

**The socio-cultural influences on young employees:
Evidence from Morocco**

Dr Ahmed Beloucif

University of the West of Scotland (UWS), School of Business & Creative industries,
Paisley, Scotland, UK.

Email: Ahmed.Beloucif@uws.ac.uk

Dr Abdelmoughit Semlali

University of the West of Scotland School of Business & Creative Industries, London
Campus, England, UK.

Email: abdelmoughit.semlali@uws.ac.uk

The socio-cultural influences on young employees: Evidence from Morocco

Abstract

The most significant recent development in social cultural environment is the change, challenges of those of young employees' attitude and behaviour towards their leaders in the workplace. Traditionally, the Moroccan society had subscribed to the beliefs, societal values such as obedience, respects to the elderly or their leaders. Consequently, that has been a surge of interest in finding out why this change is taking place in the society and impacting on the young employees in workplace. Drawing on the existing literature from the institutional theory and relationship Management. Our paper explores complex interplay between its formal regulatory institutions and the normative values held by its diverse population. Moreover, to it is examine the context, legal frameworks, and societal dynamics that shape Morocco's youth attitude and behaviour at work. Thus, we adopt a phenomenological approach and a cyclical research process, using semi-structured interview with 25 young employees across the industries.

Keywords: Institutional Theory, young employee, socio-cultural environment, leadership, Morocco.

Acknowledgements:

We are grateful for the comments on this draft, a developmental paper, by anonymous reviewers for BAM2024 Conference. We are also very thankful for their suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

This study explores young employees' attitudes and behaviour within the context of the social-cultural environment. It highlights the individual and collective values that defines the Moroccan society. It also examines the role and function of the socio-cultural environment which encompasses the family patterns, religion, education system and political system.

Morocco, a country rich in cultural heritage and religious traditions but it has a complex interplay between its formal regulatory institutions and the normative values held by its diverse population. Thus, it reflects a mix of Islamic traditions, indigenous beliefs, and modern legal structures. Some are inherited since the time of colonisation. While the formal regulatory institutions—such as state-sponsored religious bodies—seek to maintain order and uphold religious norms, normative values within Moroccan society often diverge from these institutional frameworks. This dissonance raises critical questions about the role of religion, tradition in public life, individual freedoms, and the pursuit of a cohesive national identity. Consequently, a younger generation prefers to operate outside the framework drawn for them.

The Research Problem

Due to the lack of empirical evidence, this paper disputes the beliefs of certain Moroccan writers that the culture and employees, in general, are expected to show and demonstrate their obedience without questioning the leadership. Organisations are perceived as a microcosm of a kingdom, with superior authority, hierarchical distances, and relays of power. This mindset places the superior in a place of reverence and value (Allali, 2008). Employees are expected to treat managers with respect, loyalty, and obedience. When employees conduct themselves, they do so from a space where they feel a religious and moral obligation to obey superiors. This is a context where the leader is perceived as the guarantor of respect for dignity for those who follow. The nature of management in this context dilutes the capitalist values that are based on profit and replacing them with values of solidarity (Allali, 2008). However, to our knowledge, the literature on this country is scarce and also little found ignores the socio-cultural changes happening in the society, and younger generations are somehow different from their parents and previous generations.

Drawing on the existing literature from the institutional theory and relationship Management. Our paper explores complex interplay between its formal regulatory institutions and the normative values held by its diverse population. Moreover, to it is examine the context, legal frameworks, and societal dynamics that shape Morocco's youth attitude and behaviour at work. Therefore, this study seeks to answer two specific research questions:

Q1. Whether formal organisations,, established regulatory and religious institutional environment can adapt to the normative values in Morocco and survive as a part of a modern transformation.

Q2. Do young people hold really a negative attitude towards their leaders and what socio-cultural factors influence their behaviour?

Aim and Objectives – Hardly any work has been carried out in this field (Gassemi and Ellioua, 2016) and young employees-leader relationship is still misunderstood. Thus, in this paper, we explore in-depth and uncover the attitude and behaviours of employees towards their leaders and what socio-cultural influences have on them in their workplace. Therefore, the following objectives are developed:

1. To identify and assess the socio-cultural factors that influence their attitude and behaviour in workplace.
2. To shed light on the perception of young employees towards their leaders' behaviour.
3. To provide new insights to companies' leaders/managers and policymakers for future management development style.

