what changed after the war?
- Probe: What qualities do you usually focus on in a candidate?
- Probe: Are there any specific criteria that play a role in choosing a candidate? if yes what are they (Religion, Place of living, Marital status, # of siblings?)
- Probe: Were all of these criteria you've mentioned of importance before the war? or were you obliged to follow certain procedures because of the war?
- 🎬 Can you tell us about your training programs?
- Did you implement any training programs before the war? what where they?
- Did you implement any new training programs during/after the war?
- 🎬 How do you find the salaries to be before and after the war?
- Do you compensate your employees with anything extra other than the salary? Did anything change regarding your benefit scheme after the war?
- 🎬 Can you tell me about your evaluation process?
- what aspects do you focus on in the evaluation?
- Do you follow any promotion scheme?
- 🎬 How do you foresee the HR Department to be in your company?
- What activities would you prefer to be doing differently?
- What changes would you like to see in the short and long term?
- 🎬 Do you believe employees engagement has increased or decreased over the years?
  - o Can you tell me about the relationship between employees' mortality awareness and employee engagement?

- Do you believe your employees feel attached to the job and to the company? or only care about their payroll at the end of the day?

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