



GUEST EDITORIAL

International
HRM

International human resource management: diversity, issues and challenges

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Wesley A. Scroggins

Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri, USA, and

Philip G. Benson

New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to introduce the special issue which considers the impact that the global world has had on the profession of HRM.

Design/methodology/approach – In June 2009, the International Human Resource Management Conference was held in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA. Various IHRM papers were presented, and of these, many were subjected to a second round of reviews for this special issue. This special issue is made up of the best papers.

Findings – The article highlights that as IHRM has emerged as an academic discipline, a variety of debates and issues have come to dominate the literature. For practitioners, a long-standing issue has been the delineation of specific practices to be used in the management of people within international organizations. Over time, practices have emerged, and texts today can readily be found that represent such practices for those working in MNCs as HR managers.

Originality/value – A number of concerns about HRM are raised in this issue, most of which are addressed by the papers chosen.

Keywords Globalization, Human resource management, International business, Equal opportunities

Paper type Viewpoint

Globalization has come to dominate much of the discussion in the Western world, whether in academic writing, popular press reports, or casual conversations among friends. Due to myriad factors, the international nature of the modern world has come to impact virtually all aspects of daily life. For several decades, there has been a growing recognition of this trend in the literature of human resource management (HRM) and the emergence of the literature of international human resource management (IHRM).

With globalization assuming such an important societal role, much has been written to develop our understanding of the implications of such processes. Such world developments have also seen their share of criticism, with violent outbreaks at meetings of the World Trade Organization and highly critical texts and political stances regarding the proper role of the multi-national corporation (MNC). Our purpose here is not to address such concerns, but to rather consider the impact that the global world has had on the profession of HRM.

As this trend toward globalization has advanced, the academy has increasingly found ways to incorporate such issues into academic writing and other scholarship.



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Over the last two decades, the *International Human Resource Management Conference* has emerged as one venue for work in the area of IHRM, broadly defined. Meeting approximately every two years, the conference has been held in a wide number of locations around the globe, and has led to the publication of a number of special journal issues and research volumes (e.g. Benson, 2010; Benson and Alas, 2008; Morley and Collings, 2004). This special issue of *Personnel Review* represents a continuation of past publications.

In June of 2009, the *International Human Resource Management Conference* was held in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA. Various IHRM papers were presented, and of these, many were subjected to a second round of reviews for this special issue. The following represent those best papers.

The nature of IHRM

As IHRM has emerged as an academic discipline, a variety of debates and issues have come to dominate the literature. For practitioners, a long-standing issue has been the delineation of specific practices to be used in the management of people within international organizations. Over time, practices have emerged, and texts today can readily be found (e.g. Briscoe *et al.*, 2009; Dowling *et al.*, 2007) that represent such practices for those working in MNCs as HR managers.

While the practical aspects of such texts can be useful, the bigger questions of IHRM are to be found in specialized journal articles. Practices are useful, but there are theoretical underpinnings and debates that must be addressed to inform practice in the field. Debates have arisen as to the role of culture in organizations; will MNCs converge on a single set of practices, or will practices remain diverse, even after increased intercultural contact? What is the role of strategic management when extended to the large MNC (Schuler and Tarique, 2007; Dickmann and Müller-Camen, 2006)? What drives IHRM practices in local and multi-national firms and contexts (Farndale and Paauwe, 2007)? The increased attention to international terrorism cannot be ignored, and emerging economies such as India, China, and Eastern Europe all need to be considered (Scullion *et al.*, 2007). Clearly, the literature on IHRM has the potential for great theoretical depth and richness.

HRM, even in a single-country context and from a distinctly Western perspective, can be argued as a practitioner-oriented profession. While a lengthy history of the HRM profession is far beyond our discussion here, it is easily argued that the field emerged approximately 100 years ago as a needed, administrative function in the emerging modern (i.e. manufacturing) organization. Only in more recent decades has the emergence of organizational behavior as an academic discipline given HRM the needed theoretical underpinnings for understanding our organizational impacts.

When applied to IHRM, a number of such concerns have been raised, some of which are addressed by the papers in this issue. Motivation, for example, is a major issue in any work organization. Theories of motivation, derived largely from theories and models of psychology and sociology, have been criticized as having limited applicability in the world forum. Our theories are heavily derived from studies in Western societies, especially the USA, and a common criticism is that these are not universal. Clearly, a major task for academic HRM is to study the applicability of our models in a much broader world context, and this concern can be raised for almost any topic in the HRM literature. The papers published here make such a contribution.