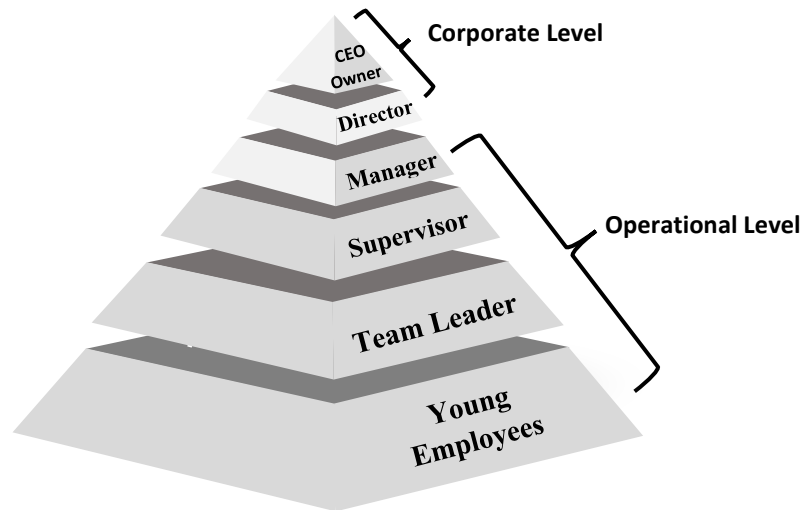
The Study Background

The High Commission for Planning of Morocco has revealed in its report “*The main characteristics of the employed population in 2019*” that out of the 10,975,000 employed persons, young people aged 15-34 constitute 36.7% of the total employment is: 10.2% for 15- to 24-year-olds and 26.5% for 25- to-34-year-olds. Salaried employment is the most dominant status among young people with a share of 48.6% (HCP, 2022). Although Moroccan young employees represent almost half of the working population, there are hardly any studies exploring the relationship between leaders and young employees. Scholars have not yet determined the influences of socio-cultural factors changes amongst young generation and their attitudes, engagement, and performance in this context. This is because no data exists concerning this phenomenon. In addition, the literature lacks empirical evidence regarding the perceptions of young employees towards the managerial practices, behaviours, and attitudes of their leaders, directors, managers, and supervisors. Most of studies connecting young employees and employment focus on the challenge of work inequality and unemployment but fail to address the issues faced by those already in the workplace (Igamane and Bousbaa, 2018). In addition, the number of young employees continues to grow in the workforce. However, the current situation shows a precarious work affecting young people (Bouzambou and Tritah, 2021). Young employees are more affected by unpaid work. Additionally, more than half of the employees (54.6%) have no contract formalizing their relationship with the employers and 9.3% are underemployed (HCP, 2021).

The latest report of the HCP on young employees “*Information note on the occasion of International Youth Day, August 12, 2022*” has revealed that more than 4 out of 10 (41.9%) young employees are having an unpaid employment. Additionally, more than 7 out of 10 young employees (73.2%) have no contract formalizing their relationship with employers, 13.2% have a fixed-term contract, 6.5% an open-ended contract and 7.1% a verbal agreement. The proportion of young employees without a contract is 79.3% among men and 48.3% among women. (HCP, 2022). According to the same report, jobs performed in the context of Morocco remain low-skilled, poorly protected and organized. More than half (52.9%) of employed social actors have no degree, 10.5% have occasional or seasonal jobs and only 25% have job-related medical coverage.

In its initial start, we tried to have a feel of situation (feasibility of the study) by talking to potential participants, a picture started to emerge as how leadership structure is formed (figure.1). Thus, despite the lack of knowledge what is happening at the different layers of leadership, there are several interactions between leaders and their employees. Consequently, this insight has guided us researchers to embrace a cyclical process, i.e., speaking to young employees and going back to literature to find explanation and digging deeper into this complex phenomenon. No doubt, the fieldwork (figure. helped to provide an insight into how young employees and their immediate leaders interact.

Figure 1: Leadership Pyramid



It is not the task of this paper to examine the actions, interaction and relationship between employees and their leader. It focuses only on the socio-cultural phenomenon from the employees' perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Drawing on the exiting literature, we have identified two main theories for this study. Institution Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and Management Theory (Benabdeljlil 2015, Allali 2008 and, El Amrani and Chebihi 2003). It is worth noting that Morocco has dominantly Muslim population. The establishment of formal religious institutions dates back centuries, with the Moroccan monarchy historically playing a central role in religious affairs and influences (Islam, Judaism, and indigenous Berber practices). However, the colonial era and subsequent independence brought new challenges, as modernization clashed with traditional norms. Where, youth in the country aspires and expect more in this situational context. Therefore, a tension between historical continuity and societal change persists to this day.

Institutional theory

According to Scott (2020), it is a theory that consider the processes by which structures, including schemes, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour. We seek to understand how these constructs are created, diffused, adopted, and adapted over time; and how they fall into decline and disuse within an Institutional environment of Morocco.

It is worth noting that peoples (employees) and organizations operate in a social environment. They change, because of new laws, new standards, rules or norms. These lead to new patterns of behaviours, and new participants. Thus, the Institutional Theory is suitable for our study, and it seeks to explain how elements such as structures, processes, and professions are created and diffused within and between organizations (Greve, 2003). It has also been argued that institutional environment has a more profound impact on the development of those elements than market pressures (Meyer and Rowan 1977), and, as such, it explains organizational behaviours that defy economic rationality (Suddaby 2013).

Looking at the legal frameworks, we find that Morocco's legal system combines elements of Islamic law (Sharia), French civil law, and customary practices. The formal religious institutions, such as the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, administer religious affairs, oversee mosques, appoint Imam, and regulate religious education. Yet, normative values extend beyond legal statutes, encompassing personal beliefs, cultural practices, and ethical considerations. We summarise the different key Islamic values in the Moroccan society in table.1.

According to (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), "organizations implement business practices because doing so enhances their legitimacy". Other writers highlight the benefits of reforms and regulations in workplace. Some went to study the impact of motivation on the job performance of public sector employees (Elamalki, Kaddar, & Beniich, 2024). Consequently, balancing these diverse influences remains an ongoing struggle and clearly apparent within a youth population that is seeking its individual autonomy from the elderly. the impact of motivation on the job performance of public sector employees (Elamalki, Kaddar, & Beniich, 2024).

It is worth noting that social **cohesion** needs to be seen. While formal institutions (governmental) promote a unified religious identity around Islam. Civil society organizations and interfaith dialogues do exist. These foster understanding and tolerance. The dissonance serves as a catalyst for dialogue, encouraging a more inclusive vision of Moroccan identity. However, it is not seen in the workplace where traditional values are more focused on, such respect of elders, not answering or questioning the authority.

One would say that the dissonance between formal religious institutions, traditions and normative values in Morocco reflects the nation's complex journey—a blend of tradition and modernity, unity and diversity. Moreover, the key components of institutional environment are considered and critically reviewed as follow:

Societal Values, Roles, Function, and Rules

We examine the roles and functions of the family patterns, religion, political systems, education system in the context of Morcom. *Societal Values* - Kluckhohn (1951 p.395) defines a value as "*a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of actions*", i.e., a person's value means the constant belief someone holds towards a behaviour that is personally and socially accepted and validated. These values are an attribute of both individuals and groups (Hofstede (1981). They represent our early programming of our lives that are not perfectly rational as we think. As known, the values are always non rational, but they still define our subjective explanation of rationality. In the context of our study, the society has inherited a set of values that defines and guides relationships between social actors and groups. Amongst the fundamental values of Moroccan society are: *Baraka* (Divine blessing) granted to the individual or group; *Sbar* (Courage and endurance); *Taa'a / Rda* (Obedience/ Parental Blessing); *AL-Maakoul* (Righteousness and seriousness); *Niya* (Trust/Good intention); *Al Kalma* (Honour word); *Al Haq* (Law and justice); *Al-Khair* (Kindness and Generosity), and *Qana'aa* (inner-satisfaction).

