

Early Withdrawal of Professional Competencies from Public Economic Institutions: (A Case Study of Industrial Executives Retiring)

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Received date: 03.12.2024; Accepted date: 26.02.2025; Publication date: 06.04.2025

doi: 10.56334/sei/8.1.55

Abstract

This article sheds light on the early retirement of many professional competencies and skills in recent years. This professional group plays a vital role in the organisational structure of public institutions, serving as both human resources and intellectual and practical capital that add a competitive advantage to the institution. The results of the field study demonstrated that the perceptions of these competencies regarding work within public institutions contributed to the construction of their professional projects for postretirement. Furthermore, it highlights the adoption of early withdrawal, which fuels the adoption of strategies for individual or collective social actions.

Keywords: Public institutions, Competencies, Retirement, Executives.

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Citation. Zerigat Hasnia H. Moulai Hadj M. (2025). Early Withdrawal of Professional Competencies from Public Economic Institutions: (A Case Study of Industrial Executives Retiring) . *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 8(1), 840-848. doi: 10.56352/sei/8.1.55. <https://imcra-az.org/archive/356-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-1-volviii-2025.html>

Introduction:

Studying the behaviour of actors within an organisation is highly important, attracting many researchers and individuals interested in the world of work. This is because work occupies a significant place in an individual's life, contributing to their psychological stability. It helps provide them with value within their social environment. Moreover, the intellectual and physical effort resulting from work is compensated, in addition to the material reward in the form of wages, by opportunities for training, social protection, and the affirmation of one's value and effectiveness, leading to a sense of independence.

From another perspective, the concept of work also encompasses other meanings. It is a professional activity through which the worker acquires competencies, skills, and professional experience related to the number of years of practice.

Racking the perceptions of actors regarding their technical and professional work, as well as their views on their professional and social roles both inside and outside the organisation, allows researchers or students in sociology to uncover the reality of work and understand the behaviour and reactions of actors as a result of changes affecting the work environment, including labour legislation and various laws that govern access to the world of work and the means of terminating employment relationships.

Professor BenBekhti argues that the issue of executives' withdrawal from public institutions during the 1980s can be framed by the fact that these professional competencies found themselves in a professional position that required them to supervise work in a context where they had no control over any of its technical or social dimensions, not even the technology (BenBekhti, 2005, p. 28).

In another context, El Kenz (SNS Industry & Society, 1982) presents, through his analysis of the role of executives, the issue of executives' basic training, which has lost its practical dimension triggered by fieldwork. This becomes evident when confronting problems arising from work situations, which reflect the extent of the executive's competence and skill in demonstrating their training, represented by the certificate, and their scientific and practical experience. This strongly indicates the gap between basic training and fieldwork for some competencies.

This situation is linked to the quantitative expansion of student intake in universities, which has contributed to the graduation of many students, particularly in technical fields such as engineering, with degrees that do not reflect the appropriate level of competence and skill. This is coupled with the student's inability to apply their knowledge in the workplace, which contributes to a lack of control

over the technical and creative aspects, which are fundamentally the responsibilities of the executive (Mérani Hassan, 2007, p. 96).

The decline in educational and training standards at universities has produced the 'common student,' who differs in their perceptions and representations of work from the classical student that prevailed in the 1970s. This situation results from the higher education policy that began with the training of executives through the democratisation of education, aimed at meeting the growing demand for employment at the expense of competence by opening up recruitment opportunities. This view aligns with what Professor Gherid (1997) presented regarding industrial workers in public national institutions, also known as 'common workers,' who differ in their representations and perceptions of work from classical industrial workers, i.e., productive workers.

Owing to rapid and extensive industrialisation, the number of workers increased, and the classical workers found themselves directed towards leadership and technical roles that carried scientific and technical responsibilities (the role of executives), in contrast to the growing recruitment at the expense of quality and competence (Rziga Yato, 2021, p. 85).

On the other hand, Professor Mohamed Mebtoul views the reality of work in public institutions as merely a reflection of the logic prevailing in Algerian society, where competence is considered a secondary element in recruitment processes, in the hierarchical structure of the institution, and in patterns of resource control that rely on factors far removed from the rational aspect of management. This contrasts with the marginalisation of those with competencies, particularly technical ones, who have not had the fortune to assume responsibilities aligned with their academic training and professional experience (Bachir Mohamed, 110, 2019).