The papers in this issue

In the first paper of this issue, Burbach and Royle employ a case study method to examine one organization's approach to a currently popular HRM issue: talent management. They discuss the problems and challenges of a U.S. organization implementing a talent management system in international subsidiaries in Ireland and Germany. The popular debate of convergence vs divergence in HRM policy and practice is addressed in this paper, and the results indicate that while internal consistency in policy and practice may be desired, numerous factors including top-level support, political exchanges, and cultural factors often lead to divergence in talent management practices in different cultural contexts.

Julie Cogin and Alan Fish have addressed a long-standing question in the literature on IHRM, namely, the impact of selection methods on improving the performance of those asked to manage in the international context. They specifically look at managers in cross-border contexts, and specifically developed measures of "diverse learning" and "national pride" as potential predictors of success in cross border roles. Selection methods for staffing multi-national work assignments is a long-standing area of interest to IHRM, and has both theoretical and practitioner implications.

In the third paper of this issue, Tanja Rabl addresses directly the role of diversity in the modern international organization. While her sample is of workers in a single country (Germany), the paper has a focus on the achievement motivation of older workers. There is a common stereotype of older workers as lacking in achievement motivation; presumably, they are past that career stage and simply looking to retire. Rabl did find that age discrimination against older workers is common, and leads to an increased fear of failure in the workplace. However, there was no relationship between age and achievement motivation.

Organizations must address such issues, and this finding is likely to have relevance far beyond the German borders. International organizations cannot afford to lose the effectiveness of older workers, since such individuals often have much of the tacit human capital in large organizations. Additionally, workers who are expatriated for lengthy overseas assignments are not typically younger, inexperienced workers. The MNC of the twenty-first century cannot afford to overlook this valuable human resource.

Bendick, Egan, and Lanier examine the issue of workforce diversity management in the USA. They provide an overview of the typical arguments that form the basis of a business case for diversity. Based on their analysis of workforce diversity management practices in two organizations, they show how a business case for diversity can often result in discriminatory employment practices. They argue that a business case for diversity is often practically implemented as diversity without inclusion in the organization culture, and offer a model for a business case for inclusion that will be more effective in reducing employment discrimination and increasing minority representation in organizations. Implications for implementing the model internationally are discussed.

Chet Barney and Steven Elias also address the motivation of workers, and from a multi-country perspective. They find that employees from Israel, Canada, and Russia all show impacts of control over their jobs in the relationship between stress and motivation, but that there are significant country differences; this suggests that prior research on the role of workplace control on the relationship between stress and

motivation may have cultural underpinnings, and should not be understood from the perspective of research only from limited samples of Western cultures.

In the final paper in this issue, Gunkel, Schlaegel, Langella, and Peluchette address issues related to career planning and development by examining factors related to career decisiveness in individuals in the USA, China, and Germany. They develop and test a model of career decisiveness that proposes that Big Five personality traits affect an individual's career adaptability, career optimism, and career knowledge. These factors then affect the individual's career decisiveness. Their results indicate support for the model. However, the results indicate that the relationships between the model variables differ somewhat across the three countries. The authors discuss the need for different career counseling and development methods for individuals with different personalities across cultures. Their results also provide support for the argument that many international human resource management models may not be universally applicable and that many constructs used in such research may be culture specific.

A final word

While much remains to be done in the world of IHRM, the papers presented here do represent a good sample of where the field is heading as we enter the new millennium. Modern business practices must broaden, and with changing technology and the Internet it is arguable that all firms are today multinationals. Combined with the increasing mobility of labor markets and the means of production for those workers, few organizations can ignore the important role of international models of administration.

The realities of MNCs will continue to grow in significance, and even lean organizations will need professionals to manage the human resource function in future decades. We hope this volume in its own small way can contribute to that future.

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About the authors

Wesley A. Scroggins is an associate professor of management in the College of Business Administration at Missouri State University. He received his PhD in management from New Mexico State University. His current research interests include modeling employee fit perceptions, meaningful work, retention management, and the application of human resource management functions in small business contexts. He has published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *Public Personnel Management*, *Team Performance Management*, and the *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*. Dr Scroggins teaches in the areas of human resource management and organizational behavior at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Wesley A. Scroggins is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: wesscroggins@missouri.edu

Philip G. Benson is currently professor of management at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, NM, USA. He received his PhD in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from Colorado State University, and has taught at universities in the USA, Europe, and Africa. He has twice been a Fulbright Scholar. Dr Benson has published widely in journals related to the management of human resources, organizational behavior, and international management. In addition to various editorial activities, he has twice been instrumental in organizing the International Human Resource Management Conference. For the 2007 conference in Tallinn, Estonia, he was Program Chair, and for the 2009 conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico, he was Conference Chair.

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