In addition to these values, there are other values that define the society in both individual and collective level. It emphasizes teamwork and collective efforts. Individuals believe in their saying: "*One hand does not clap*". Sociableness is also a necessity. To maintain harmony in the society, Moroccan invest in building and maintaining healthy relationships through visiting friends and relatives, during special occasions such as religious celebrations such as Eids, as well as hardships (eg, visit sick in hospital) as

a way to show support and empathy. Finally, Hshuma (shyness) is also a principal value that guide the behaviour of individuals in this context.

It appears that the elements of individualism and collectivism in values that are poorly explored in the context of Morocco. Most Moroccans cannot be described as individualists in the Hofstede sense insofar, as it is rare when they get driven by their personal interests. Additionally, identifying collectivistic values might be challenging as the collectivistic values of the Moroccan society do not quite explain most of the social actors conduct and actions (Allli, 2008).

Table.1: Values in the Moroccan Society		
Islamic Values	Meaning	Application
<i>El-Baraka</i>	Divine blessing granted to the individual or group.	<i>El-Baraka</i> is initially an attribute of the sheriffs (Inspiring people) who are descendants of the prophet. But it is also a divine gift attributed to things, to certain people or communities. It manifests itself through their prosperity and in the accumulation of goods, wealth, and in the social success of the offspring.
<i>Sbar (resilience)</i>	Courage & Endurance	It is a value of endurance that accompanies the individual or the group hit by misfortune, offers the ability to overcome the trials of life.
<i>Ta'aa/ and Rda Alwaledeene</i>	Obedience and Parental Blessing	Obedience is a fundamental value which starts from the obedience of children to their parents. In return, children receive the blessing (<i>Rda</i>) of their parents, a sign of satisfaction of these parents towards their offspring, otherwise the curse (<i>Sakht</i>) awaits them. Obedience extends to other relationships: husband/wife, eldest/youngest, holder of authority and power/subordinate, state (<i>Makhzen</i>)/subject, etc. In all these cases, its corollary is the commandment (<i>Lahkam</i>) which maintains the order of things.
<i>Al-maakoul</i>	Righteousness & Seriousness	Righteousness (<i>Al-Maakoul</i>) is an individual attribute that intervenes in the relationship with others. He is recognized by others as such.
<i>Imane</i>	Belief	<i>Niya</i> refers to the individual who always has a good intention towards others. A popular Moroccan quote says: "believe in <i>Niya</i> and sleep with the viper".
<i>Theqa</i>	Trust	<i>Niya</i> is the trust that we have in the other. Communities and interpersonal relationships are built on Trust.
<i>Niya</i>	Good intention.	In other words, the one who has the <i>Niya</i> carries good intention, even when he finds himself in the face of <i>evil</i> , the latter would never reach him.
<i>Al-kalma</i>	Promise	It is an individual value, but it also governs social relations.
<i>Al-haq</i>	Law and Justice	<i>Al-Haq</i> is a principal value in the society. <i>Al-Haq</i> is granted by God. It stands up against the lawless (<i>Al-Batal</i>).
<i>Al-khair</i>	Kindness & Generosity.	This value is highly appraised in the society. It is considered as both individual and collective value.
<i>Qana'a</i>	Satiety	This value is believed to repress the frustrations of poverty and social failure. This value is individual as well as collective.

Islam

In Morocco, Islam is the religion that reigns in the society and the King is considered as the commander of faithful (*Amir Al-Mouminine*) and descendent of the Prophet. The administrative supervision of religious practices in Morocco is the responsibility of the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs, which appoints the preachers (Imams) of the mosques. Their delegated power is to fulfil the mission of controlling sermons (Fridays' Khotba), calculate the prayer times in their region and monitor the lunar appearances (Months' Callender) which condition the beginnings and ends of the months. The determination of the dates of religious festivals depends in fact on these apparitions. Islam is founded on 5 Pillars:

The declaration of faith (shahada), prayer (salah), almsgiving (zakat), fasting (sawm) and pilgrimage (hajj).

Political System

Morocco is considered as a constitutional monarchy as it was since the first constitution in 1962. The Kingdom has been ruled by members of the Alaouite dynasty since the beginning of the 17th century. Being the Amir Al-Mouminine (Commander of the Faithful) and the highest commander of the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces, the King holds the position of highest authority in the nation. According to the principles of the political system in its new configuration:

“Morocco is a constitutional, democratic, parliamentary, and social monarchy. The constitutional system of Morocco is based on the separation, balance, and collaboration of powers, as well as citizenship and participatory democracy and the principles of good governance and the correlation between responsibility and accountability” (Maroc.ma, 2022).

Power and Authority

Firstly, the country strategy includes forming and appointing leaders that are capable of leading and taking over responsibilities at national, regional, and local governments. Secondly, decentralization of power across the country's regions, provinces and towns and cities. These are expected to work with civil and community groups in collaboration for social development objectives, along with ongoing central-level support including financial and technical support. Thirdly, delegation or participatory approach, i.e., the monarch put great emphasis on developing a community-driven country.

In sum, the management style is different in Morocco and its institutional environment is still complex. The culture prevalent in the country is founded on paternalistic traditional values and principles emphasising respect for authority and hierarchy (Benabdeljlil, 2015). It is also the view of Allali (2008) that an analysis of most organisations show that they represent a microcosm of the country's kingdom character, with superior authority, hierarchical distances, and relays of power. This mindset places the superior in a place of reverence and value. In such culture, employees are expected to treat managers with loyalty and obedience. When employees conduct themselves, they do so from a space where they feel religious and moral obligation to obey their superiors. This is a context where the leader is perceived as the underwriter of respect for dignity or those that follow. This kind of management dilutes capitalist values solely based on profit, replacing these values with unflinching solidarity (Allali, 2008).