Problem Statement:

Public institutions lost many professional competencies due to the massive number of early retirement files between 2016 and 2018. With its long career path, this professional group has reached the highest level of professional skill, enabling them to acquire distinguished experience and professional competence. These executives seek to invest this experience in postretirement projects. However, the most significant test for success in entering competition and the job market to realise a postretirement project is social capital, in addition to professional competence, skills, a spirit of adventure, self-confidence, and professional experience in rebuilding themselves in the labor market and benefiting from practical and field professionalism at the individual level.

This paper's primary goal is to approach the early withdrawal of professional competencies from public economic institutions through retirement: A case study of industrial executives, a professional group that emerged amidst large-scale developmental projects. Various studies have used different approaches.

Professional experience and competence are among the most important resources of economic institutions. What are the reasons that led these competencies to take early retirement in massive numbers, exceeding two million and two hundred thousand retirees in 2017, according to the National Office of Statistics (2016--2018, Report No. 49)?

What reasons led professional competencies to retire early to adopt postretirement work projects? What are their perceptions of working in public institutions? What are their perceptions of work after retirement? Moreover, what strategy have they adopted to achieve this goal?

These questions contributed to proposing the following central hypothesis: Professional competencies and skills in public institutions have severed ties with paid public work and continue to work within other frameworks by utilising all their scientific, technical, and experiential capacities, including leveraging their social and cultural capital networks to ensure the success of individual postretirement projects.

Methodology:

In our study, we relied on a qualitative approach using the 'life story' method (*récit de vie*), where the researcher asks the individual to narrate their career path in a story. This type of interview reveals individuals' perceptions and self-conceptions and helps us gain a clearer understanding of the meanings they attach to the topic of retirement.

We conducted interviews with a group of executives, consisting of 20 executives of both genders aged between 50 and 55 years. We tried to ensure the following specifications:

- First sample: Targeted industrial executives who benefited from early retirement on the basis of age in public institutions and who managed to build a career path after their retirement years.
- Second sample: This sample consisted of industrial executives still working in industrial institutions and performing a professional project for postretirement.

Study Results:

Executives who decide to withdraw from work through early retirement without the age requirements approached matter more simply and comfortably by investing their professional experience and competencies outside the production circle to which they originally belonged.

In this context, Dominique Méda (2000) distinguishes between work and employment, stating that the state must guarantee every individual in society a job that ensures a share of wealth and forms a social position, in addition to material compensation. However, work also represents a channel for benefiting from training, social protection, and fulfilling needs.

Executives now distinguish between the sacrifices made, particularly in terms of time, and their contributions in line with their employment contracts. This shift in perspective on work and labour relations with the institution arises when professionals feel repeated disappointment in recognising their professional skills. Le Boterf (2000) defines competence as "The ability to mobilise, combine, and coordinate resources within a specific process in order to achieve a particular result, which is recognised and assessable. It can be individual or collective" (p. 85).

Medelf (2000) defines it as "A blend of theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge, experience, practice, and the professional situation, as well as the environment or context that allows it to be observed and recognised. The institution must regulate and develop it" (as cited in Malignant, 2000, p. 110).

From the above, we can conclude that professional competence is built through the professional career, which allows an individual to acquire professional experience that, in turn, contributes to the development of current and future skills.

Industrial executives may resort to choosing retirement, as defined by Legislative Decree No. 94--10, dated 26 May 1994, published in the Official Gazette, No. 34, dated 1 June 1994, as a form of withdrawal from professional life owing to the pressures of work that affect the efficiency of competencies in terms of initiative and full integration into the work environment. This leads to a preference for severing ties with paid public work, referred to by Darras (دراس عمر ظاهرة تسرب القوى العاملة) (.....) as 'leakage,' and opting for early retirement as long as the law and labour legislation allow it before reaching the legal retirement age of 60.

The executives unanimously agreed that early retirement is an opportunity to achieve their accomplishments, pursue hobbies, engage in community work, or capitalise on their years of professional experience by selling their expertise in the labour market. This can be done, for example, by giving lectures in private training institutions, such as in the case of Mohamed, a former executive at Sonatrach, who submitted his early retirement request and is now a professor at a private training institution. This applies particularly to freelancing, especially if these executives experienced a lack of recognition or felt alienated during their professional careers owing to the widespread adoption of new

technologies. This has significantly contributed to many professionals being somewhat excluded or neglected when requesting training in the field, as institutions prefer to train their young executives, who have recently been hired since they are more familiar with technologies that they often use in their daily lives.