El Amrani and Chebihi (2003) advance the view that the Moroccan management style is distinct. It is characterised by a hierarchical distance and dominated by “male” values, as defined by Hofstede. The same authors also observe that the country's businesses generally operate based on the values of attachment to ethnicity and family and solidarity. These dimensions are also observed by other scholars, including Benabdeljlil (2007), who says that the companies in Morocco are often associated with relationships founded on dependence, paternalism, and clientelism. This managerial philosophy in Morocco is also acknowledged by Sahraoui and Louitri (2014). He claims that the managerial relations are the variables of males dominate and the transactions in management are founded on trust, solidarity, instinct, tribal,

clan, and family values. While Benabdeljlil (2015) argues that respect in management is derived from the rationality of weakness and fear.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

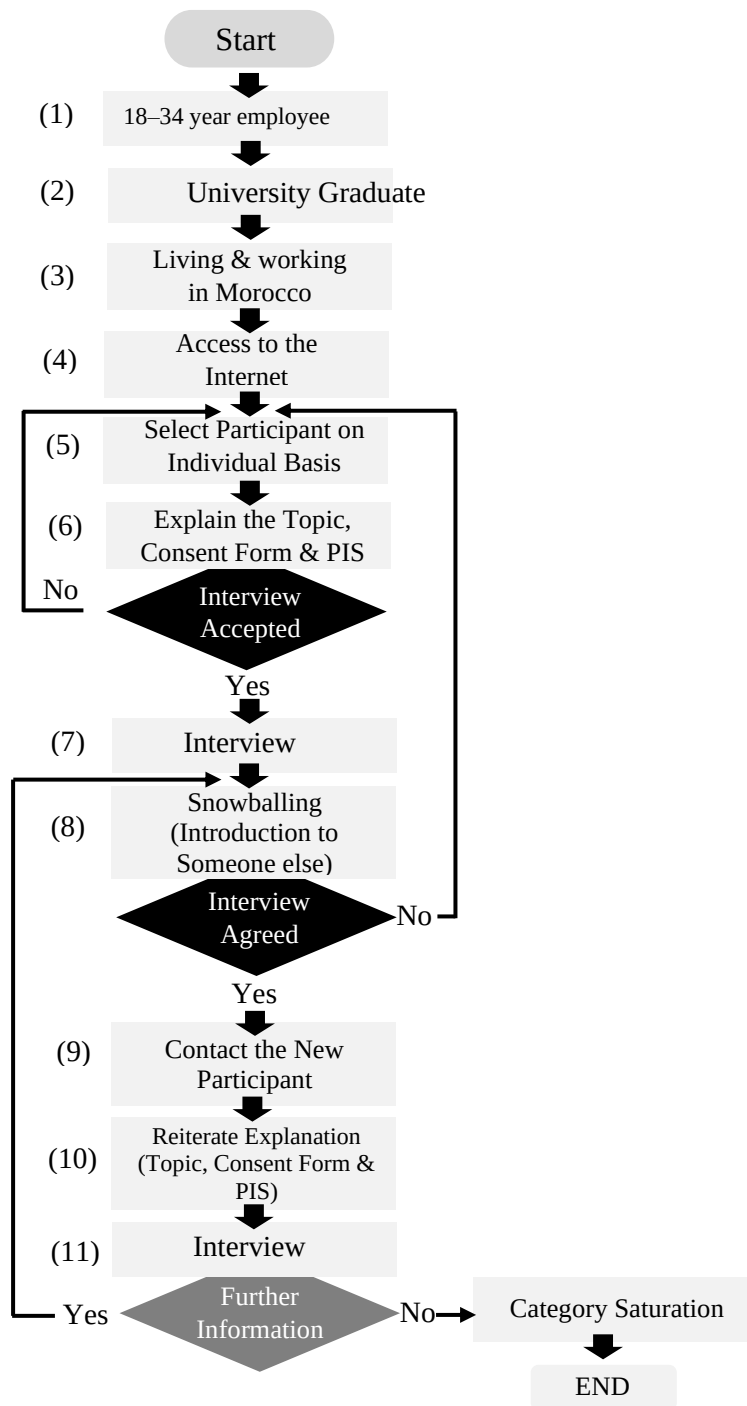
Our study adopted phenomenology research design, conducted 25 interviews with young employees in different companies and organisations in Morocco. For its epistemological and ontological positions, our study follows an *interpretivist approach*., that allows us to perceive the world (young employees' attitudes and behaviour in the socio-cultural environment) with the eyes of the participants. It is to assess the meanings that young employees have developed and brought into their experiences.

An interview guide was produced and used through the fieldwork. The interview involves posing questions based on the themes identified from the literature, organised and consistent manner, seeking more precise responses via probing. Consequently, the interview guide evolves through the fieldwork of data collection.

We have employed a purposive snowball sampling approach to ensure recruitment and participation of interviewees followed a scientific enquiry (figure.2). The process of recruitment begun by calling and inviting employed graduates to take part, proving them with a clear explanation what the research is about and how they can help. These participants are university graduates and have access to the internet, especially during the pandemic (Covid 2019). We focused our sample on youth employees because the Moroccan economy has witnessed high youth unemployment, and a high rate of informality (Gannat and Betcherman, 2021). They highlighted further that “*Morocco's economy is not creating enough jobs for the rapidly growing working-age population*, (p.2).”

Moreover, anonymity, confidentiality and ethical consent were considered. Once a rapport is established and there is a willingness from the potential participant, follow-up calls, emails and text messages are made to set a convenient date and time for an interview. All the interviews were made through Microsoft Teams meeting, or Skype. This lead to restrict our sample to employed graduates with internet connection. Interviews were transcribed and analysed three main coding procedures and phases, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Williams and Moser, 2019).

Figure 2: The Sampling Process



ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

After data preparation and analysis, five key themes were drawn from the literature review and the fieldwork: (1) Culture; (2) Social value, and beliefs; (3) Identity Crisis (emerging theme); (4) Societal challenges; (5) Religions and (5) Family value and behaviour.

Theme.1: Culture, Social Value and, Beliefs

The Moroccan context emerges as a challenging field of research. It is known by its complex and diverse culture which has a significant impact on many aspects, such as organisational structure, interaction, and leader-employee relationship. It is to note that leaders and management decision-makers in both national and international companies are facing major challenges to adapt. Participant P5 explains:

“...Of course, he (CEO) knows the main values and the different values, and even different religions. Yes...Jewish people in Morocco as well.... Moroccan Jews. So, he was aware of the complexity of all these you know... then the diversity and the complexity of these beliefs and values I would say. But he was living in a different sphere...more Westernized, more open”.

A big part of this cultural diversity and complexity is derived from the geographical position and history of Morocco that was home for many empires and civilisations. According to participant P23:

“...also don't forget that Morocco was a home for many cultures from all over the world throughout history...that's why we have a diversified culture that became difficult to understand...”

The work environment in the country relies and emphasises on “networking” and building connections. Thus, the business culture may be seen as a chaotic where certain informal behaviours are needed to achieve company's objectives.

Foreign leaders are still struggling to adapt to this context. They make efforts to build rapport with younger staff., but with a different mindset. Even Moroccan business leaders, with years of work experience abroad, are experiencing cultural barriers at work. Although such leaders approach young employees with an open mindset, but unconsciously they cross the line and cause unpleasant situation of conflict. As participant 5 expresses:

“... because he used to crack jokes, sometimes talking about ...for example, sexuality and stuff like that, which are very sensitive to some of them.”

Theme.2: Identity Crisis

We find this emerging factor as intriguing in the society. As participant P23 explains:

“...I think...we are experiencing an identity crisis. Our culture is having a crisis in identity...We are struggling...really...our culture is beautiful but lacks an identity.”

Failure to grasp the diversity and complexity, this leads them to live in contradiction with continuous questioning of their sense of self. For instance, it was found that some families encourage their children to reach higher academic levels to secure a good future. But, when they want to leave their parents' house to have their own life experience. Parents usually refuse to let them go, worrying about the challenges they might encounter.. Furthermore, participant P23 indicates::

“... we need just to understand that we need to learn from other cultures but not imitate it as it is...and this is normal, because we may encounter some values and practices that may contradict our culture...”

Theme.3: Societal Challenges faced by youth

This identity crisis has raised social challenges and influenced individuals' behaviours and perception of leadership in the workplace. In terms of interpersonal relationships, i.e., particularly leader-young employee, our study has found contradictory behaviours among young employees. A Submissive behaviour was found to be a major barrier with a heavily impact on young employee social exchange. According to participant P1:

“There is a sense of submission in this subconsciousness when you have a new European manager... there was this sense of obedience... It wasn't imposed by the marketing manager, but it was in the subconscious of people.”

This mentality of obedience and submission is perceived as a required behaviour that the young employees need to exhibit to achieve stability and acceptance from leaders at work. This appears as an acceptable social norm. However, this inherited submissive mentality led young employees to perceive leadership contingent with fear, obedience, and punishment. Thus, when they achieve a certain level of maturity in their lives, and acquire positions of power and authority, they treat their own employees the way they were treated. Therefore, submission is perceived as an important behaviour aspect that younger individuals need to display as a way of growing and developing. According to participant P13:

“In our society, you cannot challenge someone older than you. It is a lack of respect. And it would be an exception if you do so...we have this mentality, if I am older than you that means I am more knowledgeable and experienced than you. You have 30 years old, and you still perceived as a kid. I think it is something related to our culture. Definitely”

However, this is gradually changing as younger generations became aware of the unwise of such values. They are seeking ways to bring incremental change through speaking out against those norms and values when they find the opportunity without rocking the boat. For instance, they believe that there is a difference between respecting and fearing older individuals. Most of young individuals tend to mix both concepts when they interact with their leaders that often lead to clashes. Thus, young employees believe respect at work must be based on mutual respect, negotiation, and capability as the first step towards achieving company/organisation objectives. As participant P7 explains:

“...for example, you find an old employer, manager...or business owner from the generation of our parents. So automatically we exaggerate in showing respect...because the problem is that at that moment you don't think that you are not dealing with someone older than you, but a professional as well... you should respect him/her of course...but you need to be aware that you are in a professional relationship ...be whoever you want to be...but when it comes to work, I don't want to know who you are...or how old are you...just show me my job according to the conditions we agreed on at the beginning, and that's it...then judge me and I will judge you of course if we cross borders...so I mentioned HSHUMA (Being too shy) value, because if you think about it this way...How can you negotiate and defend yourself at work if you are a shy person...”

This *unconscious submission* amongst young employees became a natural and a compulsory behaviour. This mentality was found to have a great impact on young employees' soft skills. Unfortunately, employees in this context lack many skills to contribute. They are also unable to reflect and feedback to their leaders. Adding to this, their attitude is no different when they meet a foreign leader. As participant P1 highlights:

"...There was a guy (employee) who used to do whatever this manager says and then at some point the French guy (manager) said, "can you please challenge me? Can you say something before you do it? Give me some ideas. Or do you think what I'm saying make sense....The employee replied, "No. all good". Then I understood that it wasn't really 100% about the managerial style...But more about the fact that they have this mindset of looking at foreign managers as the gurus of everything, the holders of knowledge and hundreds of wisdoms. This makes them, you know, put them into this position. They obey everything, almost everything."