Mohamed, an engineer at Sonatrach with more than 20 years of experience, including periods of training organised by Sonatrach both domestically and internationally, possesses a professional network that helps him secure a return to work with the same institution as a trainer under a fixed-term contract. This was made possible by his investment in social capital.

The retirement phase is a crucial and transformative stage that impacts the psychological and social aspects of retired executives. After years of movement and activity, the executives surveyed do not favour entering the routine of daily life. Therefore, we observed that this professional group rushes to submit early retirement applications.

The large number of files submitted to public institutions led to a significant leakage of competencies and skills, resulting in the loss of valuable knowledge and expertise. This has caused difficulties within public institutions and has impacted pension funds.

Aubert and Bertrand (2016) confirm that the misuse of competencies and the narrowing of freedom at work enhance feelings of dependence and inferiority among executives. There is a positive relationship between the lack of recognition and appreciation of competencies within public institutions and the increasing demand for early retirement. Industrial executives replace their assigned, secure roles with future work tasks and projects involving significant risks to achieve and succeed in them.

This perspective aligns with that of De Zanetti et al. (2004), who discuss the reasons for early retirement. As a result, such competencies were reluctant to continue working in public institutions or exert additional effort as they had before. They acknowledge performing at the minimum level of work and investing their energy in postretirement projects.

The voluntary departure of many executives, who possess professional experience, competence, and scientific knowledge gained through training and years of seniority, has led these competencies to re-establish themselves in the labour market outside the institution's walls. They did so by recycling their professional achievements in the labour market, aligning with their professional aspirations, particularly in building postretirement projects, especially among engineers.

Executives' approach to working within national public institutions is characterised by selectivity, as indicated by their statements. Upon leaving retirement, many retirees established commercial or consultancy projects to prove their competence and skill, which had been prepared in advance during their time, benefiting from bank loans. This is especially relevant given that the current labour market is increasingly based on competence and professional experience, with the demand for such competencies growing daily. Professional skill is the actual ability to achieve results.

Many executives in public institutions who possess knowledge and professional experience adopt the behaviour of withholding, meaning that they withhold their professional knowledge and refuse to transfer it when they are about to retire by preserving and monopolising professional knowledge.

A former executive at Sonelgaz with 25 years of experience stated:

We find that there is a kind of clash in mindsets within large institutions, especially between young executives and those with more professional seniority. You often hear the phrase, 'You just came from university, and you think you understand better than me.' This confrontational view between the older generation of executives and the younger generation reflects the fact that some senior executives benefit, unlike those who came before them, from a continuous, upwards developmental career path, despite the obstacles that hinder the process of transferring professional knowledge, which they perceive as a risk that could deprive them of their 'outstanding professional competence', which diminishes in comparison with those who are younger.

He adds, saying:

The older executives know the company well, but the newly appointed university graduate must first integrate into the social atmosphere within the institution so as not to clash with the reality of the work environment, which is often dominated by a competitive atmosphere far from the principles of rational management.

This confrontational view between the older generation of executives and the younger generation was revealed by a preliminary investigation, which started to produce different rules and perspectives with varying meanings.

This situation, at the very least, translates into the fragility of the dominant professional social status within public institutions, which is based on the assumption that young executives are seen as a threat to their future.

Contradictions arise from professional pressures and mutual conflicts (generation conflicts), ambiguity regarding roles and professional status, limited social affiliations due to the clash of different

mentalities between the two generations, and a lack of broad participation among public institution executives due to ineffective communication.

Conclusion:

One of the key findings of the field study on the topic of the withdrawal of professional competencies from paid work through retirement and the subsequent social and professional rebuilding through continuity in alternative work arrangements can be summarised as follows:

- Mid-level executives' eagerness to take early retirement represents a form of professional and social reproduction.
- According to mid-level executives, the feeling of marginalisation and lack of recognition of professional competencies stems from the depreciation and exclusion they experience within national institutions.
- According to executives, building and achieving professional projects for the postretirement period is merely a challenge that this professional group faces to prove to themselves and society the true value of their scientific and knowledge-based training.
- The professional and social paths of executives and their role in re-establishing their status and qualifications outside the circle of public national institutions serve as a form of self-recognition of their skills and a way of demonstrating their expertise as part of the professional reintegration process.

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