It is also found that this culture of ageism has significantly impacted on the development and productivity of young employees and hindered them progress. They face other challenges too such as to adapt to work-culture and share their ideas and contribute to decision making. Adding to this, their unsatisfactory education, training, and preparation for their career, they are lost when they join job market. Abdelghani Youmni, a Moroccan economist reported to France 24:

"We have a young generation that does not know anything about the professional life, although they are graduated from accredited universities and schools."

A lack of orientation in high schools was found to heavily impact young people's professional lives. Most of the participants did not receive a proper guidance when it comes to choosing the academic paths to their employment/industry need. As participant P25 expresses:

"We should first have a good orientation...from the beginning...they need to ask you what you really need to do or to be in the future, so they can guide you well. In my case, I was very interested in natural science...I feel like I am alive when I read something related to science...it is not like business and economics...to be honest I don't like this area. I wish I can change my career...and find a job in the domain of natural science...I find myself there...and when you are comfortable with something, you do your all your best...because you love it... But if you find yourself in the wrong place, nothing will change. You will stay where you are...you will waste too much of your time...that's why I told you that the main problem is the wrong orientation in high school."

Our study also found young employees invest in their relationships with colleagues based on values of solidarity and teamwork. However, the intervention of their leaders, for the sake of control, destroy them. As participant P23 highlights:

"...but I have a very good relationship with my colleagues... And this manager is the only toxic person in our team..."

Young employees also perceive that some collective values that reflect cohesion and harmony in the society are vanishing. For instance, inner satisfaction was found to have a positive impact on the society. However, such value is no longer on the list of social actors' values. According Participant P25:

“Inner satisfaction...I don’t think so...No, even myself, I don’t have inner-satisfaction anymore...for example, when I joined this company, I was interested in the salary...I was thinking that it is enough for me...now, I am not satisfied anymore...but maybe because when you are ambitious, you always seek to achieve more...”

Solidarity as a core value of the Moroccan society is also disappearing. As participant P1 explains:

“.... especially ladies who usually do the same work as men, but they don’t take into consideration that they have other priorities...Family, kids, responsibilities because of the Moroccan context.... They(management) didn't consider that at all.”

This decline in solidarity has impacted many aspects the society. Participant P10: says:

“...but in general, I think solidarity is vanishing...I mean families today are not the same as they used to be...they are more isolated...they do not interact as they used to do before...we are becoming strangers to each other...and...I don’t like the change...”

Theme.4: Religion

The religious values identified in table.2, are often used in exchange relationship, interaction of people but they are hardly used by leaders in their interactions with their employees. They are often used to control their employees and to their self-interests rather than the wellbeing of subordinates. A leader is often seen as blood sucker, selfish, exploiter, rude and have no fear of God.

Theme.5: Family Value and Behaviour

Moroccan society puts a great emphasis on “parent-child” relationships. Our study has found that family plays a tremendous role in nurturing children’s personalities. It is considered as a crucial source of encouragement and support. According to Participant P25:

“...my parents are very supporting...They support and motivates me when I am down...there is no one else gives support more that my parents...They give me the energy to not give up...my mom always tells me: who seeks, will find” ...”

This mindset is manifested in the way young people perceive success, which often based on competitiveness and being first among peers in different aspects of their lives. Participant P2 recount his tale:

“Like I said you get that confidence if you have the skills. So where does that skill come from? Why do you try to learn? Why do you try to be the best at what you are doing? This does certainly did come from my family... in our family we had this culture where you just like... It's not just acceptable to get an A or A plus mark... It doesn't matter if you get an A or B or C. The most important thing is that you need to be the first in class. You need to be the best. That's our culture or like for example, when I get the school results and I come to my mother and I tell her like I got 16 out of 20 or 18 out of 20, the first question she asks me who is the first one?...Like if the first student got 20 out of 20...it's a problem... and like... maybe it's nothing but if you are the first person then it is good.”

However, we also found diversity in the patterns of families, particularly in terms of family-child relationship. As some families were found to encourage children through exposing them to new experiences and challenges, others invest heavily in their safety and well-being.

Although families in this context were found to develop strong connections with children, a gap in parents-child relationship was noticed when it comes to building a child's personality. It could be explained by a misunderstanding or disregard to the child perception of the surrounding environment. As a result, some behaviours were found detrimental to child well-being, resulting further complications when they grew up. According to Participant P19:

To sum up, the socio-cultural environment takes a big part in impacting on young employee relationship in the society and workplace. In addition to the complex cultural system and prevalence of many unwise and unhealthy behaviours governing social actors' interactions, The fact that the society impacts on which ideal academic path every student must follow in the absence of a clear and effective orientation in high school, contribute to raising major challenges for graduate students joining the workforce. Their belief in studying engineering, medicine, architecture...etc as the only subject areas to secure a financial source of income. This was found detrimental to young employees' creativity and performance. Also, family diversity along with the significant influence of parents on children's personalities, lead to emerging challenges for the young generation when joining the workforce. Specifically, they step up to the workplace with diverse attitudes and values, which make their relationships with leaders as complex and challenging to improve.

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

The aim of the study was to *"identify and assess the socio-cultural factors that impact on the work relationship."* It started with the research question and aimed to explore attitude and behaviour of young employees in Morocco. Thus, the research question focused on: *Do young people hold a negative attitude towards their leaders and what socio-cultural factors influence their behaviour?*

1. The country Socio-Cultural Environment

- (1) The Moroccan context appears as a challenging field when it comes to business practice. Its complex and diverse culture, values and beliefs have a huge impact on many aspects of business. This work-culture was found to be challenging for foreign leaders/managers to develop managerial approaches that fit the locals.
- (2) The study has found a gap in this relationship explained by two contradictory behaviours young employees exhibit when they interact with their leaders. First, a submissive behaviour that reflects the employee dissatisfaction, mistrust and resilience. Obeying leaders' orders and instructions was found to be a necessary behaviour young employees need to exhibit in the workplace to avoid conflicts. Second, an ambitious behaviour was also found among young employees which indicates determination, hope and consistent learning.

2. Socio-Cultural Shifts

From a general perspective, young employees have developed a negative perception towards leadership in the workplace:

- as contingent with fear, over-respect and punishment, and exclusion from decision making.
- a lack of orientation in high school, and the unsatisfactory trainings they received in higher education.
- Delaying young employees' learning and development, found to be used by leaders, to exert more control over them. As a result, leader-young employee collaboration is nearly absent.

- As Morocco undergoes socio-cultural changes, the younger generation grapples with evolving norms. Aspiration and dignity intersect with capitalist values, are shaping their behaviour within the society and workplace.

To sum-up, , younger generations have many attributes in common with their peers. As Ouahi and Messaoudi (2017) acknowledge that young employees show specific behaviours and qualities, which influence their careers. They are very impatient, independent, emancipated and extremely tolerant to diversity. They show great interest in social relations and constantly seek work environments in which they can flourish, evolve, and be understood. Work-life balance is one of their priorities.

3. Obedience and Leadership:

While Moroccan culture traditionally emphasizes obedience, our research suggests that young employees exhibit a nuanced relationship with authority. The microcosm of organizations, akin to kingdoms, demands respect and loyalty. However, this reverence is not absolute; it coexists with a growing desire for autonomy, i.e., asserting independence along with their aspiration.

Aspiration appears as a core value amongst youth. They are developing an individualistic aspect that impact in their family relationships, society and in workplace. These aspirations have started to contradict the principles of Moroccan family upbringing (living outside the family home, making their own decision, less sharing, etc.)

- Although some offices are designed to be closed and separated, managers still ask employees to keep doors open. This is perceived as nosiness and reflects a violation of privacy. Managers and colleagues who walk into others' offices without a proper reason. Leaders consider open office as a mean to have more control over their staff,. Others see it as valuable opportunity to interact, communicate and build healthy relationships with colleagues.
- Misunderstandings expectation and gaps in values and beliefs raise continuous conflicts between young employees and their leaders at work. Although leaders sometimes take initiatives to approach their young employees in friendly ways and encourage them to feel free to communicate, but young employees still do not show any trust considering the working culture as dominant, rigid, and destructive.

Overall, they often expect training opportunities and decent salaries. A fair and promising remuneration is one of the most factors that determine their work-commitment and intention to contribute. For those young employees, authority equals respect and competence. i.e., this generation of employees are prepared to exert the required effort to achieve ambitious organisational goals but dislike leaders that attempt to exert absolute control and authority over followers. They are more in a logic of equality, sharing and flattening of hierarchical relations.

4. Social Implications:

- (1) Young employees' needs, attitudes and behaviours- The study is a guide for Moroccan leaders/managers to better understand the attitudes, needs, and expectations of their young employees to contribute to their organisation success. Employees needs to feel valued, motivated, and committed to perform at their best. Leaders have to look at effective ways to build a healthy and trustworthy relationship with their young staff and enhance their engagement and commitment.

- (2) Young employees' skills and abilities - This study has revealed several vital skills and abilities young employees possess that can help leaders succeed in today's challenging business world. Young employees were found to be self-confident, multitaskers, and ready for positions of responsibility with support from the leadership, i.e., investing in people.

Practical Implication:

- (1) Young employee working relations - The study contributes to the Government of Morocco specifically the minister of Labour and vocational integration, the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (CGEM) and the National Agency for the promotion of employment and competencies (ANAPEC), with new insights on the social relations and attitudes in the workplace.
- (2) Employee Turnover- This study helps the government answer questions relating to business deficiency, failure, and bankruptcy dilemmas as well as problems of unemployment and skills that still hindering the nation's economic growth and development.
- (3) Academia-Industry Relationship - The study findings show that there is a lack of interaction between academia and industry, which lead to the emergence of a big gap that most of the graduates fall in when they join the workforce. The study will assist education institutions to learn about the contemporary key challenges facing graduates in the workplace and reflect on the efficiency of the programs delivered in education institutions. The study will also help in identifying the skills and trainings that meets the labour market demands, and guide in developing new programs and strategies to build adequate future employees.

To conclude, the findings from this research showed the implications for institutional theory and leadership practice. For academics, while the change in socio-cultural in the society is taking place within an institutional environment, it is only now that younger generation aspirations have been noticed and paying attention too. Yet, the old traditional ways still prevail. So, our exploratory study, suggests we should be wary of over-simplifying and accepting the societal norms, traditions and rules as to remain forever.

For practitioners (leaders in any commercial organisation) are of a need to understand their relationship with younger employees' relationships. Developing their skills and providing proper guidance at early age, i.e., from school. That will help establishing and develop a two ways academia-industry relationship for the country development. As our research focused only on the key components socio-cultural factors and their impact on young employees, is in some ways incomplete. Thus, this work forms part of our developmental paper. We are hoping to work on the feedback and comments. Bearing in mind, how young employees navigate this delicate balance—respecting tradition while asserting independence—will deepen our understanding.

REFERENCES

- Allali, B, (2008). Culture et gestion au Maroc : une osmose atypique, dans Eduardo Davel, Jean-Pierre Dupuis et Jean-François Chanlat (dir.), Gestion en contexte interculturel : approches, problématiques, pratiques et plongées, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval et Télé-université (UQAM), 2008.
- Amine, A. and Amine, N., (2010). Spécificités de la culture organisationnelle de la PME marocaine : Une étude empirique. Revue Marocaine de Gestion et d'Economie, [online] 1(2), pp.2-20. Available at:

- <https://revues.imist.ma/index.php/RMGE/article/view/4664/3298> [Accessed 15 August 2020].
- Benabdeljlil, N., (2007). Les modes de management des entreprises au Maroc : entre contingences culturelles et économiques. *Revue Internationale PME*, [online] 20(2), pp.89-122. Available at: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1008518ar> [Accessed 13 August 2020].
- Benabdeljlil, N., (2015) Rapports sociaux et attitudes au travail dans les entreprises marocaines : entre contingences culturelles et contingences économiques. In: B. Dupret, Z. Rhani, A. Boutaleb and J. Ferrié, ed., *Le Maroc au présent: D'une époque à l'autre, une société en mutation*. [online] Casablanca: Centre Jacques-Berque, pp.985-994. Available at: <https://books.openedition.org/cjb/1148?lang=en> [Accessed 14 August 2020].
- Bouzambou, N. and Tritah, S., (2021). Precarious employment: New behaviors of young Moroccans. *International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics-IJAFAME*, [online] 2(6-1), pp.198-212. Available at: <https://www.ijafame.org/index.php/ijafame/article/view/268/352> [Accessed 17 August 2020].
- EL Abboubi, M. and EL Kandoussi, F., (2016). La GRH au Maroc : entre Paternalisme et Bienveillance. *Revue des Etudes Multidisciplinaires en Sciences Economiques et Sociales*, [online] 1(1), pp.1-24. Available at: <https://revues.imist.ma/index.php/REMSES/article/view/4816/3407> [Accessed 13 August 2020]
- Hamann, R., Luiz, J., Ramaboa, K., Khan, F., Dhlamini, X., & Nilsson, W. (2020). Neither Colony Nor Enclave: Calling for dialogical contextualism in management and organization studies. *Organization Theory*, 1(1), [online] 63178771987970. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2631787719879705>
- Elamalki, D., Kaddar, A. & Beniich, N. (2024). Impact of motivation on the job performance of public sector employees: the case of Morocco. *Future Business Journal* **10**(53). [online]<https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-024-00342-4>
- EL Aynaoui, K and Ibourk, Aomar (2019). Les enjeux du marché du travail au Maroc. OCP Policy Center, Rabat, Morocco. www.ocppc.ma
- Gannat, H and Betcherman, G. (2021). Labor regulation and social protection for workers in Morocco. JEL classification: J38, J41, J80, World Bank.
- Greve, H. R. (2003). *Organizational learning from performance feedback: A behavioral perspective on innovation and change*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Gümüşay, A. A., Claus, L., & Amis, J. (2020). Engaging with Grand Challenges: An Institutional Logics Perspective. *Organization Theory*, 1(3), [online] 263178772096048. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2631787720960487>
- Gümüşay, A. A., Smets, M., & Morris, T. (2020). "God at Work": Engaging central and incompatible institutional logics through elastic hybridity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 63(1), 124–154. [online] <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.0481>

- HCP, 2019. *The main characteristics of the employed population in 2019*. Rabat: High Commission for Planning of Morocco.
- HCP, (2021). *The main characteristics of the employed population in 2021*. Rabat: High Commission for Planning of Morocco.
- HCP, (2022). *Information note on the occasion of the International Youth Day*. Rabat: High Commission for Planning of Morocco
- His Majesty King Mohammed VI, (2018). *Full Text of Royal Speech on 65th Anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the People*. [online] Maroc.ma. Available at: <https://www.maroc.ma/en/royal-activities/full-text-royal-speech-65th-anniversary-revolution-king-and-people> [Accessed 17 July 2022].
- Hofstede, G., (1981). Culture and Organizations. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, [online] 10(4), pp.15-41. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40396875> https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331473953_Leadership_Past_Present_and_Future_An_Evolution_of_an_Idea [Accessed 7 Oct. 2019].
- Khajeh, E. (2018). Impact of Leadership Styles on Organizational Performance. *Journal of Human Resources Management Research*, [online] 1(1), pp.2-6. Available at: <https://ibimapublishing.com/articles/JHRMR/2018/687849/687849-1.pdf> [Accessed 8 Oct. 2019].
- Kluckhohn, C. (1951) Values and Value-Orientations in the Theory of Action: An Exploration in Definition and Classification. In: Parsons, T. and Shils, E., Eds., *Toward a General Theory of Action*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 388-433. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674863507.c8>
- Makkaoui, M., Hannoun, F., Ouazizi, K., Rizzo, A., Ali, D. A., Cherqui, a., ... & Khabbache, H. (2024). Spirituality as predictor of well-being at work in the moroccan context.. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-4223777/v1>
- Maroc.ma, 2022. *Monarchy*. [online] Maroc.ma. Available at: <https://www.maroc.ma/en/content/monarchy> [Accessed 22 March 2022].
- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(2), 340–363.
- Narasimhan, R. and Lawrence, B., 2012. Behavioral Integrity: How Leader Referents and Trust Matter to Workplace Outcomes. *Journal of Business Ethics*, [online] 111(2), pp.165-178. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-011-1199-9> [Accessed 30 June 2021].
- Morris, S., Aguilera, R. V., Fisher, G., & Thatcher, S. M. B. (2023). Theorizing From Emerging Markets: Challenges, Opportunities, and Publishing Advice. *Academy of Management Review*. 48(1) [online] <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2022.0527>
- Omar, R. (2021). Culture, styles de management, GRH et performance des organisations marocaines : Revue de littérature. *International Journal of Financial Accountability, Economics, Management, and Auditing (IJFAEMA)*, [online] 3(4), pp.620-632. Available at: <https://woasjournals.com/index.php/ijfaema/article/view/134> [Accessed 10 August 2021].
- Padilla, A., Hogan, R. and Kaiser, R. (2007). The toxic triangle: Destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments. *The Leadership Quarterly*, [online] 18(3), pp.176-194. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222521379_The_toxic_triangle_Destructive

- [leaders susceptible followers and conducive environments](#) [Accessed 15 Dec. 2022].
- Scott, W.R (2004). "Institutional theory." in *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, George Ritzer, ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp. 408-14.
- Suddaby, R. (2013). Institutional theory. In *Encyclopedia of management theory* (pp. 379–384). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Williams, M. and Moser, T. (2019) 'The Art of Coding and Thematic Exploration in Qualitative Research', *International Management Review*, 15(1), pp. 45–55.
Available at:
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bsu&AN=135847332&site=ehost-live> [Accessed: 17 March 2022].

